



WEEKLY HANSARD

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E-mail: hansard@parliament.qld.gov.au

Phone: (07) 3406 7314 Fax: (07) 3210 0182

51ST PARLIAMENT

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WEDNESDAY, 10 AUGUST 2005

Mr SPEAKER (Hon. T McGrady, Mount Isa) read prayers and took the chair at 9.30 am.

PRIVILEGE

Answer to Questions on Notice

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (9.31 am): Mr Speaker, during the 2005 estimates process I asked you as the then minister for state development and innovation in questions on notice Nos 16, 17 and 18 to supply details of all grants and investment schemes, programs and funds administered by your department in both the 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05 financial years. It is clear in supplying the response to the non-government questions on notice that there has been a breach of section 266(2) of the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly, and I request that you refer these matters to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I request that the honourable member write to me.

PRIVILEGE

Comments by Member for Sandgate

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (9.31 am): Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to the *Hansard* record of the proceedings of Estimates Committee D 2005 and in particular to the statements of the then health minister Nuttall. As can be seen from the transcript, the then minister gave evidence to the estimates committee that he stood by and reaffirmed his previous statements that he did not know about widely held concerns over the proficiency of overseas trained doctors or any lack of screening of them, as nobody—including specifically his then director-general, Dr Steve Buckland, his then head of health services, Dr John Scott, or any of their underlings—had told him.

In further evidence, Dr Scott specifically stated that the then health minister Nuttall had been briefed on those matters. From media comment and media admissions by Minister Nuttall, it is clear that the evidence he gave to the committee was incorrect and misleading. Mr Speaker, I have written to you asking you to refer former health minister Nuttall to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee in view of the apparent breach of the standing orders of this House raised by his failure to answer honestly questions from Estimates Committee D.

Mr SPEAKER: I received your letter this morning. I will respond in due course.

Mr NUTTALL: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The honourable member at the end of his statement said that I was dishonest. I find those comments offensive and untrue and I ask them to be withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: Withdraw.

Mr COPELAND: Mr Speaker, I withdraw and I wait for the decision of the MEPPC.

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Death of Mr GT Chinchen

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.33 am): I move—

That this House desires to place on record its appreciation of the services rendered to this state by the late Geoffrey Talbot Chinchen, a former member of the parliament of Queensland, and that Mr Speaker be requested to convey to the family of the deceased gentleman the above resolution together with an expression of the sympathy and sorrow of the members of the parliament of Queensland in the loss that they have sustained.

Before I commence, I am advised by the minister for police and member for Mount Gravatt that Mr Chinchen's widow, Heather, and her son David are in the gallery today. I pass on to both of them my personal condolences and the condolences of all members of the government.

Mr Geoffrey Talbot Chinchen was born on 31 July 1915 in Elsternwick, Victoria and educated at Melbourne and Geelong technical colleges, where he studied accountancy. Prior to the outbreak of World War II, Mr Chinchen worked in the sales department for the Ford Motor Co. in Geelong before joining the Royal Australian Air Force. Mr Chinchen became a fighter pilot with the No. 3 Squadron

before being promoted to squadron leader. He was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1942 for skills on numerous dive-bombing and machine gun attacks, and was presented with this insignia by His Majesty King George VI at Buckingham Palace, London in 1944.

For exceptional courage in his escape from a German prisoner of war camp, Mr Chinchen was honoured again when he was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire in 1945. Following his distinguished career in the Royal Australian Air Force, Mr Chinchen married in 1946 and returned to work for the Ford Motor Company in Geelong. He was transferred to Brisbane with his family in 1952 and promoted to Queensland manager. Mr Chinchen and his wife later purchased a property at Rochedale, where they worked together as fruit farmers.

Mr Chinchen ventured into the political arena as chairperson of the Rochedale branch of the Queensland Liberal Party and continued on to be elected as the member for Mount Gravatt in the state election in 1963. In his maiden speech in this House, Mr Chinchen communicated his desire to contribute his experiences as a civilian and his observation as a relative newcomer to Queensland. He expressed his views for the future development of Queensland and encouraged a philosophy of change within parliament.

Mr Chinchen spoke of government modernisation, business processes and population growth—all of which remain current issues in today's society. As a parliamentarian he was part of the Ginger Group in the late 1960s, which included people such as Charles Porter, John Murray and Bill Lickiss and which rallied for amendments to the state's electoral system—something which many members on my side of the House shared, I can tell you. Mr Chinchen was a member of a number of committees including the parliamentary Select Committee on Subordinate Legislation and the government committee inquiry into consumer affairs. He also served as a Liberal Party whip. Mr Chinchen was a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and a delegate to the Australasian Regional Conference, the General Conference held at Mauritius and part of the parliamentary delegation to Japan and South-East Asia. He retired from parliament in 1977.

Mr Chinchen's funeral service was held on Friday, 22 July 2005 at the Anglican Church of St Mary the Virgin, Kangaroo Point. I again take this opportunity to extend my sympathy and that of this House to his family, his wife, Heather, his children and their families.

By way of addition, I should pay particular tribute to Mr Chinchen because of his involvement in the Ginger Group. Those of us who followed Queensland politics during the sixties, seventies, eighties and nineties—particularly in the seventies and eighties—will know that the Ginger Group were people of considerable principle. Although I did not agree with everything they said and did, they at least had the courage to stand up in the party room, in the coalition that existed at that time, and argue for Liberal principles.

One of the most important principles that they argued for was fair electoral boundaries. There is something that needs to be highlighted, and that is the National Party malapportionment which existed for many years. Indeed it started in the late forties under a Labor government, I hasten to add, but was finetuned and excelled under the National Party in a way that even the Labor Party in those days could not have dreamed of, which I have to say is not of any credit to either the Labor Party or the National Party. But the Ginger Group argued for fair electoral boundaries. The old boundaries disadvantaged the Liberal Party as much as they did the Labor Party. Fair electoral boundaries advantage democracy. It was only the Liberal Party and the Labor Party that were disadvantaged because we were not given a fair go.

This Ginger Group actually believed in principle. This Ginger Group did have a commitment to fair electoral boundaries, and I want to highlight that because that was about giving the public a say. That was about ensuring that Queenslanders could change the government if the will of the government said that the government should be changed. The Ginger Group believed in principle, and Mr Chinchen is someone whom I personally subscribe to, as I know all members of government do. It was hard to be a member of the Ginger Group within those political circumstances, bearing in mind the political circumstances of the day, and that is why he was clearly a man of character and strength and I admire that.

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (9.39 am): On behalf of the Liberal Party, I rise today to pass on to the family and friends of the late Geoffrey Chinchen MBE our sympathies and condolences.

Geoffrey Talbot Chinchen was born at Myaringa, Elsternwick, Brighton, Victoria on 31 July 1915. His parents were Cecil Talbot Chinchen, who was an architect, and Clementine Wilson Turnbull. Geoffrey also had a sister called Margaret.

Geoffrey was educated at the Melbourne and Geelong technical colleges. After studying accountancy he joined the Ford Motor Co. sales department in Geelong. In 1940 he joined the RAAF and moved to Archerfield. He then became a pilot trainer with the Empire trainer scheme at Camden and Wagga Wagga.

Geoffrey was posted to the Middle East as a fighter pilot with No. 3 Squadron, where he was quickly promoted to squadron leader. In January 1942 Geoffrey was shot down in Libya and was

wounded. Undeterred, he returned to the squadron two months later. In June of the same year he was shot down again, this time by enemy ground fire, and was captured by the Germans. He was put to work in a meteorological tent. During this time he met the German commander Rommel. Geoffrey was transferred to an Italian POW camp and, as the Germans retreated, was transferred again to a German camp near the French border. He miraculously escaped the POW camp, fled to Switzerland and returned to England to be trained as a Mosquito pilot. Peace was declared before he could add to his wartime adventures. During his service Geoffrey was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1942, while he was being held a prisoner by the Germans, and was made a member of the Order of the British Empire on 1 June 1945. He travelled to the USA in an attempt to make it back to Australia but was unable to return home until 1946.

Not long after he was discharged from the Air Force, Geoffrey married Heather Woolley on 23 December 1946. This was a marriage that lasted 69 years until his death and produced one son and two daughters.

Back in Australia, Geoffrey returned to the Ford Motor Co. and proceeded to rise through the ranks. He was transferred to Brisbane in 1952 and became the Queensland manager of Ford—an extremely prestigious position. He resigned in 1956 after being offered a position with Ford in Canada. He and Heather bought a 20-hectare property in Rochedale, where they farmed potatoes, pawpaws and bananas.

Geoffrey joined the Liberal Party and became chairman of the Rochedale branch. On 1 June 1963 he was elected to the Queensland parliament as the Liberal member for Mount Gravatt after the previous member, Graham Hart, was appointed as a Supreme Court judge. He held the seat comfortably—apart from victory on DLP preferences in 1972—until his retirement in 1977.

Geoffrey, despite being a parliamentary novice, quickly became one of the leaders of the Liberal Party's Ginger Group that, over a period of years, was not afraid to voice its disapproval of government policies or even to vote against them. Probably because of his involvement with the Ginger Group, he was never elevated to the ministry, despite his impressive managerial experience. He did serve as Liberal Party whip for a number of years and was involved in a number of committees, being an almost permanent fixture on the library committee during his term of office. Geoffrey was also a delegate to a number of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conferences.

Geoffrey retired from parliament on 12 November 1977 after 14 years of service and went back to the farm at Rochedale. He stayed out of the public light until 1994, when the Goss government sent him a resumption notice on his property as part of a plan to build a toll road to the Gold Coast. In keeping with his humble demeanour, the article that appeared in the *Courier-Mail* on the subject did not mention Geoffrey as a former state member of parliament but as a farmer from Rochedale. I think it is fair to assume that the author did not realise that Geoffrey was a former member of parliament.

Geoffrey Chinchen gave outstanding service to his country, to his state, to this parliament and to the Liberal Party. He went about his life in a self-effacing manner and was well respected for his manners and his politeness, and he was deeply committed to his principles of liberalism.

Geoffrey Chinchen and his wife retired to the Tricare retirement village at Mount Gravatt. He passed away on 17 July 2005. He is survived by his wife, Heather, his son, two daughters and 10 grandchildren. My colleagues and the Liberal Party organisation join with the Premier and other members of this House in extending our sympathy to his family.

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.44 am): In joining in this condolence motion for the late Geoffrey Talbot Chinchen, I acknowledge the contributions that have been made prior to this. Geoffrey Chinchen was born on 31 July 1915 at Myaringa, Elsternwick, Brighton, Victoria. He passed away in the Greenslopes Hospital, Brisbane, on 17 July 2005. He was the son of Cecil Talbot Chinchen, who was an architect, and Clementine Wilson Turnbull. Educated at the Melbourne and Geelong technical colleges, he was a keen footballer and cricketer. He married Heather Woolley on 23 December 1946 and had one son, two daughters and 10 grandchildren.

After studying accountancy, his early employment history included him joining the Ford Motor Co. at Geelong in the sales department. With the outbreak of war, Geoffrey Chinchen left the Ford Motor Co. to take up duty with the Royal Australian Air Force. His war history included joining the RAAF at Archerfield, Queensland in 1940, where he became a pilot trainer with the Empire trainer scheme at Camden and Wagga Wagga. He was posted to the Middle East, where he flew with No. 3 Squadron as a fighter pilot, with eventual promotion to squadron leader. Geoff Chinchen crash-landed in Libya in January 1942, and after his release from hospital Geoff Chinchen returned to the squadron in March 1942. In June the same year he was shot down by enemy ground fire and was captured by the Germans and became a prisoner of war. In my time I have come across a number of former fighter pilots and squadron leaders who flew bombers in that theatre of war in the Second World War. When you consider that many of them did not return from their first sortie, it was quite extraordinary that many of them lived to tell the tale and fly again.

As has been indicated by the Leader of the Liberal Party, Geoffrey Chinchen was captured, and the Germans put him to work in the meteorological tent in the Western Desert of North Africa. It was there that he met Field Marshal Rommel. Geoff Chinchen was sent to an Italian prisoner of war camp. When Italy capitulated, he was taken to a prisoner of war camp in Germany, near the French border. Shortly after, he and another prisoner escaped to Switzerland, where they were treated well by the Swiss and were prevented from leaving. To fill in time, this Australian took up skiing and bobsledding, and I understand that he became very proficient at both.

Eventually returning to England via Italy and into allied hands, Geoff Chinchen retrained as a pilot of the fighter bomber the Mosquito. Peace was declared in Europe, and Chinchen travelled to the United States and returned to Australia in 1946. In September 1942 he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, and in June 1945 he was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire.

His postwar employment history included returning to the Ford Motor Co., where he rose through the ranks and was transferred to Brisbane in 1952 as the Queensland manager. Geoff Chinchen chose to resign from the company instead of taking up a post in Canada. He and his wife purchased a 20-hectare property at Rochedale on which they farmed potatoes, pawpaws and bananas.

Geoff Chinchen joined the Rochedale Liberal Party branch on 1 June 1963, and he was elected the Liberal Party member for Mount Gravatt and held the seat comfortably until November 1977, when he retired from parliament. This morning we heard reference to the fact that he was part of the famous Ginger Group. I think every parliament needs a Ginger Group. I reflect on what is happening in Canberra at this particular time. At that time the Ginger Group fought for matters of what they saw as great principle.

A moment ago the Premier noted the issue of a so-called electoral malapportionment in Queensland and the history of that. I will pass one comment on that in this parliament. When that was finally abolished in 1991, at the subsequent state election in 1992 the Liberal, Labor and National parties achieved the same vote as they did in 1989, to within one per cent, and each party secured the same number of seats in this House. I ask people to reflect on that.

Geoff Chinchen was Liberal Party whip. He also was a delegate to various Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conferences and other such meetings. He was a part of overseas trade delegations and he also held quite significant positions within this parliament.

Geoff Chinchen was a highly principled and honourable gentleman. Colloquially described as 'from the old school' his upbringing, education and training provided him with a strong sense of duty to his country, his community and, above all, his family. Geoff Chinchen was a strong advocate for review and reform, particularly in relation to government services.

In his maiden speech he called for changes in methods and changes in thinking so that the development of the state was not hampered by old-fashioned ways. He delivered his maiden speech in 1963. Geoff Chinchen, being somewhat of a visionary, stated in that maiden speech—

The important thing for this State is the philosophy of change which will allow us to move away from what is accepted at the moment ... The important point I wish to make at this stage is that the philosophy of change must be adopted by individuals, organisations, bodies, unions and all the other units that comprise the working fabric of our economy and society.

It almost appears that the more things change the more they stay the same. He goes on to say—

If we do not go forward as fast as other States, we are still going back. For that reason it is absolutely necessary for us to make sure that any of our planning is at least as fast and as good as the planning of other States, or perhaps better.

With those thoughts in mind, members will recoil from the thought that the lack of planning and foresight by the Goss government put Geoff and his wife Heather under enormous strain when in August 1994 they received an impersonal letter from the government which stated that their property on Rochedale Road was within the corridor of interest for the government's toll road to the Gold Coast. The failed proposal would have split the Chinchen's property and would have changed their lives. All the rest is history.

I join with other members in passing on the condolences of members of this parliament, but particularly those of the members of the National Party, to Geoff's family and wish them all the very best. Our prayers and thoughts are with them at this time of obvious grief.

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (9.51 am): Geoffrey Chinchen, the member for Mount Gravatt from 1963 to 1977, is the second longest serving member for Mount Gravatt. I passed his record in May this year.

Mr Chinchen, unlike me, had four very distinguished careers and he excelled at each. He had an illustrious military career with the Royal Australian Air Force, receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross and being made a Member of the Order of the British Empire for his efforts in fighting the Nazi forces in North Africa and Europe. He excelled at management with the Ford Motor Co. being its Queensland manager. As we have heard he was also offered a position in Canada. He was a successful and diligent farmer who, along with his wife Heather, tended their property at Rochedale. He was also an assiduous and dedicated member of parliament.

In his maiden speech Geoffrey Chinchen reflected his big picture, knowledgeable vision for a future Queensland that would, and now does, compete as an equal with the larger southern states. He stressed the importance of thinking and planning, accepting new ideas and thoughts and he felt that Queensland suffered from a small state mind-set. In his time in parliament Geoffrey Chinchen served on a variety of committees and as Liberal Party whip. As whip he could exercise a degree of influence over his Liberal Party colleagues.

Geoffrey Chinchen was part of the Ginger Group of Liberal MPs who appeared to get under the skin of various Country Party ministers. In the 1960s this group believed that if the then Country Party continued to refuse to merge with the Liberals then the Liberals could flex their independent muscle. As the Leader of the Opposition said, some things never change in politics.

The paternalism of the Country Party and the resentment of this Ginger Group reached a crescendo when after the refurbished Legislative Assembly chamber was reopened in 1964 the cabinet inspired seating plan had Liberal members paired with Country Party members side by side. This was no doubt to guide their decision making and temper the views of Geoffrey Chinchen and other members of the Ginger Group. I guess if the Liberals and Nationals ever re-form a coalition in Queensland it is possible that the member for Beaudesert might seek guidance in a similar seating plan.

In March 1971 this Ginger Group also voted with the Labor Party to defeat a first reading speech relating to legislation that would have further strengthened the gerrymander of the National Party. Geoffrey Chinchen noted in his speech that having electorates with enrolment disparities of four to one did the cause of democracy no good whatever. The defeat meant that this Ginger Group and the ALP held the numbers in the parliament for a brief period. The gravity of the situation and the role of Geoffrey Chinchen was highlighted on page 1 of the *Courier-Mail* on 31 March 1971 under the headline 'Chalk warns government near collapse'. It had a photo of the Ginger Group prominently featuring Mr Chinchen.

In parliament he also worked to protect the interests of his electorate. He spoke about the need to preserve the Mount Gravatt Showgrounds from development. He opposed the naming of the suburb Robertson because his constituents wanted it to be called Sunnybank North.

I am told by Heather, his wife, that Geoffrey Chinchen was really responsible for Griffith University being sited in Nathan. At the time the education minister, Mr Jack Pizzey, asked the Brisbane members of parliament if they could think of a site of land for a new university that the government was planning. Geoffrey, along with other members of parliament, put forward some submissions. His two submissions were a site at Kuraby and a site in Toohey Forest at Nathan where the current university is located. Good choice.

Outside of parliament Mr Chinchen was always a hardworking and well-known local member. I, along with other students at the Marshall Road Primary School, used to look forward to the visits of Mr Chinchen. All pupils welcomed him bringing along a minister and giving us a holiday. I guess that is why he stands out so much in my memory. While that practice would not have won too many votes from the parents, he certainly did win our hearts.

Older constituents of the Mount Gravatt electorate remember Geoffrey and his wife Heather as a wonderful couple. Heather attended most functions with him and she tells me she enjoyed them and she enjoyed the opportunity to talk to different groups of people and get involved in community groups. They also tell me that Geoffrey Chinchen was a man of the people who got behind community projects and organisations.

Finally, Geoffrey Chinchen was a loving and caring family man. I was fortunate to speak to Heather about him last week. As the Premier acknowledged, Heather and their son David are in the gallery today. She told me the story of how they met 66 years ago on 7 July 1939 at a ball and how they fell in love. However, his service overseas with the RAAF, his time as a prisoner of war, and the fact that he could not return immediately at the conclusion of the fighting, instead having to travel to the United States, meant they were separated for the next six years.

Geoffrey Chinchen was reunited with Heather in Australia at the time of his discharge in 1946 and they married in December of that year. Heather tells me that Geoffrey was a very modest man but always a thorough gentleman. They shared a very happy marriage. Heather and Geoffrey celebrated their 90th birthdays this year. The Chinchen family and members of the Sunnybank Red Cross put on a wonderful birthday party that had been planned for a long time. Geoffrey suffered a stroke on the way home from that party. It was a wonderful memory for him and for the whole family who attended.

I know he will be greatly missed by his family. His distinguished career as a member of this parliament will form a memorable part of the history of this state. I, along with other members, pass on my condolences to his family.

Motion agreed to, honourable members standing in silence.

PETITIONS

The following honourable members have lodged paper petitions for presentation—

Mareeba Preschool

Ms Lee Long from 605 petitioners requesting the House to not sell off the Mareeba Pre-school and the relocation of the children into the Primary School.

Herberton to Petford Road

Ms Lee Long from 167 petitioners requesting the House to upgrade the rough and dangerous condition of the section of road between Watsonville and Irvinebank on the Herberton to Petford Road to a standard of safety acceptable to the citizens, school traffic and tourists of Irvinebank as a matter of urgency.

Atherton Ambulance Station

Ms Lee Long from 964 petitioners requesting the House to direct the construction of the replacement Ambulance Station for Atherton to take place as a matter of urgency and without further delay.

Metal Trade Stacks, Yeronga TAFE

Mr Lingard from 752 petitioners requesting the House to immediately dismantle the remaining nine metal trade stacks at Yeronga TAFE's Park Road campus in order to prevent any further harmful emissions contaminating the surrounding residential and schools area.

Boat Ramp, Auckland Creek

Mrs E Cunningham from 1,836 petitioners requesting the House to support the retention of the existing boat ramp on the Auckland Creek side of Goonoon Street, Gladstone, and seek an undertaking from the Minister for Transport that the ramp will be retained, maintained and upgraded (as required) in its current position for the enjoyment of existing and future boat users.

Domestic Violence Deaths Review

Mrs Smith from 126 petitioners requesting the House to establish a Multi-Disciplinary Domestic Violence Death Review Board which would provide information on the nature and circumstance of each domestic violence death as well as possible gaps in legislation and/or service response, as with more information these deaths may be prevented.

Big Brother

Mr Foley from 388 petitioners requesting the House to immediately withdraw all financial support provided to the Big Brother television program and commit to not funding Big Brother or similar ventures in the future; immediately cease the promotion of sexually explicit and highly graphic material to children and young people; withdraw all previous public statements of support for Big Brother; and take all practical measures to ensure inappropriate material is not made available to children through another medium including internet, mobiles or any other new media, in particular where the alternative medium is promoted to children on television or radio.

The following honourable member has sponsored an e-petition which is now closed and presented—

Metal Trade Stacks, Yeronga TAFE

Mr Lingard from 45 petitioners requesting the House to immediately dismantle the remaining nine metal trade stacks at Yeronga TAFE's Park Road campus in order to prevent any further harmful emissions contaminating the surrounding residential and schools area.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Science in Parliament

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.02 am): Today we are holding our fourth Science in Parliament with the emphasis this year on exploring ways of taking science to the world through collaboration and communication. I was honoured to open it this morning. In my discussion with scientists I was pleased to open this special day this morning with a reminder to participants that we live in a changing world, and it is absolutely vital that Queensland must continue to innovate. I table for the record the Science in Parliament documentation. I urge all members to participate in it. For the record, I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Following Queensland's lead, other states and countries are embracing change and developing new industries based on know-how and innovation. We cannot afford to stop now and let others get ahead of Queensland.

More than 200 people are participating in the Science in Parliament today, including about 190 Queensland scientists. I hope that many of you will take advantage of the opportunity to find out more about the work of this special group of Queenslanders.

We are proud that Queensland has some of the world's finest scientists in our research and medical facilities, and pleased that they are helping us gain widespread recognition as the Smart State.

This reputation helps us to attract new businesses to Queensland, which translates to more jobs for future generations of Queenslanders.

The work of these scientists is very important and we want to help them gain greater recognition.

That's why one of the sessions this afternoon is on the topic "selling science to mums, dads and kids."

The ABC's Bernie Hobbs will facilitate that session. Although she lives in Sydney, Bernie is a Queensland, a scientist and one of our country's best science journalists.

I'm sure she will help guide our scientific community in the right direction to gain the recognition they deserve.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Vietnam War, 30th Anniversary

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.02 am): There are a number of matters that I wish to report on, but because of time I will incorporate them. Firstly, I had the pleasure last night along with my key ministers, including the minister for multicultural affairs, Chris Cummins, of hosting a reception in the Parliamentary Annexe for more than 270 members of the Vietnamese Queensland community. The event was held to acknowledge the 30th anniversary since the fall of Saigon in April 1975 which effectively marked the end of the Vietnamese War. The year 1975 was also a new beginning for many Vietnamese. Up to two million people chose the uncertainties of life in new countries and climates rather than remaining to face an uncertain future at home. Many of them chose to settle in Queensland. We now have 12,000 people in the Vietnamese Queensland community. I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard* as a tribute to the Australian Vietnamese community.

Leave granted.

They have enriched our multicultural society in many ways and made a positive mark on all levels of the community.

The Vietnamese anniversary celebrations included a youth forum, a photographic exhibition and a literary competition, as well as the reception.

During the evening, I introduced the audience to Chris Cummins, our new Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs.

Queensland has very clear, positive policies in support of multiculturalism, which helps the State not only domestically but also when we engage in overseas trade.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Living Heroes—VP60

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.03 am): Tomorrow morning the transport minister, Paul Lucas, and I will farewell more than 150 World War II veterans and war widows as they board a special troop train bound for Townsville. They are heading to the garrison city to celebrate 60 years since the end of the war in the Pacific. Veterans will take a trip back in time in comfort and style. It is right that these living heroes are travelling free on the *Sunlander*, as rail played a key role in transporting troops, supplies and military equipment in particular to Townsville. I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard* as a tribute.

Leave granted.

Tomorrow morning I will be seeing off a group of World War II veterans travelling to Townsville for a very special event.

They will be participating in the "Living Heroes—VP60" event being run by the Townsville City Council from August 12-15 to honour veterans and recognise the role Townsville played during World War II.

These veterans are indeed "Living Heroes".

Those who served in World War II didn't just defend our country—they helped define its character.

Queensland Rail is playing an important role in this event and providing free travel for the veterans on the *Sunlander*.

The involvement of Queensland Rail is appropriate because rail was widely used in transporting troops, supplies and military equipment to the garrison city of Townsville.

Townsville was a vital supply and deployment centre for Allied troops, and the RAAF aerodrome at Garbutt was one of the largest bases in the Pacific.

By mid-1943, troop numbers at Townsville reached 90,000—outnumbering locals by about three to one. So it is little wonder that this trip is important to many of our veterans.

This trip will be a chance to remember those who never returned from war and to salute and thank those who did return.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Regional Sitzings of Parliament, Rockhampton

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.04 am): I wish to provide advice to members on the forthcoming sitting of the parliament in central Queensland. This will be the second regional sitting of the parliament and follows on from the highly successful sitting in north Queensland at Townsville in September 2002. At this point a total of 34 schools comprising 2,700 students have registered with the Parliamentary Education Service to attend tours of the sitting. That number will increase as more schools register. I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Planning for the sitting has been underway since mid 2004 with officers of my Department and the Parliamentary Service.

On 26 July, the Governor in Council signed the instrument declaring that the Parliament will sit in the Pilbeam Theatre and Rockhampton Art Gallery on 4, 5 and 6 October 2005.

The Rockhampton City Council is an important partner in supporting arrangements for the sitting.

I would like to thank the Mayor of Rockhampton, Councillor Margaret Strehlow, for the assistance being provided by the Council.

A number of community engagement activities will be held during the sitting. A major focus of these activities will be engaging with school children in the region to educate them on the parliamentary process.

The program has been developed in conjunction with the Parliamentary Service, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Communities, the Office for Women and the Queensland Electoral Commission.

At this time a total of 34 schools, comprising 2,700 students, have registered with the Parliamentary Education Service to attend tours of the sitting. This number will increase as more schools register.

A school subsidy program has been established for those schools 200 kilometres or more away from Rockhampton to assist with the costs of attending the sitting.

Primary and junior secondary students in the region have also been invited to participate in an art competition.

The competition has a number of themes which encourage students to demonstrate how the Parliament influences their lives and the importance of the right of everyone to vote.

This is important, given that 2005 is the centenary of women's right to vote, as well as being the 40th anniversary of the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this state to vote.

A teacher's resource kit will be distributed prior to the sitting to assist teachers develop their students' knowledge of the Parliament and its processes prior to attending the sitting, and so gain the maximum benefit from the occasion.

The Walter Reid Cultural Centre will be the focus of a number of other activities for schools, as well as the general public.

The play, *Citizen Jane*, will be performed in the Centre's auditorium over the three days. The play is an educational and entertaining view of the parliamentary process and was very popular with schools at the North Queensland sitting.

Parliamentary artefacts, and memorabilia from the Parliament's O'Donovan Collection, will be on display.

As well, mock voting activities, hosted by the Queensland Electoral Commission and the Department of Communities, will be set up to raise awareness of the process and to show students that their vote does count.

The Parliament's exhibition of the centenary of women's right to vote will also be on display.

A public barbeque will be held at lunch time on Tuesday for the people of Rockhampton to meet and mingle with Ministers and Members.

I am also pleased to announce that the Executive Council will be held at historic "Kenmore House" in the grounds of the Rockhampton Mater Misericordiae Hospital.

"Kenmore" was built by Mr John Ferguson in 1894. As President of the Central Queensland Separation League, Mr Ferguson proposed at the time that the house become the residence of the future Governor of Central Queensland.

I thank the Members for their continued support of this initiative, and look forward to joining with them in Rockhampton on 4-6 October 2005.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

AgForce Annual General Meeting

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.04 am): I wish to report on a number of things. Firstly I, along with key ministers, on the evening of Monday, 18 July made a visit to the AgForce annual general meeting in Kingaroy. There were a number of commitments that I gave on behalf of the government to AgForce and our rural producers. I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

On the evening of Monday July 18 I made a visit to the AgForce annual general meeting in Kingaroy.

It was my third meeting with AgForce president Peter Kenny in a month.

His dogged persistence had me attend that dinner and also support initiatives he has successfully lobbied us hard for.

The Kingaroy welcome was predictably warm and along with catching up with new Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Peter McGauran—it was timely.

- (1) At that gathering former Natural Resources Minister Stephen Robertson and I announced that landholders in areas where there is less than 30% remnant vegetation cover will now qualify for the State Government's \$150 million financial assistance package.

Cabinet has approved changes to the eligibility criteria for landholders to seek financial assistance under the package's \$130 million Structural Adjustment Scheme.

Under the scheme, landholders directly affected by the new vegetation management framework can apply to the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority for up to \$100,000 assistance to restructure their farm enterprises or exit the industry.

We have decided to broaden the eligibility criteria for this assistance to include, for the first time, landholders in catchments where there is less than 30% remnant vegetation cover.

Listed catchments with less than 30% remnant vegetation include the Moonie, Condamine, Balonne, Weir, Mackenzie, Lower Burnett and Bremer rivers plus Barambah Creek.

Until now, landholders in these catchments were not eligible to apply for assistance even though individually they may have more than 30% cover on their property.

We listened to AgForce on this issue and agree there was a case to broaden the eligibility criteria.

This was warmly received and I thank those producers present who thanked me and also for their unsolicited supportive public comments.

This was a big win for AgForce and again showed our commitment to work with them.

- (2) The week earlier at the Gold Coast Community Cabinet we announced that rural leasehold land rents would be frozen for 12 months to ease the financial burden on Queensland farmers.

Cabinet endorsed a plan to provide rent relief to thousands of farmers and graziers who hold Category 1 (grazing and agriculture) leases, licences and permits under the Land Act 1994.

Under the plan, rents on 12,037 rural leasehold properties will be maintained at present levels instead of being recalculated using the new 2005 unimproved capital land valuations issued in March.

That rent relief will save the bush nearly \$9 million in rent payments during 2005-06 and protect the viability of many grazing and agricultural enterprises.

We all know farmers are doing it very tough as a result of the worst drought in a hundred years.

This rent relief package is all about a fair go for farmers and their families.

It's about maintaining trust with the bush.

And it represents an early success for AgForce and the State Government through our Blueprint for the Bush partnership process.

I look forward to meeting with AgForce at the Ekka next week and taking part in their annual cook off.

We are working hard on the Blueprint for the Bush and I urge rural and regional Queenslanders—especially the councils—to have a say. Submissions close on October 14.

Our joint Government AgForce July 6 Roma launch of the Blueprint for the Bush Discussion Paper was another success.

Thank you to the people of Roma and those at Mount Abundance Homestead for their warm welcome.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Australian Football League, Preliminary Finals

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.04 am): As the minister responsible for sport, I am delighted to see that a compromise between the various parties has been reached to allow a non-Victorian club to host preliminary finals next month for the AFL. Members will be aware that this matter was pursued vigorously by me and the Premier of South Australia. I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

There has been another Queensland-sponsored victory at the MCG and we have played a lead role.

The long-standing dispute between the AFL and the Melbourne Cricket Club over its preliminary-final contract at the MCG that was biased against non-Victorian AFL clubs appears to be over.

The compromise between the parties will allow non-Victorian clubs to host preliminary finals next month.

Last year South Australian Premier Mike Rann and I made a call for the AFL to review where it plays its Preliminary Finals.

The year before I criticised as unfair non-Victorian AFL teams being forced to play finals at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Then along with my NSW, South Australian and West Australian counterparts we complained about an AFL deal to hold finals at the MCG.

I argued then—and still do—that "Non-Victorian clubs, like our Brisbane Lions, should be allowed to host finals provided their position on the ladder warrants it."

The MCC, which controls the Melbourne Cricket Ground, has now compromised on its contract with the AFL that stipulates at least one preliminary final be played at the MCG until 2032.

I understand that the new deal is not welcomed by everyone, especially MCC members over the possibility of losing a preliminary final to another state.

The preliminary-final dispute hit a peak last year when the higher-ranked Brisbane was forced to host the second preliminary final at the MCG despite having earned the right to play Geelong at the Gabba.

Commonsense has prevailed.

The AFL nationally will be the winner.

I still remain firm however that the AFL Grand Final should be played at the MCG—the code's spiritual home.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Golf Championships

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.05 am): Sporting events like golf have become more important. The Cadbury Schweppes Australian PGA Championship and the ANZ Ladies Masters are an important part of our sporting activities. I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Queensland is proud of its sport and proud of its tourism industry.

It's little wonder then that the game of golf plays an important role in the Smart State.

Golf appeals to people across all walks of life and it's developed into one of Queensland's tourist attractions.

We are fortunate in Queensland to have a great selection of golf courses for amateurs and professionals alike. We're also fortunate to host what I believe are the top two tournaments in Australia.

Australia's oldest golf championship, the Cadbury Schweppes Australian PGA Championship at Coolumb, will be celebrating its centenary in December. This event will attract some of the best golfers in the world.

The second tournament, now entering its 17th year, is the ANZ Ladies Masters at Royal Pines Resort on the Gold Coast. This is one of the richest women's tournaments and one of the most watched on television in the world.

Our ability to stage golf tournaments of this calibre sends an important signal to the world—not just the golfing world.

It is my Government's intention, through Queensland Events working with tournament organisers, to further promote our two major tournaments in the Asian market.

We aim to attract more top-level golfers—both men and women—from the Asian tour, and we also want to increase interest in these events from Asian tourists.

The ANZ Ladies Masters this year saw Japan's rising golf star Ai Miyazoto attract enormous television coverage in her home country as she went stroke for stroke with our own Karrie Webb to finish in second place.

The Japanese media crew of some 30 reporters following Ai's every move created enormous publicity for the Gold Coast in Japan.

Queensland Events also worked with Tourism Queensland and event organisers to ensure the two final days of play on the Gold Coast aired live in several countries, including Korea.

Korea is recognised as one of our state's key, emerging tourism targets. The fact that Queensland hosts golf tournaments of this stature can only enhance our appeal in Korea.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Hervey Bay, Commercial Flights

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.05 am): I also seek leave to have incorporated in *Hansard* a tribute to the Hervey Bay area. Along with the member for Hervey Bay, I attended the inaugural commercial flights by Virgin Blue and Jetstar from Sydney. This is as a result of our policy in relation to Virgin Blue. I just say to the critics who complained about our support for this: where are you now? This was the right thing to do and that is the result. I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Friday July 29 was a great day for the Hervey Bay area.

It was the day that saw the inaugural commercial flights by Virgin Blue and Jetstar from Sydney.

Their arrivals—within minutes of each other—signalled the beginning of a new era for Hervey Bay.

With 1.2 million visitors a year the Hervey Bay region already plays an important role in our State's tourism economy and today's inaugural flights signal the beginning of a new era.

The eight new services a week from Virgin Blue and Jetstar have the potential to bring about 1000 new visitors to the region and that equates to a real boom in development and employment opportunities.

The combined new operations total 1076 seats a week between Sydney and Hervey Bay, offering domestic and international visitors direct access to one of Queensland's coastal treasures.

To coincide with the flights the Government—through Tourism Queensland, Hervey Bay City Council, the regional tourism organisation and strategic industry partners—have launched a \$400,000 cooperative marketing campaign to promote the destination and new jet services.

The campaign 'Nothing compares to nature' contrasts the hustle and bustle of city life with the tranquil beauty of the Fraser Coast region—home to World Heritage listed Fraser Island and Hervey Bay, whale watch capital of Australia.

The campaign targets the lucrative Sydney couples market and includes television, online and print advertising and editorial features.

Whale watching is a key attraction for Hervey Bay.

The campaign's strategic industry partners include: Kingfisher Bay Resort, Kondari and Fraser Island Company.

The improved access also brings benefits to the wider region:

Better access in and out of the region for permanent residents;

New business opportunities for local primary producers now just 1 hour and 40 minutes from Sydney markets and connecting flights to overseas markets;

A significant boost in employment, particularly in retail, commercial and tourism sectors; and

An asset for residents and businesses in the wider region south from Bundaberg.

The State Government is also proud to have supported the refurbishment of the Hervey Bay Airport with \$1.2 million through the Local Government Bodies—Capital Works Subsidy Scheme.

The facility has tripled in size and now has all the assets passengers require, including café, bar, information centre, retail outlet and luggage carousel.

Other facts:

Direct flights between Sydney and Hervey Bay commence 29 July 2005.

Jetstar will operate 4 return flights per week from Sydney to Hervey Bay utilising their Boeing 717 aircraft with 125 seats. This equates to 500 seats per week.

Virgin Blue will operate 4 return flights per week from Sydney to Hervey Bay utilising their Boeing 737-700 aircraft with 144 seats. This equates to 576 seats per week.

There will be a total of 1,076 seats per week between Sydney and Hervey Bay (in both directions).

Sunshine Express operates flights between Brisbane and Hervey Bay—approximately 900 seats per week.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

International Movie Convention

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.05 am): Because I have a number of other things I want to talk about, I seek leave to have incorporated in *Hansard* my ministerial statement on the Australian International Movie Convention and also a tribute to Queensland swimmers who did well in recent events overseas—the world championships.

Leave granted.

The Australian International Movie Convention will be held next week, August 15-18, at the Royal Pines Resort, on the Gold Coast.

We have had a “feature length” involvement with this event and continue to work very closely with the organisers, the Motion Pictures Exhibitors Association of Queensland.

This is the association’s 60th convention and it’s the 60th time it’s been held in Queensland.

This is a great effort considering how hard some of the other States have tried to lure them away, but it shows that when you have a great location, you stick with it!

Queensland locations, facilities and crews have had a key role in film and television productions during the past few years, and the presence of the Movie Convention further demonstrates Queensland’s strong position on the industry radar.

The convention attracts Australia’s key film industry representatives from across Australia, New Zealand and the USA.

The Convention caps off a strong line-up of recent major film events in Queensland including the 14th Brisbane International Film Festival, the 2005 Screen Producers Association of Australia Conference and the Screen Producers’ Fringe Festival.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Swimming World Championships

It is again congratulations to Queensland’s swimmers.

Our own Queensland Academy of Sport (QAS) swimmer, Libby Lenton, smashed the 100m freestyle short course world record (that is a race swum in a 25m pool) in Monday night’s semi-final swim at the Australian Short Course Championships in Melbourne.

Clocking a time of 51.91 seconds to take 0.26 seconds from the previous world record, Lenton became the first woman to break the 52 second barrier and the first Australian to officially hold the short course record.

In other achievements by QAS swimmers, Leith Brodie took out the 400m individual medley in a time of 4:11.91 with Ephraim Hannant coming in third. Melissa Gorman won gold in the 800m freestyle in a time of 8:23.93 and Christian Sprenger took silver in the 100m breaststroke in a time of 59.66.

The Australian Short Course Championships is a selection trial for next year’s World Short Course Championships and will continue at the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre until Thursday 11 August.

This follows the “Simply stunning” performance of our Queensland swimmers at this month’s World Swimming championships in Montreal.

Sixteen of the Australian team of 38 won 17 of the 22 medals Australia won.

Our swimmers have achieved a phenomenal feat at Montreal not only collecting the highest world championship medal tally ever for the nation but also for the state of Queensland.

It was really pleasing to watch one of the greatest swimmers of all time, Queensland bred and Queensland Academy of Sport (QAS) swimmer Grant Hackett, snatch the 800 metre World Record from rival Ian Thorpe.

Equally, when Leisel Jones (QAS) broke through years of hard work to score two individual gold medals and break a World Record in the 200 metre breaststroke.

On the final day of the championships the third World Record was picked up by Queensland and Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) swimmer, Jade Edmiston, in the 50 metre breaststroke.

The records did not stop there with Grant Hackett being crowned the greatest medal winner in world championship history.

Hackett’s gold medal in the 1500 metre freestyle set him to become the first swimmer in 11 championships to win the same event four consecutive times.

He picked up gold medals in the 400, 800 and 1500 metre freestyle, silver in the 200 metre freestyle and bronze in the 4 x 200 metre freestyle relay to bring his total championship medal count to 17.

He has become the greatest medal winner in world championship history and will long remain the king of long distance swimming.

Other outstanding results of the Championships included a repeat performance of the Athens Olympic women's gold medal 4 x 100 metre medley relay with Jessicah Schipper (QAS), Libby Lenton (QAS), Leisel Jones (QAS) and New South Wales Institute of Sport swimmer Sophie Edington snatching the gold in a time of 3:57.47 and just 0.15 behind the World Record.

As well the 4 x 100 metre freestyle relay—of Jodie Henry (former QAS), Alice Mills (former QAS), Shayne Reese (Victorian Institute of Sport) and Libby Lenton claimed gold ahead of Germany and the United States.

In the 4 x 200 metre freestyle relay, comprised of Libby Lenton, Victorian Institute of Sport swimmer Shayne Reese, Bronte Barratt (QAS) and Linda Mackenzie (AIS), the women scored a silver medal but broke an Australian and Commonwealth Record.

Libby Lenton swam the first leg of the race in an Australian Record and if she had swum the same time in the final of the 200 metre freestyle she would have claimed the gold medal.

It was pleasing to see Jessicah Schipper swim an outstanding meet collecting her first individual gold medal in the 100 metre butterfly, gold in the 4 x 100 metre medley relay and silver in the 200 metre butterfly.

In obtaining the individual gold medal Schipper broke three Championship Records and a Commonwealth Record.

Both Bronte Barratt and Leith Brodie (QAS) performed well at their international debut both claiming medals.

They are new faces and their talent is starting to shine through on the international arena.

Barratt was a member of the 4 x 200m freestyle relay team that picked up silver and broke a Commonwealth Record whilst Brodie claimed bronze in the 4 x 100 metre freestyle relay.

World Championship results for Queensland swimmers:

Jessicah Schipper (QAS)—claimed gold in the 100m butterfly (broke three Championship Records) and the 4 x 100m medley relay and silver in the 200m butterfly (Commonwealth Record)

Libby Lenton (QAS)—claimed gold in the 4 x 100m freestyle, 4 x 100m medley relay and 50m freestyle and silver in the 4 x 200m freestyle relay team (Commonwealth Record) and 100m butterfly (Personal Best)

Grant Hackett (QAS)—claimed gold in the 400m, 800m (World Record) and 1500m freestyle, silver in the 200m freestyle and bronze in the 4 x 200m freestyle

Leisel Jones (QAS)—claimed gold in the 100m breaststroke, 200m breaststroke (World Record) and 4 x 100m medley relay

Jodie Henry (AIS)—claimed gold in the 100m freestyle, 4 x 100m freestyle relay and 4 x 100m medley relay

Jade Edmiston (AIS)—claimed gold in the 50m breaststroke (World Record)

Linda Mackenzie (AIS)—claimed silver in the 4 x 200m freestyle relay (Commonwealth Record)

Alice Mills (AIS)—claimed gold in the 4 x 100m freestyle relay

Bronte Barratt (QAS)—claimed silver in the 4 x 200m freestyle relay (Commonwealth Record)

Andrew Mewing (QAS)—claimed bronze in 4 x 100m freestyle relay and 4 x 200m freestyle

Leith Brodie (QAS)—claimed bronze in the 4 x 100m freestyle relay

Nick Sprenger (QAS)—claimed bronze in the 4 x 200m freestyle relay

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Duck and Quail Hunting

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.06 am): I want to join with the minister for the environment and advise that there will be no more duck and quail hunting in Queensland. It is time to ban this recreational shooting of ducks and quail. This is not an appropriate activity in contemporary life in the Smart State. For example, in 1984 there were more than 1,800 licensed hunters and in 2004 there were just 376. Conversely, the environment minister has received more than 700 representations this year on the issue with all but 15 seeking to have duck and quail hunting banned. Community concern combined with declining bird numbers, diminishing wetlands and the effects of the drought mean it is time to act, and act we will.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: All dinosaurs are at risk, including you. State cabinet has agreed the Nature Conservation (Duck and Quail) Conservation Plan 1995, which manages the hunting of ducks and quails, will not be remade when it expires in September. There has been community concern that shooting ducks and quail with shotgun pellets while they are flying is cruel because the birds are often wounded instead of being killed instantly. The RSPCA has suggested that as many as 90 per cent of ducks shot suffer a cruel, slow death. The issue was referred to the Animal Welfare—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I take the National Party's objection to this and I note it for the record. I just say to the people of Queensland: we are happy to stand by this policy. I just say to all Queenslanders: the National Party supports the continuing shooting of ducks and quail. My government does not. Let the record show it. I take the interjection from the member for Toowoomba South and the Deputy Leader of the National Party. Let the record show exactly where we stand on this issue. The issue was referred to the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: They continue to object. Let the record show it. The issue was referred to the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, which reports to the primary industries minister. That committee—

Miss Simpson interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Let me tell the member that there will be a lot of environmentalists in her seat who will not agree with her, and I look forward to that at the next election. If she goes out in her electorate and says that she supports it and I go out and say that I do not, let us see how we end up.

Miss SIMPSON: I rise to a point of order. The Premier is misrepresenting me. I was making reference to dead duck ministers.

Mr SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr BEATTIE: So she does agree with us. So she does agree with me. There is a split: some of you do; some of you do not. You will have a chance to indicate. The committee concluded that the likely rate of wounding instead of direct kills was unacceptable, leading to unreasonable pain and suffering. Also, few modern hunters viewing a bird in flight are able to distinguish a species which can be shot from one which is protected. In the past three years the EPA has cancelled two hunting seasons due to reduced populations from poor rainfall conditions. Other forms of hunting where animal welfare is not a concern are still legal in—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Will you knock it off?

Mr SPEAKER: Excuse me, Premier. Member for Toowoomba South, you have sat there for the last 10 minutes interrupting the Premier. I am giving you a warning now.

Mr BEATTIE: In the past three years the EPA has cancelled two hunting seasons due to reduced populations from poor rainfall conditions. Other forms of hunting where animal welfare is not a concern are still legal in Queensland, specifically the destruction of feral species such as pigs and deer. The removal of feral animals can help the environment and, as a stationary target, the likelihood of a direct kill and the ability to immediately retrieve the animal is higher.

In terms of people on the land, they can—and the minister for environment will explain this—get exemptions if there are plague proportions or problems of that kind. The minister will spell that out. So farmers in particular circumstances can get permits. I table that for the information of the House.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

State Taxes

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.09 am): I want to compare the impact of state taxes on business between the various states. I seek leave to incorporate details of that in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Queensland is the place to do business and the National Retail Association has this week confirmed it.

The Association in an August 8 update to members (table) detailed a simple comparison of State taxes business between the States.

It was headed:

COMPARING THE IMPACT OF STATE TAXES ON BUSINESS

The Association then detailed:

That following recent changes in New South Wales and Queensland administrations, (and the abolition of the controversial "vendors' tax" on property transactions in NSW), it was timely to examine the impact of state taxes and charges on business activity.

The table they published was prepared by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and shows a simple interstate comparison of key taxes.

I naturally had that double-checked and I have developed the attached table.

I do not dispute the accuracy of their table—but just wanted to ensure that all was okay.

The initial comparison considers:

A small business of 15 employees on average wages.

The business rents its premises for \$5000 per month on an annual lease arrangement and the property has three parking spaces attached to it for employee use.

The business also owns two cars worth \$20,000 each and a delivery van worth \$50,000, which it registers.

The tables compare the different tax outcomes of this scenario that would be paid by the business if it were located in each of the six states

I am happy to report that Queensland is the clear winner.

In the Association table the total for the Queensland business was \$2010 and the worst were New South Wales \$21,604, \$16,963 in South Australia and \$15,783 in Victoria.

The double-checked comparison which I had undertaken still had Queensland on just \$2010 and New South Wales lower at \$20,024, and \$16,963 in South Australia and \$15,783 in Victoria.

Table 1: Interstate Comparison of taxes 2003-04¹

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS
Total Wages ²	\$773,916	\$741,078	\$693,030	\$746,070	\$684,918	\$663,000
Est. Payroll ³	\$843,568	\$807,775	\$755,403	\$813,216	\$746,561	\$722,670
Payroll tax	\$14,614	\$13,533	\$0	\$3,477	\$13,753	\$0
Stamp duty on leases	\$210	0	\$210	\$210	\$600	0
Parking Space Levy	\$2,580 ⁴	0	0	\$540	0	0
Stamp duty on motor vehicle registration	\$4,200	\$2,250	\$1,800	\$3,500	\$2,610	\$2,646
TOTAL	\$21,604	\$15,783	\$2,010	\$7,727	\$16,963	\$2,646

- (1) Interstate Comparison of taxes 2003-04 & various State Budget papers.
- (2) Using AWOTE for each State, as of May 2003.
- (3) Example includes superannuation but does not take into account other tax base, inclusions such as non-executive directors' termination payments & share/options remuneration that could potentially further inflate the payroll.
- (4) Queensland is to abolish Stamp Duty on Leases from 1 January 2006, and South Australia from 1 July 2004.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Opposition Political Advertising

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.10 am): The government developed an advertising code of conduct and we adhere to it religiously. Every request I receive to approve advertising funded by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet must carry a certification from a senior executive of the department that the advertising adheres to the code. It is often necessary to inform the public of state government initiatives which, for example, they may wish to take advantage of, which they should be aware of, which are likely to affect them, or which enhance public safety or is a new government initiative or announcement on which they may seek additional information.

However, taxpayer funded advertising must never be political. We are scrupulous about ensuring it is not. Unfortunately, such scruples are not shared by all who are privileged to receive public funds. The Director-General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Dr Leo Keliher, has brought to my attention a flagrant breach of the no politics rule for publicly funded advertisements. Dr Keliher is the accountable officer under the Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977 for maintaining control over expenditure from Ministerial Services. Ministerial Services holds \$41,117.90 in disputed expenditure claims for advertising costs by the Office of the Leader of the Opposition. An amount of \$16,733.44 relates to shadow cabinet advertising that I rejected in June. I answered a question about this during the estimates committee hearing. A further \$24,384.46 relates to other advertising that is shamelessly political.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: The Leader of the Opposition laughs about wasting taxpayers' money. Mr Springborg wants to dip into the public purse to settle these disputed accounts despite being given a budget of more than \$2 million this year—a record for a single party opposition.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: The member for Southern Downs, if you have any questions you will have the appropriate time to ask them in a few minutes.

Mr BEATTIE: The Leader of the Opposition continues to rack up debts despite the opposition handbook stating that they are not payable. He knows full well that this is improper.

On 30 November I wrote to the opposition leader advising that it was appropriate that shadow cabinet ministers should use their parliamentary allowances to fund shadow cabinet activity, which is what they were given for. Mr Springborg refuses to pay his debts to businesses and some are threatening legal action. To prevent costly litigation and further pain to the creditors, Dr Keliher has decided to approve the payments. However, to ensure that taxpayers are not worse off I will reduce the opposition's budget by \$41,000.

Despite all the lessons of history, the National Party is a slow learner when it comes to the proper use of public funds. On three occasions in the past 12 months my department has drawn my attention to questionable opposition expenditure. The amounts involved total \$47,233. The three occasions were \$6,116 spent on a consultant for planning shadow cabinet in August 2004—and by the look of them he had a pretty tough job; \$16,733 for shadow cabinet advertising in April and May 2005; \$24,384 for other advertising in June and July 2005, which included a *Demand Secure Property Rights* brochure which refers to the 'Nationals' parliamentary team' and the 'Nationals' charter of property rights'. How would they like it if I started running things about the Labor Party?

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Callide! That is your final warning.

Mr BEATTIE: It also seeks public funds for the Nationals. Two other brochures titled *Queensland Focus* and *Achievers* are styled as reports of the Nationals—not of the opposition, of the Nationals. The department has been trying for months to sit down with the opposition leader to agree on advertising guidelines. Until he settles guidelines he will have to ask Ministerial Services to approve his advertising expenses.

Dr Keliher has written to the Leader of the Opposition and to the Auditor-General. I table both of those letters. I table attachments including a list of disputed expenditure claims with the dates of invoices. I table an example of the shadow cabinet material. For comparison, I table examples of the government's *Community Cabinet News*.

The behaviour of the opposition is in stark contrast to that of the government. In early 2004 the Auditor-General tabled a report on government advertising showing that the supervision process and all the advertisements reviewed complied with requirements. The Auditor-General also reviewed my department's advertising expenditure and late in 2004 a random Auditor-General's audit of advertising confirmed ongoing compliance.

We are playing by the rules, but the opposition leader is thumbing his nose at taxpayers and accountability. I acknowledge that the opposition has a job to do and I do not generally interfere in what they do or how they do it. But this is an accountability issue. Everyone who uses taxpayers' money has a responsibility to use it appropriately.

I know the Leader of the Opposition thinks it is a joke. That is the way he treats accountability. Let me go through this. I will table the director-general's letter to the Auditor-General and the letter from my director-general to the Leader of the Opposition. Let us look at what we have here. This is blatantly dishonest. The material that has been produced is nothing short of party political. Here is one document that states, 'Let's get the basics right. A report card on the achievements of the Nationals'. That is all party political. If I did that the Leader of the Opposition would go ape. He has never suggested we have made party political references.

I will go through these documents and I will table each one of them for the information of the House. One refers to killing people in hospitals. That is hardly nonpolitical. The documents go on about the Nationals and giving them a big tick. This whole thing is just party political. We have a report titled *Queensland Focus*, which is a report by the Queensland Nationals. The whole report talked about the Queensland Nationals—the Nationals have demanded this, the Nationals have done that. The reality is that no-one in government has done this. There are attacks on people's credibility. Nowhere do we find any balance. If members looked at the government's *Community Cabinet News* they would find that articles about members such as Howard Hobbs are in it. Also, there are articles about the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Nicklin. I table those documents to give members some idea of the balance of reporting.

Let me make it absolutely clear: this party political nonsense is not going to be funded by the taxpayer. As Premier, there is no way I am going to approve National Party propaganda. The Leader of the Opposition should do the decent thing and the National Party should pay for it. This is a disgrace. The only reason my director-general approved it is that we do not want to see the creditors out of pocket. We are not going to allow these dishonest practices to continue. I make it very clear to the Leader of the Opposition that we will finalise those guidelines and these advertisements will not be approved again. If the Leader of the Opposition continues to breach the guidelines and the rules, he will fund them out of the National Party's funds, not from the taxpayers. I will make it very clear what the rules are.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Duck and Quail Hunting

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women) (10.17 am): As the Premier has told the House, we have banned duck and quail hunting in Queensland. I am delighted to share the floor with the Premier today in announcing the end to what many, myself included, consider a barbaric practice. We have done this for sound reasons: declining bird numbers, the effects of the drought and community concern over cruelty. The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee concluded that the likely rate of wounding was unacceptable leading to unreasonable pain and suffering for these birds. In other words, shooting a duck or a quail in the wing with shotgun pellets often results in the bird being wounded and left to die a slow, painful death.

This issue has been a concern held by many citizens who have written to me and to other members of the government. We have listened to these concerns. One woman wrote—

The idea that you can kill an animal for 'sport, recreation or tradition' should be consigned to the dark ages.

Another urged—

Please be the Minister, the woman, who has the brains to end the slaughter and suffering of our wildlife.

In days long past it may have been, and probably was, acceptable to kill wild duck and other wild fowl for the table. But now the fact is that poultry and other game birds are readily available—and, I might say, for the cost of a couple of shotgun cartridges. There is no need and no reason any longer for the shooting for sport of these birds.

Another concern expressed to me was that birds other than ducks and quail were routinely killed. One person asked, 'How can we be sure a hunter with a split second to decide in imperfect conditions ... is making a correct decision? Our native birds deserve more protection than this.' Others pointed out that the number of shooters has been declining. One man wrote, 'I know of no good reason why 400 people should be allowed to go bush and shoot ... at will several species of our wild duck and quail.' Indeed, duck and quail hunting appears to be losing popularity in Queensland. In 1984 some 1,800 recreational wildlife harvesting licences were issued, but in 2004 the number had dropped to just 376. But overwhelmingly most people have concentrated on the cruelty, describing duck and quail shooting as 'this unnecessary, barbaric pastime enjoyed by a small number of people who essentially shoot for fun'.

Damage mitigation permits for farmers will be unaffected, of course. Usually damage mitigation permits can be supplied in two to three days. Where inspection of remote areas is required it may take as much as a week. These mitigation permits will be unaffected by this important decision. I am pleased to say that community attitudes in Queensland have reached the stage at which the time has come to ban duck and quail shooting.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Leader of the Opposition

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (10.21 am): Yesterday in this House the Leader of the Opposition stated that I had been in Mapoon, saying that its community housing program may not be able to continue because it is not the core business of councils. I was not in Mapoon. He was also wrong on the matter of the statement about housing. I did not make that statement. What I said at a ministerial forum in Weipa was that in the light of the Fitzgerald report, which recognises these and other matters as challenges for community councils, it is appropriate to have a debate on Indigenous housing. I did not single out any specific community. As the member for Gregory said last night, Indigenous housing is an issue facing Indigenous communities throughout Queensland.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hornibrook Highway

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.22 am): I give notice that I will move—

That this House calls on the Beattie government to retain the iconic and historic Hornibrook Highway bridge for tourist and recreational purposes.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Chatsworth By-election, Labor Candidate

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.22 am): The hilarity and the comedy is permeating the state seat of Chatsworth as we speak. This morning Peter Beattie's man in Chatsworth, Chris Forrester, is responsible for sending out the following flyer. How would people in that electorate feel if they received this? It states—

Dear—

so-and-so—

When you, your kids, your parents, anyone in your family gets sick and injured what do you want most?

I can tell honourable members that what they want most are hospitals that work. They do not want Third World witchdoctors in Queensland attending to their needs. They do not want waiting lists on which people are waiting for up to 10 years for their surgery. They do not want a situation in which people are dying on waiting lists in Queensland and dying under the hand of unqualified people in this state attending to their surgical needs. I cannot believe the audacity of this government, after all of the pain and the misery it has inflicted on the people of Queensland, and the audacity of this person, Chris Forrester, to send such a flyer around.

This morning we have heard in this parliament the government rallying to save ducks and quails. However, this government cannot even ensure the safety of our kids or the patients in our hospitals. It is a matter of getting the basics right in Queensland, and the government has failed.

This letter goes on to say, 'Keep your voice in the Beattie government'. The only way the people in that electorate are going to get a voice in the parliament that matters is to vote for Michael Caltabiano.

Government members: Ha, ha!

Mr SPRINGBORG: Members opposite can laugh, but I ask everyone here to consider this: the good people of Burnett had a voice in this parliament and it worked. The good people of Bundaberg had a voice in the government and in the cabinet in Nita Cunningham and it did not work. So if the people vote for this person who does not understand the basic issues, they are going to have more silence in Chatsworth, more of the neglect and more of the problems in Queensland Health that we have seen permeate under this government that does not care about the basics.

Mr LINGARD: I rise to a point of order. Mr Speaker, it has always been the practice of this House that we refer to people in their official position. The Premier is not the member for Brisbane Central, nor are you, Mr Speaker, the member for Mount Isa. I have noticed four times this morning that you have referred to the Leader of the Opposition as the member for Southern Downs.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Point taken.

Member for Barron River

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (10.25 am): As a matter of courtesy to members in the House, I would like to take this opportunity to announce that I will be retiring from state politics at the next election. It has been a difficult decision because there are so many things that I love about the job. However, after 15 years I do believe that the time is right for renewal if Labor is to retain this difficult marginal seat well into the future. It has been a privilege to represent the people of Barron River for so many years. I thank the residents of the many communities in my electorate for their confidence in me to represent their interests for so many years.

Being a member of parliament is a privilege afforded to relatively few people, and I really appreciate having the opportunity to contribute my talent, passion and commitment for the betterment of my community and our state. I am proud to have contributed to the timely provision of key services in my electorate in the areas of education, health, transport and policing as the population has grown since my election back in 1989. But as members here know only too well, the biggest battles in Barron River have been over environmental issues. I am still a conservationist at heart, so it has never been easy to strike the right balance and try to represent all of my constituents. My involvement with the preparation of the Trinity Inlet Management Plan stopped a range of inappropriate coastal developments, and the Smithfield Conservation Park has preserved the rainforest mountain backdrop to the James Cook University. But the Bluewater canal development has been built.

I have been privileged to witness history being made in this House on many occasions, but the most significant change I have seen in the parliament has been the increase in the number of women members. When I arrived in 1989 women made up only 10 per cent of the parliament. Now we are 33 per cent, which I believe makes a significant difference for the better.

As to the future, I am looking forward to working part-time in a third career after my years as an academic and politician. I still want to serve the community and would like to use my knowledge and

skills to contribute in the international arena, particularly in the developing countries of our region. Of course, I am also looking forward to spending more time with my family. I would like to thank members from both sides of the House for their friendship and support.

It is not time yet to say farewell. I still have many things I want to achieve both as member for Barron River and as chair of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee in the next 18 months. I intend to continue to work hard to achieve further positive outcomes for my community and for Queensland in my remaining time in parliament.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I think I speak on behalf of all members when I wish you all the very best in your future endeavours.

Redcliffe and Chatsworth By-elections

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (10.27 am): Last week the government took out a full-page ad in the *Bundaberg NewsMail* stating that it was going to be a fresh start for Bundaberg Health. But is this the first time the government has had a fresh start? Sadly, no. Right back when Peter Beattie first became the Premier of Queensland, when he sacked 12 of the 18 directors-general, he said, 'I explained to them that I wanted to make a fresh start with a new team'. In the run-up to the 2001 election campaign, the Premier said, 'This is a rebirth, a renewal. This is a fresh start for the Labor Party.' When announcing the 2001 state election, again, 'Queenslanders want a fresh start.' Later on in 2004, in the wake of the child abuse scandal in Queensland, again it was a 'fresh start'—'We are all making sacrifices to put the children first.' After the election campaign was over in the tally room, 'Tomorrow is a fresh start for a new government.' When Gordon Nuttall stood down as the health minister, 'We needed a fresh start to enable Health to move forward.' When the cabinet reshuffle was occurring, 'This is a fresh start. I started with a blank piece of paper.' On and on it goes.

Even when the Premier was announcing the two candidates for the by-elections at Chatsworth and Redcliffe, what was it? It was a fresh start! In this state there is nothing more stale than a fresh start. Every time there is trouble in the government, what happens? It is a fresh start! This government needs to get its priorities right in this state, not tell the people of Queensland every time there is a problem, 'It is a time for a fresh start.' We are all sick and tired of that. We need action, not another fresh start.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Queensland Health

Mr SPRINGBORG (10.30 am): My question without notice is to the Premier. In eight of the last 10 years the Premier has appointed the health minister or been health minister himself. In that time he has appointed every director-general of Queensland Health. As the Premier is the person most responsible for the tragic failure that Queensland Health is today, does the buck stop with him?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question. Before I answer, I say to the Leader of the Liberal Party for the record that when a number of director-generals' contracts expired they were not renewed, and he may recall that he was part of that government. Mr Borbidge actually ensured that their contracts expired at the election. The second thing is that I am always prepared to look at things afresh.

Mr Quinn: Almost on a daily basis.

Mr BEATTIE: It is still the same old Liberals. They have not changed at all. I heard Mr Quinn on radio saying that he was happy to go down and campaign at Redcliffe. That was not the point: I said Chatsworth. He does not want to be seen with Michael Caltabiano. That is the point. If Mr Caltabiano ever does get in here, it would be like greased lightning: he would be over there and he would be sitting in Mr Quinn's spot. That is what will happen. Chatsworth is the point we are talking about.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Premier, please come back to the subject.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, I will come back to the issue. I will come back to health.

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: This is about the only time we see them excited in here.

Mr Quinn interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Stop interjecting so I can answer the question.

Mr Johnson: Wind the clock back three minutes.

Mr BEATTIE: I am happy to give the member an answer. The issue about health is very simple. My government has been in office for seven years and one month. In that time I have, of course, been the relevant person to appoint ministers. Yes, that is true. I have also been the relevant person to appoint directors-general. Along with former health minister Mike Horan, I supported the appointment of

a former director-general Robert Stable, who I think is a very decent person and who I think worked very hard. Mike clearly shares that view because Robert continued as his director-general for the two years, four months and one week that he was health minister.

Our philosophy about health is very simple: providing health services to a population of just under four million and over 1.74 million square kilometres is very difficult. We are determined to face up to problems head-on. Whenever there have been difficulties we have not run away from them. I remind the Leader of the Opposition that we were the ones who established both the Peter Forster review and the Tony Morris royal commission. In the days of the National Party things were just swept under the carpet. We have not done that. We have decided to tackle these issues head-on, and that is exactly what we have done.

We are not going to get into name calling. I am not going to stand up here like the Leader of the Opposition did and refer to our doctors as witchdoctors and use derogatory terms. I thank our doctors and nurses in the system, as the health minister and I did yesterday, for their commitment. I thank the doctors and nurses in our health system who every day save lives, who every day give 150 per cent. Yesterday when the health minister and I visited Redcliffe we took the opportunity to thank them for being great citizens.

Time expired.

Office of the Speaker

Mr SPRINGBORG: My second question without notice is also to the Premier. I refer to the unauthorised mystery trip undertaken by the former Speaker during the 1998-99 financial year at a cost of more than \$13,000. This trip was not included in the material the Premier tabled in this House on 10 June 2005, nor was the \$26,000 for unauthorised travel during 2001-02 which I understand the Premier has retrospectively approved. I ask the Premier again whether he will tell the parliament if he has retrospectively approved this travel—that is, the \$13,000. If not, will the former Speaker be required to repay the taxpayer funds he used for the unauthorised travel and provide a full report to this parliament?

Mr BEATTIE: The issues that were raised in the internal audit were referred to the CMC and some matters out of that were referred to the DPP. I have already made reference to that. When the Leader of the Opposition asked me this question yesterday, I sought clarification of the detail which he could not give me at the time.

Mr Springborg: Oh!

Mr BEATTIE: Well, he could not. These matters, as far as I am concerned, have been through the appropriate processes. I am told that there was a trip dated, I think, 4 to 13 December 1998. Was the Premier's approval sought? I am advised that it was and that approval was given for that trip.

Mr Springborg: Where's the report?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, you have asked the question. Allow the Premier to answer.

Mr BEATTIE: The reality here is very simple.

Miss Simpson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Maroochydore, I warn you.

Mr BEATTIE: The former Speaker of this House has retired due to ill health. He has resigned from parliament and has done so because of ill health.

Mrs Miller: They're laughing about someone who is sick.

Mr BEATTIE: I would not laugh at someone who is sick. I do not laugh at people who have gone through ill health. The opposition wants to come in here and dance on Ray Hollis's grave. That is what the opposition wants to do, and I am not going to allow it. The reality is that he has been the subject of two inquiries—initially the CMC and then the DPP. He is not well and, as far as I am concerned, had these matters not been investigated by the CMC and the DPP then it would have been a different story.

These matters have been examined. I have made that very clear. They were part of an audit report. There may be some matters that were prior to that report, which the opposition leader seems to have gone back and dug up. I have said that there was Premier's approval for a trip in 1998, which is what I think he is referring to. If, indeed, he wants to continue to pursue these things, he can do it on his own. The reality is that these matters have been properly looked at. The matter in 1998 was never raised before. As I said, according to my information the trip was previously approved by me, which is my responsibility. I have now tightened the guidelines.

Let us look at what happened here. There was an investigation into the former Speaker's conduct in a number of matters by both the CMC and the DPP. Those reports have indicated that no matter is to be pursued further. I have tightened the guidelines. I do not intend to pursue these matters any further.

Mr Springborg: Will you table the approval?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, I warn you.

Mr BEATTIE: The reality is that it is over. As far as I am concerned, a man who is ill, bearing in mind that he has resigned and left his office, is entitled to the dignity and opportunity to recover his health. I am not going to allow the opposition to pursue him to an early grave.

Time expired.

Terrorism, Ammonium Nitrate

Ms CROFT: My question without notice is to the Premier. The Premier has assured Queenslanders that the state government is doing everything it can to deal with the threat of terrorism. Can the Premier please tell the House what the Queensland government has done to restrict access to ammonium nitrate?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for the question. Long before the London bombings—in fact, since the Bali bombings in October 2002—Australian governments, industry and the community have agreed on the need to be more stringent about ammonium nitrate. Ammonium nitrate is used commonly and innocently in industries such as farming and mining but, in the wrong hands, can be an ingredient in murderous explosives. Queensland has led all the way on regulating ammonium nitrate. After a COAG meeting in December 2002 we became the ‘template’ state, developing a proposed system for regulating ammonium nitrate which was watched by the rest of the nation. COAG considered the results of the Queensland review on 25 June 2004, and all Australian governments agreed on a national licensing regime to regulate the use, manufacture, storage, transport, supply, import and export of ammonium nitrate to ensure that it is available only to legitimate users.

All leaders agreed to endeavour to have in place the legislative arrangements for their licensing regimes by 1 November 2004. Queensland was the only jurisdiction to meet this deadline. We also agreed to a transition period to 30 June 2005 to allow governments to prepare relevant legislation and for users and industry stakeholders to become compliant. When the clock ticked past midnight on 30 June, Queensland was, once again, the only state that met this deadline. The federal Attorney-General, Philip Ruddock, said on ABC Radio’s *AM* program—

It is disappointing that we have, in relation to the licensing regime, only Queensland in place on the agreed date for commencement, the 1st of July.

Mr SEENEY: Mr Speaker—

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Callide.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, the three minutes did not go up. The time did not run.

Mr SeeneY: Life is tough.

Mr SPEAKER: Please take a seat, member for Callide.

Mr BEATTIE: He knows it, too. Why do you think he has a big grin, Mr Speaker? The time did not run, Mr Speaker. It is two minutes.

Mr SeeneY: I’m a fair-minded bloke; I’ll listen to you.

Mr BEATTIE: We will agree to the word ‘big’ and that is where we will stop. Phillip Ruddock went on to state—

And I hope that the others will recognise that it is important in the broader national interest that these matters be resolved as quickly as possible.

To be fair, other jurisdictions are moving on this, but we remain streets ahead of the other states and so we should. The Queensland government takes its responsibilities to improve the safety and security of Queenslanders very seriously. Queensland is the largest user of ammonium nitrate products, with about 500,000 tonnes consumed each year by the mining industry and farmers.

The new arrangement means that security sensitive ammonium nitrate is a declared explosive and is regulated under the Explosives Act 1989. About 1,800 explosives licence holders can use security sensitive ammonium nitrate. The explosives inspectorate of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines is receiving up to 100 licence applications per month. This is expected to rise over the next three to six months.

The inspectorate has been working closely with all stakeholders in the ammonium nitrate supply chain to ensure that the compliance processes are as smooth as possible. Applicants need security checks, which is a necessary and responsible measure in the current security climate. Our regime is fair to farmers and the mining industry, and it puts the safety and security of Queenslanders on a higher plane.

Members will be aware that the Prime Minister has called a summit—a COAG meeting of premiers, chief ministers and himself—to discuss the terrorism threat and terrorism issues. He has called it for a date on which this parliament is sitting. We are still negotiating the date, but it may well be

that we will postpone the sitting of that parliament to later in the week. The proposed date is a Tuesday. We may need to have parliament sit Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of that week. If that happens, I would ask for the indulgence of members because it is important that I am both here in the parliament and representing the interests of Queenslanders at COAG.

Office of the Speaker

Mr SEENEY: My question without notice is also directed to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier tabled new guidelines for the Speaker's entitlements. These new guidelines quite specifically state that official functions of the Speaker do not include a meeting of the Speaker's political party or the subgroup of that party. The AWU factional function, drawn to the parliament's attention yesterday, was illegal then and is illegal now. Will the Labor Party be reimbursing the cost of this function or have the Premier's new parliamentary standards collapsed overnight?

Mr BEATTIE: I got an early drop on this question. I was asked the same question this morning by Cathy Border—fancy that! Let me answer the question because—

Government members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I am happy to answer it twice. In fact, I am happy to answer it three times.

A government member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Hang on! I expect the guidelines which I tabled yesterday to be enforced, because they do in my view provide for better financial management of the Office of the Speaker. There are two aspects to entertainment. The first one provides for official functions where an appropriate list is kept of those people who attend. What the member referred to is that section. So are we really clear? That is the first point.

The second point is that there is a section in there which provides for an allowance for the Speaker. I think it is \$2,250. A similar allowance is paid to the whips. I think that includes the opposition whips as well, so it is bipartisan. The actual expenditure of that money is entirely a matter for the discretion of the person concerned.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Well, that is the way the allowance is paid. They have to account to the tax commissioner for that. If, for example, the National Party whip had the President of the National Party and a couple of his National Party heavyweights or factional heavyweights in and the allowance was used for that, then that is a matter for that individual and the tax commissioner. Is that clear to those opposite? That is how it works.

HMAS *Brisbane*

Ms MOLLOY: Mr Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate you on your new position. My question is directed to the Premier. The Sunday before last the sinking of the ex-HMAS *Brisbane* was a significant day for the Sunshine Coast and Queensland. Can the Premier detail to the House how extensive the coverage of that great event has been and what is happening on the site now?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the member for Noosa. I want to acknowledge her support in particular. I also want to acknowledge the support of Chris Cummins, the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs for the ex-HMAS *Brisbane* becoming an international dive site. I know that the member for Noosa enjoyed the day as much as Chris and I did. In a bipartisan way, we invited the member for Maroochydore and the member for Caloundra. So we had one really happy bipartisan day.

I am pleased to advise the House that the ex-HMAS *Brisbane* was successfully and spectacularly scuttled on Sunday, 31 July. Our newest tourism destination allows us to break into the valuable international wreck dive market and broaden the scope of our tourism offering. The ship is a significant nature and adventure based tourism asset for the state, as the minister for tourism tells me. She tells me that she is going to dive on the site shortly. We have something special to offer that no-one in Australia can. The *Brisbane* offers a unique diving experience by providing diver access to both the engine room and the boiler room. Even better, the *Brisbane* has the weather friendly Sunshine Coast, and what a stellar combination that is. If the tourism minister does not dive, the small business minister will have to!

Mr Cummins: I'm in training.

Mr BEATTIE: There is a lot of diving going on.

Mr Lucas: A lot of people are going to take a dive in Chatsworth.

Mr BEATTIE: I will not take that interjection, Mr Speaker. The scuttling surpassed our wildest expectations in terms of the spectacle, excitement and sheer public interest and put Queensland in the international spotlight. We achieved our major promotional objectives to achieve significant local, state, national and international media coverage from the United States to the United Kingdom and just about

everywhere in between; to put Queensland firmly on the international dive tourism map; to enhance Queensland's and the Sunshine Coast's profile as a destination; and to boost Queensland's already robust tourism offering.

The media attention that scuttling generated means that probably millions of people around the world heard about the *Brisbane*, the Sunshine Coast and Queensland. That is a great outcome in anyone's language but that is not our only objective. Estimates indicate that the ex-HMAS *Brisbane* artificial reef and dive site will pump an extra \$22 million into the local economy, bringing extra tourism dollars into the Sunshine Coast's restaurants, resorts and attractions. Similar wrecks interstate have generated up to 10,000 dives a year.

While it was sad to see the ship sink, its enduring legacy to the people will be as a dive site and artificial reef, creating a whole new reef habitat and marine ecosystem. As an artificial reef, the ex-HMAS *Brisbane* will also provide valuable scientific research opportunities, building knowledge about the formation of reefs. We are now exploring long-term research ventures about reef ecosystems and colonisation with universities and museums to add to our Smart State research credentials. It is vital to protect the ex-HMAS *Brisbane* site, and accordingly a conservation park has been declared over the site. I table the details for the information of the House.

Bogus Doctors, Ministerial Briefings

Mr COPELAND: My question is also directed to the Premier. Given that the former health minister had full briefing notes prepared in 2002 regarding bogus psychiatrists Vincent Berg at Townsville Hospital and Vitomir Zepinic at Toowoomba Hospital, when was the Premier or any other cabinet minister first advised of the situation regarding either of these bogus psychiatrists?

Mr BEATTIE: So this is Vincent Berg and the one in Toowoomba?

Mr Copeland: Either or when you were advised?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. I was looking forward to an opportunity to share with the House—and I thank him for the courtesy—the fact that I have today written to Senator Vanstone. This concerns one of the psychiatrists; this is the Russian one. My letter states—

I am writing to seek your advice on the processes used by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) to assess visa and citizenship applications.

As you may be aware, on 9 August 2005, *The Australian* published an article titled 'Bogus doctor a child abuser' about Mr Vincent Berg, who was employed as a psychiatrist at the Townsville Hospital. The article alleges that, in 1987, Mr Berg was convicted for indecent dealing with children in Russia, and served nine months of a three year sentence in Russia before immigrating to Australia in 1992 as a refugee.

The article raises a number of questions about how DIMIA assesses persons seeking residency, citizenship and subsequent employment in Australia and, in particular, how it assessed Mr Berg's application.

It is my understanding that section 501 of the *Migration Act 1958* includes a character test to ensure that visa applicants and visa holders are of good character. I am advised that a person could fail the character test for a number of reasons, including having a criminal record similar to Mr Berg's, or if there is a significant risk that the person may harass, molest or intimidate another person in Australia.

If the article is accurate, surely DIMIA's checking process should have identified Mr Berg's previous conviction and deemed him ineligible for entry to Australia.

I also note that *The Australian* claims that Mr Berg subsequently applied for, and was granted, Australian citizenship. This presumably should have triggered a second assessment process.

I discussed these issues in Queensland Parliament on 9 August 2005.

That is yesterday—

I would appreciate your advice on the circumstances—

Mr COPELAND: I rise to a point of order, Mr Speaker. My question was: when was the minister advised of either of these bogus psychiatrists in Townsville and Toowoomba? The Premier still has not answered when he or other cabinet members were advised of this.

Mr SPEAKER: Could I reiterate what I said yesterday? A member is entitled to ask a question; the minister is entitled to answer the question. Premier.

Mr BEATTIE: As I was saying, I wrote to Amanda Vanstone and I concluded by saying—

I would appreciate your advice on the circumstances of Mr Berg's applications, the relevant assessment processes used by DIMIA, and any implications for the ongoing validity of Mr Berg's citizenship.

In order words, if it is true, his citizenship should be cancelled. Let us not have any more of this political nonsense.

Mr Copeland interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Cunningham, I warn you.

Mr BEATTIE: You know as well as I do that the Department of Immigration would have had to have approved Mr Berg's Australian citizenship. He became an Australian citizen. How did he get there? Do we approve Australian citizenship? No, we do not. Let me make it clear that we will get to the bottom of it. The member opposite should stop playing politics and help us find out why the Australian government approved Mr Berg's Australian citizenship.

Prince Charles Hospital

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. The minister would be aware that the Prince Charles Hospital at Chermiside is one of Queensland's busiest hospitals, particularly in providing cardiothoracic, extended care, mental health, orthopaedic and community health services. Can the minister inform the House about the government's plans to expand the hospital to meet the growing public demand for general medical services for the 400,000 residents on Brisbane's north side?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the honourable member for the question, and I acknowledge his longstanding commitment to that hospital. I note the honourable member has announced that he intends to retire at the next election. One of his great achievements has been the work that he has performed for Prince Charles Hospital over the last number of years, and it is quite appropriate to acknowledge that.

I am delighted to say that the construction work has begun on the \$84.5 million redevelopment of the Prince Charles Hospital. After question time, the Premier and I will be visiting the hospital for a sod turning ceremony to mark the start of this important project. Stage 1 of the project involves construction of a modern, state-of-the-art building that will include an expanded emergency department, two new medical wards, a new surgical ward and a new critical care unit. The hospital's current emergency department, which primarily treats people suffering from heart and lung conditions, will be expanded to become a general emergency department. This improved emergency department will be fully equipped to treat a full range of medical conditions. Stage 1 of the project is scheduled for completion by December 2006. It is anticipated that the expanded emergency department will treat about 51,000 people each year by 2011, making it the second busiest emergency department in Queensland.

Stage 2 of the redevelopment will include refurbishment works and alterations of some areas of the existing hospital to cater for growth in demand. This includes the expansion and refurbishment of existing general medical and surgical services to support a general emergency department. These expansions will mean 120 extra beds, eight renal dialysis chairs, a 10-place ambulatory care unit and two new operating theatres. Stage 2 refurbishment works are expected to be completed by late 2007. Naturally, additional nursing and medical staff will be required to operate these new and expanded hospital services at Prince Charles Hospital. Planning is currently under way by Queensland Health to determine additional staffing requirements. Recruitment of key medical appointments including the director of emergency medicine, director of general surgery and director of medicine has already commenced.

This \$84.5 million redevelopment project will significantly improve services at the Prince Charles and cater for the growing demand for hospital services, particularly on Brisbane's north side. It means that people will have access to a fuller range of general and speciality health care services in the one central location. This project is part of the Beattie government's commitment to meet the challenges presented by Queensland's growing population and growing demand for health services, and it reflects our approach to building healthier hospitals that provide responsive, high-quality acute and emergency care to Queenslanders.

Bogus Doctors, Ministerial Briefings

Mr QUINN: My question is directed to the Premier. I refer the Premier to the documents he has provided to the Morris royal commission on 3 August this year, which show that his former health minister, Wendy Edmond, received a personal briefing from the Queensland Medical Board on 4 December 2002 about two bogus doctors working in the Queensland Health system, and I ask: after having requested an urgent briefing from the Health Department the same day she received this personal briefing, why did the Premier's minister not do anything further in any way during the next 14 months to protect patients and stop bogus doctors working in the Queensland hospitals, or are there other relevant documents that the Premier has not yet released to Commissioner Morris that show what his government knew?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the Leader of the Liberal Party for his question. I have made it clear to Queensland Health and to my department that any relevant material pertaining to the Morris royal commission will be provided to it. I have provided the material that the member referred to. There were also two memos in that material that did indicate what the then minister did in following those issues up with her department and, if I remember correctly, the Medical Board—one memo was to the Medical Board and one was to her director-general.

I have made it clear that any material that needs to be provided should be provided to the Morris royal commission. There has been some subsequent material also provided by me to the Morris royal commission subsequent to the material that the member opposite released. It is fairly pedestrian in my view. I do not think there is anything particularly exciting in it. By way of completeness and in the interests of ensuring that that royal commission has all the material, that material has been provided. If there is a boredom factor in the material provided, I am sorry, but I made it clear that the inquiry will have all the material it needs. The reason for that is very simple: I want to ensure that the recommendations that come out of the Morris royal commission and the Peter Forster review go to the heart of improving the health system in those areas where it needs to be improved, and there clearly are areas where it needs to be improved.

The member said that the former minister did nothing. The former minister gave appropriate instructions for action to be taken and for matters to be followed through. Whether that is enough is now a matter for Tony Morris. He can make whatever determination he likes on the material that is provided. It is not as if—and I say this with great respect to the Leader of the Liberal Party—this material has been thrown into the bottom of the Brisbane River. It has actually gone to an independent royal commissioner who can make findings in relation to the material, and he can then find whatever he likes in relation to what was the appropriate behaviour of either the minister or the department at that time. It is not as if this information has gone nowhere. These inquiries were not set up by the man in the moon. We set them up as a government to advance those areas of health that need improving. We are not going to cover anything up. I made it clear to Health that it was to provide all material, and it has done so. Tony Morris understands that he will get full cooperation from my government. There is now a new director-general in that department, who I appointed, and I believe she is worthy of support by both sides of this House because she will ensure that there is full compliance with my instructions, the instructions of the health minister and the previous health minister that everything needed to be provided to that inquiry.

The members opposite are never satisfied. The fact is that we set up a royal commission. We are getting to the bottom of this. All material has been provided. Let us wait until we see their findings. It is now 10 August. We have between now and 30 September for those inquiries to continue the work that they have been set up to do in accordance with the terms of reference. They will then report and we will then implement the recommendations once they have been considered by cabinet.

Industrial Relations Reforms

Mr POOLE: My question is to the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. Does the minister have any insight into the mixed messages coming from Canberra regarding the proposed industrial relations changes?

Mr BARTON: I thank the member for the question. It is amazing how unclear the message coming out of Canberra is at this time. The public outcry about the federal government's proposed draconian changes is certainly starting to hit home and cause all sorts of confusion in their own ranks. Some real cracks are starting to appear in terms of this issue between those in the national coalition.

The events in Canberra yesterday showed some real division. We had the Deputy Prime Minister, Mark Vaile, pledging that workers would be guaranteed at least seven minimum standards in AWAs when the legislation comes out in October. Members will recall that the proposals up to now say that there will be only five. Mark Vaile from the National Party says seven. What happens when the Prime Minister is asked to back up the statement made by his No. 2, his deputy? He does not back it up. He says, 'No, it will be the way I have always said it will be. We will have to wait. When the legislation is brought down the government will maintain the position that it has always stated.'

Some in the southern media have been so unkind as to say that the Prime Minister has slapped down his deputy. So much for coalition unity on this issue! It will be very interesting to see whether the two parties on the other side of this House have similar views. We have also had the Treasurer, Peter Costello, waiting in the wings saying, 'It is not going to be for workplaces with up to 100 employees. There will be no unfair dismissal provisions for anybody in the work force.' He has had to be slapped down by the Prime Minister for that one. He is still out there sneaking around trying to say that it should be even harsher.

We had another person from this parliament's past emerge on 4RO in Rockhampton at 8.11 am today on the Jeff Goodwin show. It was Santo Santoro. What did Senator Santoro say with regard to the industrial commission's decision yesterday that there should be more paternity leave provisions et cetera? He said, 'No, that should be left to negotiation in the workplace.' It is going to be very interesting to see whether Senator Santoro gets slapped down.

The latest drip-feed that has come out from Kevin Andrews—he could not tell us this at the ministerial council meeting on Friday—is that it is going to be a three-year phase-in period. It will be phased in over three years. If members read the southern press in particular they will find that business is not really interested in having this confusion hanging around for a further three years.

Again the minister has failed to give any assurances that people will not be worse off. He failed to do that with us last week. Now he is saying that he cannot even tell us how long the phase-in will be but that it might be three years. No wonder workers and their families are getting very fearful of what these proposed changes might bring.

Community Hospital Boards

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. Community hospital boards have served this state brilliantly in the past. The community volunteer positions on the boards have served communities very well and have stopped any perceived bias and conflict of interest. Will the minister go back to the future and rid the government of a multilayered self-servicing bureaucracy by reintroducing community hospital boards which will save millions of dollars which can be pumped back into the health system coalface?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. As the honourable member would be aware, there are a number of inquiries under way. The first is the Morris inquiry into the events surrounding Bundaberg Hospital. The second is the review of the Queensland health system by Peter Forster and his team. We have received the interim report from Mr Forster. We expect to receive his recommendations by the end of September.

Both the Premier and I have been cautious in our comments with respect to the future structure of Queensland Health. The reason we have been cautious is that we want to ensure that Mr Forster and his team can go about their work unimpeded. It is also important for us to not pre-empt what Mr Forster may in fact recommend. I point out to the member for Maryborough that I think it is more appropriate on this occasion that we wait for the recommendations of the Forster review before we take a look at the suggestion that he has made.

Industrial Relations Reforms

Mr LEE: My question is to the minister for communities. Could the minister please advise the House of the impact he thinks the Howard government's new industrial relations laws may have on penalty rates for young people?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question. The member for Indooroopilly is well respected on both sides of the House, I am sure, for the interest he takes in the welfare of young Queenslanders. In the past few months the ACTU has rung the alarm bells concerning the impact the Howard government's proposed industrial relations changes will have on all Australians. Community concern is high, and rightfully so.

As the minister who is responsible for youth in this state, I am particularly concerned about the impact these changes will have on young Queenslanders. Many young people are often among the lowest paid and they work shifts that involve late nights, early mornings, weekends and public holidays. Under the Howard government's proposed changes penalties rates, which form an important part of their pay, will be at risk.

The ACTU has stressed that the entitlement of Australian workers to penalty rates is guaranteed by awards. Workers on awards must be paid penalty rates. However, these changes will impact strongly on young people because they are predominantly employed in the retail and hospitality industries, where workers rely on these penalty rates to earn a decent wage.

Often young people starting out in the work force do not understand the industrial relations system. At times they are very vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace because they lack the experience and the confidence to negotiate better pay deals. Young people may not know their rights. Under the Howard government's proposed IR reforms they will be particularly disadvantaged. Young workers may, in fact, be required to sign unfair individual workplace agreements that reduce their take-home pay. A good example was a case before the Industrial Relations Court of South Australia on 5 August this year. In that case the court found that a 15-year-old had been coerced into entering into an AWA that reduced her wages by 25 per cent. The judge also commented on the respective bargaining power of the parties concerned.

In Queensland, however, young workers will continue to be protected because minors are not able to enter into QWAs under the Queensland Industrial Relations Act. Workers in the federal system will see their penalties, overtime and allowances stripped away because these are not provided for in Howard's fair pay and conditions standards.

The impact of the new changes will also be felt in the rural and regional areas of Queensland, particularly in the bush. It will accelerate an already alarming influx of people to the city. The proposed federal IR laws are an ideologically motivated crock and deserve the condemnation of the Australian people. I urge the Howard government to think about the impact of these changes on young people because they are our future.

Adult Entertainment; Prostitution

Mr HORAN: My question is to the honourable the Premier. I refer to the growing community outrage at the recommendations of the CMC regarding adult entertainment and outservices by prostitutes. Will the Premier give Queenslanders an assurance that his government will not act on the recommendations—specifically recommendations Nos 7, 12, 15, 18 and 26—of the regulating adult entertainment review because they will degrade women and lower community standards?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for the question, because this is a very weighty issue that we are considering at the moment. I will give the member a very direct answer. We have not made up our minds about the particular matters that the member has referred to or those recommendations. We are considering them at the moment. The minister for police and I have had some discussions. I will be completing those discussions with the Attorney-General before it goes to cabinet.

These are very difficult social issues. As the member knows, we agonised about the decriminalisation of prostitution which my government brought in. When we brought in those measures we did it in a very restricted way. There are very tight provisions involved. One of the areas that the member eludes to relates to escorts. We have been very reluctant to agree to escorts. A lot of states have them.

The former head of the Prostitution Licensing Authority, Bill Carter—he is a former Supreme Court judge and hardly a mad left-winger; he is quite a sensible man; he lives near me and I get on him quite well with him—recommended to us that we consider under very strict supervision limited escorts associated with the existing tightly restricted brothels. I have signalled publicly that I have been quite conservative about decriminalising prostitution any further.

Bill Carter, however, and other people, including the CMC if I recall correctly, indicated to me and therefore have indicated to the government that unless we provide some form of outlet for limited escorts from brothels it could lead to other issues. For example, the brothels will not be able to financially survive. If that happens, then that will encourage illegal prostitution. Members know that I have been tough on illegal prostitution—and I want to thank the Police Service for doing this—and that I do not support street prostitution, bearing in mind that some of it in fact existed in Brunswick Street in New Farm. I take a very strict view about that, and indeed the police have clamped down on that very seriously.

Let me summarise my answer by saying this: to date we have made no decision. Secondly, we will not be opening the floodgates. Any changes we make will be restricted, and they will be sensible. Thirdly, the only proposal that I think is worthy of detailed consideration is the proposal from Bill Carter—that is, whether we allow limited and restricted escorts from the existing brothels. I want to make it clear to the member that I have not made up my mind on that, but there are people who argue, like Bill Carter, that it should be an addition to the existing arrangements. My concern is whether we can get the appropriate safeguards in place. The answer is this—

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I will give the member an honest answer. There is no need to be half-smart about it. He asked a serious question and I will give him an answer. The test will be this: if we can ensure that the appropriate checks and balances are in place to protect public safety and health and to ensure that there is no criminality involved, then we will seriously consider that in a very restricted form. If we cannot, we will not.

Townsville-Thuringowa Region, Development

Mr WALLACE: Mr Speaker, I firstly offer the congratulations of the north on your election as Speaker. My question is to another north Queenslander, the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women. Minister, Thuringowa and Townsville are developing very rapidly. Can the minister tell the parliament what the state government is doing to ensure our region develops appropriately?

Ms BOYLE: Mr Speaker, some might even say that the north Queensland members are taking over the parliament between yourself in such a high position and the honourable member for Thuringowa.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Ms BOYLE: I am being warned by other ministers, Mr Speaker. As we all know, Queensland is in a period of rapid growth and it is essential that we manage this growth wisely and plan for a sustainable future. South-east Queensland is not the state's only hot spot in terms of growth. Particularly up and down the coast, population growth is placing pressure on our cities and local governments. One particularly dynamic part of Queensland that is growing is the Townsville-Thuringowa region, the fastest growing urban area outside south-east Queensland.

In fact, last year over 3,000 people moved to the region. The region certainly is thriving. There is no doubt about that. It is important, therefore, that this region and other growing regions stay ahead of the planning game and that the state government assists them. That is why I have had my planning department prepare a Townsville-Thuringowa land supply and demand report. There has been conflict between the Mayor of Thuringowa and the Mayor of Townsville about the proper direction of further residential growth in the area. There has been argument, including from members of the business community, about the timing, the placement and the roll-out of further land supply in the Townsville and Thuringowa areas.

I am concerned that on occasion this has appeared to be a competition between the councils when in fact it should be a planning decision that is made on the basis of the broader needs of the urban area regardless of artificial council boundaries. This report therefore quantifies the amount of available urban land in Townsville and Thuringowa cities. It also considers the land supply in relation to the expected future demand for residential land in the region. The Townsville council particularly through Mayor Mooney has been supporting bringing forward a development proposal known as Rocky Springs. Townsville's stock consumption, the report discloses, is very high and probably not sustainable for more than seven to 10 years. In the meantime, however, the land supply in Thuringowa is sufficient for up to some 30 to 42 years.

This report therefore will underline further discussions with other state agencies like Transport and Main Roads about infrastructure impacts of new development potentially in the Rocky Springs area. In the meantime, I have released the report for other stakeholders, particularly business and development organisations, in the Townsville-Thuringowa region to consider and to report to government prior to my department conducting next year's Townsville-Thuringowa strategy plan review.

Redcliffe By-Election, Labor Candidate

Dr FLEGG: My question is to the Minister for Health. The government has allowed the Redcliffe Hospital to run down over the past few years and left local patients without adequate medical services, including critical bed shortages with occupancy over 100 per cent, potentially life-endangering shortages in paediatrics and maternity and an overflowing accident and emergency department. I ask the minister: why should residents in the Redcliffe by-election vote for the Labor candidate, who in recent years as chair of the Redcliffe district health council has failed to stand up for local Redcliffe patients and when she now has deliberately tried to hide her longstanding involvement with the Redcliffe Hospital by airbrushing any reference to it from her web site and election material?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. I can confirm that Lillian van Litsenburg, the Labor candidate for Redcliffe, was a member of the district health council from 1998 to 2004. She was in fact chair of that council from December 2000 to December 2004. One of the things that really impressed me when I was at Redcliffe Hospital with the Premier yesterday was the recognition of Lillian and the work she had done during her time as a member and chair of that health council. Whatever floor we went to, the staff stopped her and said, 'Hello, Lillian.' The other thing that impressed me about Lillian yesterday was that in the time we spent there she used that time, as any good candidate should, to lobby the Premier and I for improved health services in the electorate of Redcliffe.

In fact, the thing that impressed me most about the candidate for Redcliffe yesterday was that in parting one of the things she said to me was, 'Minister, if I have the privilege of being elected as the member for Redcliffe, then I really want to talk to you in depth about some issues in Redcliffe. I want to have a meeting with you as soon as I can should I have the privilege of being the member for Redcliffe after the by-election.' Contrast that approach with the comments by the Leader of the Opposition today, and I was flabbergasted. This is the party that wants to get in bed with you guys, and there he was in the media today knocking the investment that we announced yesterday to improve services to the people of Redcliffe. He was saying that it was somehow inappropriate.

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: What we have said all along with the release of the Forster review—the interim report—and what it highlighted was that, as the member said, Redcliffe was basically the hardest working hospital in the state. Could members imagine for one moment that, having had that information tabled by Mr Forster, as a government we sat back and did nothing, that we sat back and said—

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Moggill, I warn you.

Mr ROBERTSON: We did not sit back and say, 'We think it's fine for a hospital to work at 105 per cent capacity.' What we did instead was come up with practical solutions to address that—practical and immediate solutions that the Leader of the Opposition attacked and denigrated, just as he denigrated in the House today overseas trained doctors. I could see you squirming, member for Moggill, when the

Leader of the Opposition talked about overseas trained doctors as being witchdoctors. Let the parliamentary record show exactly what the Leader of the Opposition thinks of overseas trained doctors, and no wonder, member for Moggill, you squirmed in your seat, because you also know that the other thing that people in Redcliffe said to me yesterday was how pleased they are to have so many overseas trained doctors at Redcliffe Hospital.

Time expired.

Mining Industry

Mr PEARCE: My question is to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. The people of Queensland have in recent months heard about the mineral commodities boom and the rapid increase in both mining activity and exploration across this state. Can the minister give us some examples of how Queensland is maintaining its reputation as a leader in the development and use of cutting-edge technology in the mining industry?

Mr PALASZCZUK: I thank the honourable member for the question. I also commend him on his very strong commitment to the mining industry and especially his strong commitment to mine safety. His reputation in that regard is known all over the state. I would like to congratulate the member on that.

Yes, today is Science in Parliament and, yes, today I am inviting all honourable members and representatives of the media to join me at 12.30 pm on the Speaker's Green for a first-hand look at an exciting innovation in the world of robotics. The \$250,000 Talon robot was recently bought by the Queensland government's Safety in Mines Testing and Research Station. The robot does some extraordinary things and is able to venture into unsafe areas of underground mines after a disaster. It can be remotely operated from up to six kilometres away and will be of great assistance in rescue operations.

The robot was originally developed in the United States for military use and is the only one of its kind in Australia. Of course, it is an invention that we hope we never have to use, but it is reassuring to know that we have state-of-the-art technology on hand if we need it. This incredible machine is able to cover difficult terrain, go underwater, be radio operated or even be controlled using a fibre optic link. When controlled by the fibre optic link, it has a range of up to six kilometres allowing it to go further into underground mines to send vital information back to mines rescue personnel on the surface. In an emergency SIMTARS will work in conjunction with the Queensland Mines Rescue Service to assist in the rescue of personnel and in the recovery of the mine.

Although it is a state-of-the-art device, there is further potential of this robot. Over the next six months we plan to modify the robot to extend the range of its capabilities and make it more suitable for Queensland's underground coalmine environment. One of these modifications will fit the robot with gas detection equipment. SIMTARS has already developed a range of mine gas monitoring and interpretation hardware and software. These systems evaluate the atmosphere in underground coalmines for oxygen concentration and detect the presence of toxic gases like carbon monoxide and flammable gases like methane. This can help in the early detection of fires and in the prevention of mine explosions.

It has been 20 years since we stopped sending canaries underground to detect harmful gases. It is hard to imagine how far technology has brought us since then. SIMTARS' systems are already used extensively throughout Queensland and have been exported to China, India, New Zealand and the United States. I would once again thank the honourable member for Fitzroy for his question and once again compliment him on his strong involvement in the mine industry and his strong involvement in mine safety.

Tin Can Bay Police Station

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: I direct a question to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. Can she advise on the hold-ups currently preventing police from taking up occupancy at the new Tin Can Bay Police Station?

Ms SPENCE: The Queensland Police Service has a recruiting process whereby expressions of interest are put out for positions around the state as they become available. Officers are then entitled to apply for those positions. Obviously, that means that it is a challenge sometimes for certain police stations to attract officers. Recently we had some difficulty getting officers posted to Caboolture. Obviously, like all of us police officers find some locations in the state more attractive than others. One would expect that Tin Can Bay, though, would be a very attractive location that officers would want to flock to. But sometimes this is not the case. That expression of interest has gone out and I am told that those positions will be filled very shortly.

Citrus Canker

Mr BRISKEY: I direct a question to the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. Can the minister advise as to what assistance the state government is providing to citrus growers in Emerald?

Mr NUTTALL: On becoming the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries just two weeks ago I compiled a list of immediate priorities. At the top of that list was assistance for growers in Emerald affected by citrus canker. This government was and remains absolutely committed, with or without the support of the other states, to easing the pain of growers who through no fault of their own had their livelihoods destroyed.

Today I can announce, in cooperation with the federal government and Growcom, an \$11.5 million package for the reimbursement and re-establishment of the affected properties. Unfortunately, despite our very best efforts the Queensland and federal governments and industry have been forced to go it alone. Despite the citrus canker outbreak threat to all states, Queensland is the only state that is prepared to put its hand in its pocket. Despite decisions being made nationally as part of the National Citrus Canker Eradication Program, a nationally cost-shared approach to grower reimbursement and establishment has been rejected by every other state except Queensland.

So instead of contributing just \$750,000 as originally proposed as part of a national package, Queensland has entered into a trilateral arrangement with the Commonwealth government and industry based on a 40-40-20 contribution. This government's contribution will be \$4.6 million. The total package will ensure reimbursement and establishment for 150,000 non-infested trees that are to be destroyed after 3 June this year. It was on that date that the citrus canker National Management Group directed Queensland, as the designated combat state for canker, to destroy all remaining commercial and domestic trees in the Emerald pest quarantine area by 30 August 2005. We will now extend that. This trilateral approach is consistent with the spirit of the proposed emergency plant pest response deed, which the Queensland government has also now agreed to sign. Under the deed, owner reimbursement costs would be shared by the Commonwealth, other jurisdictions and the industry.

Queensland's position is clear. I have met with the federal agriculture minister, Peter McGuaran. I have met twice with the affected growers in Emerald and I have seen their plight. They are families who are determined to replant and rebuild. As a government we are just as determined to enable them to do that through a package which, for reimbursement, allocates \$80 per tree that has not been destroyed as at 3 June at a cost of \$9.2 million and for re-establishment provides \$20 per tree planted to replace those at a cost of \$2.3 million. Separate to this it is expected that through the collaborative efforts of the Queensland citrus industry, one other grower who has already seen all of his trees destroyed will be afforded some direct financial assistance.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Warrego I would like to acknowledge in the gallery the students, teachers and parents from the Middle Park State School in the electorate of Mount Ommaney.

Country Hospitals

Mr HOBBS: I direct a question to the Minister for Health. Former health ministers Edmonds and Nuttall were both determined to retract rural services and close country hospitals. This was outlined in the *Smart State: Health 2020 Directions Statement*. As the strategy has been described by rural doctors as a high-risk plan, will the minister restore confidence to rural communities and rural doctors with a personal guarantee that he will not close country hospitals, in particular, one-doctor hospitals, or will not reshape those country hospitals?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am not too sure what the member is referring to when he is asking me to give a guarantee not to reshape rural hospitals. I would have thought that, given the inquiries that are under way both by Mr Morris and by Mr Forster, what would come out of those inquiries would be a road map forward in terms of shaping Queensland Health's system for the 21st century. That is what we are committed to. The Premier has responded already to the particular issue that the member has raised. We will be waiting to see the recommendations that will come out of the Forster review and the Morris inquiry. They will inform us as to the way forward to provide a 21st century health system for the people of Queensland, which I am personally committed to.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Clayfield, I acknowledge in the gallery the many scientists who are here at Parliament House today participating in Science in Parliament. They are an integral part of the Smart State philosophy of Mr Beattie's government. There is only one minute left in question time, so I think I will close question time.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF QUEENSLAND

Report

Hon. LD LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (Minister for Justice and Attorney-General) (11.29 am): I lay upon the table of the House the Electoral Commission of Queensland's research report No. 1 of 2005 titled *Queensland election 2004: ballot paper survey*.

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation (Parliament) Bill

Estimates Committee A

Report No. 1

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The question is—

That report No. 1 of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (11.29 am): It was my pleasure to chair Estimates Committee A. All participants were very cooperative. This ensured that the process was productive. I wish to thank Leanne Clare and the executive support team for their great work in assisting the committee. I would like to thank the committee members—the deputy chair, the member for Southern Downs and Leader of the Opposition; the member for Mount Coot-tha; the member for Darling Downs; the member for Glass House; the member for Ipswich; and the member Robina—for their cooperation throughout the day and in the meetings prior to and after the hearing day. It was an excellent committee and I pass on their appreciation of the hard work done by Leanne Clare to assist us.

Report No. 1 looks at the Legislative Assembly. Obviously, the Legislative Assembly consists of 89 members who discharge a range of legislative and constituency responsibilities. The estimates committee process really displayed the diverse nature of what we have here at Parliament House. It also displayed the excellent work done by the parliamentary staff—from the Clerk of the Parliament to all of the subsidiary services: the catering staff, the attendants, Hansard, the cleaning staff and a range of other services.

Mr Lawlor: The gardeners.

Mr REEVES: The gardens are superbly kept. It also demonstrates that, as this is such a large operation, we need to work together and have the right staff in place so that the management processes work effectively.

Some of the highlights of the 2005 budget with regard to the Legislative Assembly include improving the style, production processes and integrity of the *Hansard*, *Votes and Proceedings*, the *Notice Paper* and the *Daily Program* as well as investigating opportunities to streamline the process for casting and collating votes for the chamber. As the deputy whip, I think any streamlining in that regard would probably assist both the government and the opposition whips.

Other highlights include looking at replacing the audiovisual television distribution system throughout the parliamentary precinct; replacing computer equipment in members' electorate offices; hosting the regional sitting of parliament in Rockhampton, or should I say Rockvegas—we are all looking forward to that; and implementing a training and development program for electorate office staff. I think this is very important. I know that some pilot studies have already been carried out. It is important that we get the right training for our electorate office staff. They are at the front line. They have to offer social work and a whole range of services. Unfortunately, from time to time they have to handle some really difficult situations.

I see the former Acting Speaker and Deputy Speaker in the chamber. I commend him on his efforts on the day and prior to the committee hearing. He was instrumental in pushing for staff training for the electorate officers. I know that the electorate officer of the member for Bundamba, Steve Axe, was instrumental as a delegate to encourage that training. I congratulate him for the extra effort that he made on behalf of electorate officers.

Mrs Miller: Beyond the call of duty.

Mr REEVES: He does go beyond the call of duty. He is a very good mate of mine. He just has a bad haircut.

I congratulate my electorate officer, Sarah Harvey, who does excellent work for me, and my assistant electorate officers, Jo Briskey and Ravi Chandra, who do great work for me as well as combine their work with their studies. I thank them for the efforts they make for me but particularly for the constituents of the Mansfield electorate.

I would like to thank all those committee members who assisted in the procedures. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the member for Mount Isa for attaining the high office of Speaker yesterday. As deputy whip, I look forward to working with the member for Mount Isa, the new Speaker of parliament, to help the parliament run as smoothly as it has in the past. I commend Report No. 1 of Estimates Committee A to the House.

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.35 am): I wish to acknowledge the role of the chairman of the committee, the member for Mansfield, for the way in which he conducted Estimates Committee A. We found that he was extremely fair. He allowed the committee to flow and did as much as he possibly could to enable the probing nature of estimates committees to go ahead, particularly in relation to this one.

I also thank the committee support staff and the other members of the committee for their cooperation in the role of that committee. I also acknowledge the then Acting Speaker, who I thought did a very good job in being as forthright and as open as he possibly could in answering questions from the committee. Even though it was somewhat difficult for him because he obviously did not have a lot of the in-depth, background knowledge, he did his very best to answer those questions. I again acknowledge the very important and very good role he played in the time that he was Acting Speaker.

I want to confine my remarks today to the section of the report that relates to the Speaker's guidelines, in particular in relation to the former Speaker, Mr Hollis. We have heard a lot from Premier Beattie in the past about how there had been a clearance from the CMC and the DPP. I particularly want to confine my comments here to the issue of overseas travel. A press release from the Crime and Misconduct Commission on 6 May 2005 states—

In relation to Mr Hollis's overseas travel, the Commission has found that his conduct does not raise a suspicion of official misconduct.

We always said that would not be the case because it is a matter of internal guidelines. The other issues were a matter of official misconduct. The media release further states—

For the conduct of a member of parliament to constitute official misconduct, the conduct must be capable of amounting to a criminal offence, not a mere breach of official guidelines.

That is what we always concentrated on here. It was always an issue of leadership of the Premier to actually address this issue. In his press release of 7 July 2005 the Premier stated—

The main problem here was the lack of appropriate and effective guidelines for the financial management of the Speaker's Office which we have now fixed.

What no-one has ever seen with regard to this is the background which came out in the CMC's report into the official guidelines and the review of what the Premier put forward. On page 1, under the heading 'Background', regarding the complaint the second paragraph states—

Subsequent media reports initially included statements that expenditure guidelines for entertainment and travel for the Office of the Speaker did not exist. This reporting was inaccurate.

I would say this was perpetuated by the Premier. It goes on—

Guidelines for the financial management of the Office of the Speaker did exist; however, the degree to which they were used and complied with may be in dispute. While it is timely that the guidelines be reviewed, they are not grossly inadequate. Their current effectiveness is influenced both by their soundness and by the degree of commitment to compliance with them.

It was always an issue of compliance, and that is what the Nationals said. There was no desire by the former Speaker to comply with the guidelines, which were quite clear in what they said insofar as getting approval for overseas travel and reporting back to the parliament.

In recent times we have seen Premier Beattie retrospectively approve \$45,000 of the \$60,000 spent on overseas travel, which is beyond the pale. Only \$17,000 of that expenditure was associated with a report when it was retrospectively approved. Another \$26,000 of it was granted without any form of reporting whatsoever. This morning in this place the Premier slipped around the issue of the outstanding \$13,700 which relates to a trip the former Speaker undertook in 1998-99. Honourable members should keep in mind that these trips have never had approval and have never been reported on in parliament. This morning he said that he thought there was approval or he recollected that there was approval. He cannot just start changing his mind.

I challenge the Premier to come in here and table that today. Even if the former Speaker did receive approval, which has been the revelation in parliament today—to the best of the Premier's knowledge—there is still no report. So this parliament, along with the Premier, has been responsible for retrospectively approving some \$44,000 worth of overseas travel not properly taken by the former Speaker and without there being any report to this parliament. If this sort of retrospective approval is given, then this parliament deserves to see the letters of validation and deserves to see the report. The matter is not over. As the CMC said, it is a matter for this parliament as to how it enforces its own guidelines.

Time expired.

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (11.39 am): I rise to support the report before the chamber. I thank the former Speaker for his work in shaping the budget and welcome the incoming Speaker. I am sure that his work with the parliament will carry on the good work that has occurred in the past. It is a shame that the Leader of the Opposition has gone on about the same hobbyhorse. Perhaps the reason he still has single digit figures or has about 11 per cent of support from the people of Queensland for him and his leadership is that he is on about these sorts of issues that he has just spoken about.

One aspect of the hospitality of the Speaker has been bandied about in the press. From where my office is here, I often see guests pass by with attendants and other people. On a number of occasions people from the Consular Corps, other parliaments, senior business and community leaders from all countries and interstate come through here. The Speaker, on behalf of all people of Queensland, acts as host. There are hospitality expenses and they should be recognised. Businesses do this all the time and we support them in doing it. It is interesting that the television and radio stations feel free to give away food, drink and other gifts and see this as community spirit. Yet when a Speaker of the parliament does it on behalf of the people of Queensland, somehow this is not supposed to occur. The double standard is quite remarkable. It is another example, unfortunately, of cutting down the tall poppy. It is something that is part of the cultural cringe that some people in the media are still involved with.

I have heard some comments about the former Speaker's health. Without divulging confidences, I can say that, in speaking to the former Speaker and his wife in recent days, his health has dramatically improved. I do not know his blood pressure readings, but he told me that the doctor's report currently shows a significant improvement. However, he still has a way to go, and I wish him well in his recovery.

Some of the other challenges facing our incoming Speaker will be in the field of IT. For example, a simple thing about this chamber that many people do not know is that the computers supplied by the Ministerial Services Branch and the computers supplied by the Parliamentary Service require different cabling. So to change seating arrangements in this chamber is quite difficult because we have to run different cabling for the different positions. Surely technology is at a stage where the manufacturers can use the same cabling. Imagine if every time we got a new TV we had to change the cabling within our own home! We just would not accept that, but these are some of the cost challenges that the Parliamentary Service and Mr Speaker face in the field of IT.

In the electorate offices we need to have continual upgrades of the computers and technologies, just as every small business does. The in-house television monitoring system here at Parliament House is really in the Dark Ages, but the cost of implementing a new system would be expensive. Also, there is such a rapidly changing field of options for in-house television and the decision has to be made for the next generation of the parliament. It would need to be remote controlled and it would need to be linked with broadband in some way. They are some very difficult decisions that the incoming Speaker will have to deal with—difficult in terms of the decision making and the costing.

I also hope that part of the technological change would be the introduction of an electronic voting system within the chamber. I had the chance recently to look at the Singapore parliament's situation. It is extremely simple and well accepted. The technology is simple, but it is a matter of cost and the will to do it.

Something occurred a few years ago when it was realised that the electorate offices needed an upgrade of equipment, and I suggest that this also should be considered by the incoming Speaker. Every small business every so often looks at the equipment they have and upgrade. I would suggest that once a term there should be an amount of money available that can be spent only on equipment in the electorate offices. A whole range of normal office equipment and produce that is not part of the normal monthly ordering through stores is needed, and I would suggest that once a term an amount of money be made available for that specific use. We act as a small business. Our customers, that is our constituents, deserve the top-line service that they demand of any group, such as ourselves, and part of that is to have basic equipment in our offices.

These are financial challenges that the new Speaker will face, and this parliament will have to give Mr Speaker the backing so that he can get that money from Treasury. I support the report before the House.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.44 am): I rise to make a contribution to the consideration of the estimates committee report and to make some comments regarding the operation of the parliamentary precinct, particularly the Parliamentary Annexe, and to take issue with some of the comments that were made by the previous speaker. I certainly agree with the previous speaker that the position of the Speaker of the parliament is an important one and that there is a very important role for the Speaker to play in representing all of us here as parliamentarians, representing this parliament as an institution and doing so in a manner that is accountable and appropriate. I think the questions that the opposition has raised about the way that that role was performed by the former Speaker are also very appropriate, especially with regard to the AWU faction function which was the subject of questioning again this morning and which was specifically singled out by the member for Stafford.

There is no doubt that whoever is Speaker of parliament from whatever side of politics he or she comes has an obligation to provide entertainment and will incur considerable cost in doing that on behalf of us all. But that responsibility does not extend to providing functions for that particular person's own political party or subgroups of that political party. That has been recognised in the new guidelines that the Premier has introduced. Unfortunately, the Premier has not pursued that issue to its natural conclusion and sought reimbursement for the obvious illegal function that was presided over by the former Speaker. It is very legitimate for the opposition to question that. There is no justification for that function, and I express the hope that those types of functions will not occur again. Hopefully, that will be achieved by the opposition continuing to focus public attention on the degree to which that position was abused in the past.

There are a number of issues regarding the Parliamentary Annexe and Parliament House itself which I would like to comment on. To that extent, I certainly agree with some of the comments that the member for Stafford made. We have an obligation to the people who will follow us in this place to ensure that this precinct and all of the facilities here are maintained at an appropriate standard, at a standard that is in keeping with the rest of the community. The only way we are going to do that is to continually make money available each year to ensure that technology upgrades are undertaken when they should be before the technology becomes too far out of date, that appropriate maintenance standards are part and parcel of maintaining this whole complex and that the standard of accommodation that is available here to us as members—and to members who will be here in future years—is in keeping with what is a generally accepted standard for someone in this type of position in the community.

In recent years that certainly has not been the case. I have been here almost seven years now and I think the standards around this parliamentary complex are certainly not what they were seven years ago, and we are all the poorer for that no matter what side of politics we sit on. For example, when we look at the television system that the member for Stafford mentioned, we see that the television system in the rooms that are available to us is not something that any one of us would have in our homes. There is no way that any one of us would have in our homes the type of television system that exists in the Parliamentary Annexe. That is simply because we have not insisted that the money be made available to ensure that that system is upgraded.

It is a similar story with electorate offices. The computer systems and the furnishings in some electorate offices are almost an embarrassment in comparison to the types of things that the solicitor's office next door or the accountant's office down the street has. We have a responsibility to keep those things up to a standard, and that is going to take money. It is something that should be supported by every member of this House irrespective of which side of politics we sit on. We should ignore the cheap shots that will come from the lower end of the media scrutiny who like to take cheap shots at the costs of maintaining these things, because we maintain them for the people of Queensland and we maintain them for the representatives that the people of Queensland will elect to this place in the future. I have much pleasure in supporting the committee's report.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! Before calling the honourable member for Glass House, I acknowledge in the gallery teachers, parents and students from the Middle Park State School in the electorate of Mount Ommaney.

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (11.50 am): It is my pleasure to rise in support of the Estimates Committee A report arising from the estimates committees which were held in July. I would like to place on record the great achievements that have occurred with the development of the parliament over the past couple of years and also the vast improvement in the accessibility of the parliament to the people of Queensland.

With a budget of \$56.03 million, the Parliamentary Service is a big responsibility for the Speaker. I was pleased to hear Mr Acting Speaker talk about the projects that will be funded from this budget allocation. Improvements will include the replacement of the audiovisual distribution system, upgrades to major airconditioning infrastructure, streamlining of *Hansard* processes, the replacement of existing computer equipment in members' electorate offices and a further commitment to streamlining the process for casting and collating votes in the chamber. Having a laptop computer that I can take to my electorate office and around my electorate, which is larger than some of the city members, has been a great boon to me. It has meant that I have been able to do my job in a much more effective manner. So I would like to see those technology improvements continue.

I would encourage the new Speaker to evaluate the new training program that has been trialled in eight electorate offices and to consider the best way of extending that training program throughout the many electorate offices across Queensland. I know it is one thing that my staff have often said they would like access to. My staff are very professional, dedicated team members who perform their duties under sometimes difficult circumstances. They often have to deal with upset or angry community members who have problems that they cannot solve. My staff are sympathetic and caring and always do their utmost to assist. It would be helpful, though, to provide some additional training in client contact and communication strategies. It would also be helpful to provide some advanced training in the various computer programs that they have to operate.

These are exciting times indeed for the entire service of the Queensland parliament. As I said earlier, parliament is about the people. It is their House, and it has been encouraging to see the many improvements that have been made to facilitate this—from the school visits, the new education displays, access to live debates through the internet and the regional sitting of parliament in central Queensland which I personally am looking forward to. I understand that a comprehensive community engagement program has been developed by the Queensland parliament to encourage the community, especially primary and secondary students, to come and see the Queensland parliament in action and to increase their knowledge of the history of our parliament and its representatives. I am also looking forward to the youth parliament that we are hopefully going to have on the Friday when we are in Rockhampton. It is an important chance to see the types of issues that concern our young people and to listen to the ideas that they put forward. They have many interesting ideas and many suggestions about how their lives can be improved and how the lives of their families can be improved. I notice that you are on the safe youth parties task force as well, Mr Deputy Speaker. I know that we are going to use that time in Rockhampton to talk to young people in a regional centre about how they go about their everyday life when they are not in school and the types of things we can do to make life safer for them.

Over the past year we have had a number of youth parliaments in this place, and it has been great to see the involvement of young people. I had a youth member for Glass House, Brock Taylor, who had very important things to say about water initiatives and the environment. I look forward to watching him and his colleagues as they grow and progress through the years. I believe that they will become very effective representatives for their community because they are doing a great job as youth members at the moment.

With all of this going on, what was the opposition leader concerned with? It was alcohol. How much, where and when. He was obsessed, and it went on and on. It reminded me of the estimates committee process last year when all he was interested in was the amount of cutlery in the precinct and the stocktaking procedures for it. So what will it be next year—condiments or how much pepper we use?

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Ms MALE: Exactly right; it was the big issues. He did not use the time effectively yet complained later that there was not enough time. It is disgraceful behaviour considering that all members here put aside time to question the expenditure of departments and to look at what has been done in the past and what can be done in the future. As members of parliament we need to take every opportunity to look at what is happening in each of our departments. In this case, it is the department of the Speaker. We need to make sure that we are doing it effectively as members of parliament because this is what we do for the people of our electorates. We are there to hold everyone accountable. I would like that process to not be quite so abused in coming years.

I also take this opportunity to welcome Mr McGrady as the Speaker of parliament and congratulate him on his appointment. As a Deputy Speaker, I look forward to working very closely with him over the next year or so. I commend the estimates committee process to the House.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (11.55 am): First and foremost, I recognise that the Speaker is sitting in the chamber today, and I convey to him my sincere best wishes as he takes on the responsible role as Speaker of the Queensland parliament. Being a next-door neighbour, I understand precisely what it is like to manage an electorate the size of Mount Isa. I think we share similar sized electorates with similar problems and disadvantages, and that is one of the issues I want to speak about this morning.

We have heard the Leader of the Opposition canvass the issue of inappropriate expenditure by the former Speaker. It has been canvassed in the media and outside by numerous people. I know the Premier's response in relation to this. I also notice that the Chairman of Committees is sitting in the House today. I think he did a wonderful job as a caretaker speaker, and I congratulate him for that.

The point I want to make today is this: the money that is injected into either ministerial offices or electorate offices, and which allows us as members of parliament to manage our electorate operations or parliamentary precinct operations, is all taxpayer funded money. As the Premier has said on numerous occasions, it is about transparency and accountability. I believe that is what the people want and I believe that is what the people deserve.

I was first elected to this place on 2 December 1989, as was the current Speaker. We both came in here at the same time. Irrespective of what we do, the important factor is the people whom we have working with us to provide services—whether it is people here in Parliament House, people in our electorate offices or the employees we had in our business operations in former lives. It has been a strategy of mine all my life to say that people who come to work at my place are not working for me and I am not working for them; it is about working together.

I hope we can see a return to a good relationship with the people within the precincts of Parliament House. They are wonderful staff doing a wonderful job. I cannot speak highly enough of the security staff in this place. They are a champion lot of blokes. They are always there. They are the front line. When I talk about the front line, I mean they are always there when people come through the

precinct at any hour of the day or night. They are the ones who afford courtesy to the people who come here and who ask questions. They are always there to assist members, visitors, members' families and staff. I say to the Speaker today as he sits in the chamber: I hope we can have a good working relationship with those people, because I can say honestly here today that there was certainly some resentment of the former Speaker. We do not need that type of activity and we do not need that type of culture.

I also want to touch on the issue of electorate offices, which the member for Glass House canvassed very well. We have seen improvements in the technology that is available to us as members of parliament, especially with laptop computers and being able to network all those computers. I have two electorate offices, and it is important to be able to liaise with and to know precisely what is going on in our electorates.

I think everybody in the House would agree that emails have increased the workload threefold. I know that the ladies in my office spend a considerable amount of time processing emails.

Mr McGrady: Do you work the email yourself, Vaughan?

Mr JOHNSON: I have to tell you, Mr Speaker, that I am computer illiterate, but I have other things to do. From the way you are smiling, Mr Speaker, I think you are probably in the same boat. I believe that people have to face up to what their qualities are, and computer literacy is not one of my qualities.

It is very important that we do make certain that our electorate offices are equipped with the right type of equipment. We are abreast of the professional changes that are going on, especially in the world of technology. But, more importantly, those offices are not there for me as a National Party member or a government member; they are there for all of our constituents, regardless of who they support. It is about us providing that representation. Mr Speaker, I thank you for the time afforded to me.

Mr FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (12.00 pm): I rise to support the appropriation that we considered as part of Estimates Committee A. I was a member of Estimates Committee A. First and foremost, I want to thank the chair, the member for Mansfield, and also the research director who assisted us in that process, Leanne Clare, for the sterling job that they both did.

I begin by acknowledging the presence in the House, as this report is being considered, of the new Speaker, the member for Mount Isa. I congratulate him on his election to that office. I know that his commitment to regional Queenslanders in particular will flavour the way he performs the job of Speaker of the parliament. I know that he is fully committed to continuing the work that was commenced some years ago in making this parliament a much more accessible place and a much more relevant place.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence in the chamber of the Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees and my neighbouring member of parliament, the member for Ashgrove, who performed the role of Acting Speaker so ably in recent times. It was the member for Ashgrove who formally participated in the estimates committee process due to the exigencies of the time. It was probably a nostalgic effort for him from times gone by. He has also recently announced his intention to retire from the parliament. I congratulate him on that. I know that I will be seeing him from time to time in the Mount Coot-tha electorate office, which is dangerously close to the house that he is retiring to. I am sure that I will be having a cup of tea and experiencing his wisdom from time to time, and it is something that I very much look forward to.

Mr Fouras: I'll keep you to that, Andrew.

Mr FRASER: I am sure you will.

Mr Lingard: You might be sorry.

Mr FRASER: I am sure I will not be sorry. During the estimates committee process the initiatives of the parliament were again laid out in some detail, in particular the one record project, which is an innovative way for the parliament to propose to streamline the record that is kept of the proceedings of the parliament in a way that enhances accessibility to the sometimes archaic forms of the way we conduct business in the House. That is an innovative project by parliamentary standards around the world. I know it is something that the Clerk of the Parliament is particularly committed to, and I look forward to that project coming to fruition.

There was also consideration of electronic voting methods, in particular those used in Scotland and Wales, during the estimates committee process. The enhancements to technology, which many members have touched on in their contributions so far, do enable us as members of parliament to do our job more efficiently. There was some reference to email in the previous speech. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the staff in my electorate office, employed as they are by the parliament. I am sure, given the sometimes odd hours that I keep due to the exigencies of my household, that they would prefer that I was not able to communicate with them at 2 am. Sometimes they can arrive to a whole screed of emails because there were a couple of unexpected hours in my day due to the human alarm clock I live with.

That brings me to comment on one aspect of the parliament's operations which was mentioned in the estimates committee process, and that is emergency evacuations. There were eight of them last year that were planned and eight that were probably not so planned. I am not one of those members

who lives here, fortunately living just four kilometres down the road. I know that at times those early morning evacuations can test everybody. It is something that I have some—

Mr McGrady interjected.

Mr FRASER: It is probably something that I do not want to witness; nevertheless those of us who have young families are well and truly up and about by that time anyway. Maybe we can sort something out about that in the longer term.

During the estimates committee process reference was also made to the regional parliament, which is a tremendous initiative in making parliament accessible to people outside of Brisbane.

I want to close by saying that, as a member who has reached the halfway mark of term one as a toddler, if you like, I have been uniquely impressed by the work that is done by the staff of the parliament, particularly the work that is done by the Clerk, who is always immediately accessible, entirely professional and has a wealth of experience which makes those of us who work in this place very grateful for the ability that he brings to the place. We deal with organisations—public, private and community—all the time. I have to say that the parliament of Queensland is a very impressive place in the way that it adopts modern management practices. It has come along in quantum leaps, in my view, in recent times. That is due in no small part to the efforts of the Clerk and, of course, all the staff here who do a tremendous job in making sure that this rather unique beast works for the benefit of those members who work here and the people of Queensland. I commend the appropriation to the House.

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (12.05 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the consideration of the report of Estimates Committee A. I note that the Deputy Speaker was probably in a difficult situation when the estimates committee did consider the activities of the Legislative Assembly, given the absence of the Speaker at that time. Like other members, I note the presence in the chamber of the new Speaker. As a newly appointed person to the panel of deputy chairs, I look forward with some trepidation to working with you over the next few months. I have to say that no reflection is intended on the Speaker.

The operations of the Legislative Assembly are a very important part of all of our working lives because we do spend so much time here. But even the time that we do spend at home is governed, to a large extent, by the operations of the Legislative Assembly given that our electorate offices—both in staff and facilities—are determined within this budget. A number of members have recognised the difficulties that we have had with technology. Even though we have moved ahead in small steps, we are significantly behind what would reasonably be expected by way of technology or the facilities available to members if they were working in the private sector. I still recall when I was first elected in 2001 and turned up for the very first day in my electorate office at Pittsworth, as it then was. I could not believe that as a member of parliament there was no computer of any description provided for my use. I had never, in my entire working life, not had a computer on my desk provided by my employer, so I had to go and buy a laptop. Thankfully, we now at least have laptops, which has been a major step forward, but it is still behind what a lot of private industry has access to.

In talking to other members of parliament from other jurisdictions around Australia I find that we are still a little way behind what is commonly accepted in those jurisdictions. As the member for Callide said, I think we have to resist the temptation and try to avoid the cheap shots that are sometimes taken by the media, because they are cheap shots. When allowances and other things are provided to us, it is something that we need to operate effectively and it is something that our staff need to operate effectively. I do not think that we should be concerned about the shots that will be taken against us, because it is a valuable part of today's working environment.

I would also like to say that there seems to be somewhat of a baby boom happening in parliament at the moment. We have had a number of members—including the member for Mount Coot-tha, the member for Indooroopilly, the member for Mansfield and myself—who have had a baby recently, and now the members for Algester and Mudgeeraba are going to join the club.

Mrs Reilly: We can do it ourselves; you had your wife do it.

Mr COPELAND: I had a wife who did all the hard work, I have to acknowledge that, but it is a change for us—the working hours that we do put in both while we are here and while we are in our electorates. It is very difficult for members who have a young family in particular to continue the workload that they may have been doing prior to their new arrival. We have taken advantage, for example, of the family unit that is provided here at Parliament House. That is a fantastic facility. I know that we have appreciated it when we have been down here. I noted that when Mr Speaker was presented to the Governor on Tuesday the opportunity was taken by the Governor to lobby for some family friendlier hours, particularly when we are sitting, and the issue of child care was also raised.

I would be very surprised if we ever get that far down the track at the parliament. Something we have to consider is the effect of our work on our families. It is something that has long been a concern. The demands that are placed on members are increasing. It is getting harder and harder to keep up. For example, with the advent of emails people now expect a turnaround of 15 minutes rather than a couple of days when it was a fax or a couple of weeks when it was by snail mail. That has dramatically changed the way members of parliament operate. I think that we should continue to be concerned about that.

In terms of technology, one of the changes we have seen is with mobile telephones. I know the media did have a go at us. They said that the allowance was going to increase the money that we have in our pockets. Under the previous scheme there were many members of parliament who had to pay over and above their allowance because their mobile bill was much higher. That is particularly so for members with large electorates who spend a lot of time in the car driving around their electorates. The member for Whitsunday does this. I know that many of my colleagues on this side of the House have had to pay over and above the allowance.

With the change in how that allowance is paid to us I think that some members are going to be worse off than they were previously. I urge the Speaker to keep an eye on that. It has only recently been changed. I know that the first bills are starting to come through and they have been a real surprise for some people. It is something that we need to keep abreast of.

Hon. J FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (12.11 pm): I am pleased to take part in the debate on the report of Estimates Committee A. In particular, it gives me the opportunity to say thank you to a number of people in this parliament. I had the privilege of being Acting Speaker for nearly three months on and off. I join the member for Mount Coot-tha in saying how lucky I was to have the support and advice of the Clerk, Neil Laurie. There is no doubt about his professionalism and objectivity. His professionalism stood out to me. It was a privilege to deal with the Clerk. With Lucinda in Hansard, Michael in corporate services and Mary in the library I think we are well served in this parliament by some excellent officers.

I take this opportunity to speak about two issues. One is Hansard and the other is the regional parliament. I was the Speaker when we had a review of Hansard. Unfortunately, the result of that review was that we did away with pen writers who could write 250 words a minute. They had to dictate to typists. That was a very complicated system. To make savings we had to do it. It was a shame really.

Hansard maintains an excellent service standard with the current system. The record is produced by six computer aided transcription reporters—CAT reporters—three editors and a publisher. There was a review done at the end of 2002. The views of staff were canvassed and other production systems around Australia were looked at. There was no doubt at all that, whilst other production systems may be capable of producing a reasonable *Hansard* the current Queensland system is actually the best to have at this point in time. Undoubtedly, that review recommended that we maintain that system. However, there is a problem with recruiting appropriately qualified CAT reporters. I think it is a major threat to the viability of this system. I am pleased to say that at the moment there are two trainee reporters. They commenced training in 2004 and will complete their training in 2006. It is unfortunate that training schools have closed. It is unfortunate that these people are getting picked up by other services.

The second issue I want to raise is the regional parliament. I have been a great supporter of the concept of community engagement. I think it is important at a time when social capital is declining that we do as much as we can to engage people more in the community. There is a comprehensive community engagement program for the regional parliament. I am delighted to put on the *Hansard* some of the activities that will take place prior to the sitting and during the sitting.

There will be a legal educators conference and a conference for public sector officers. That is the same as we do in Brisbane. Public sector officers in the Rockhampton region will attend this conference and receive professional development. There will be a full-day seminar on how parliament works. There are art competitions for schoolchildren which are ongoing. We are producing a teachers' resources kit which will be distributed to the schools in the region. This kit will be upgraded and available for teachers to use on a day-to-day basis. School visits are subsidised. I commend Premier's for this subsidy. I also commend the Department of Communities for the role it is playing in producing this material.

I think it is important that these schoolchildren turn up. They will get sample bags. They will get plugged into what parliament is all about. This is very important. There will be a youth parliament. The youth of Brisbane have their youth parliaments, so it will be good to see this half-day activity in Rockhampton.

It is important that we have an education program within this parliament. It is important that people do not just come and see this building and say how great it is; they need to understand fully how the parliament should function. Then when it does not function properly they can be real critics. They can be out there saying, 'This is going off the rails.' When our citizens come to understand the proper functions of the parliament they will be better able to play a more meaningful role and interact with it.

It is sad that we do not have enough citizenship training in this country. We ought to be doing more as it is important. I do know that when I was Speaker we produced two videos for use in primary and secondary schools. Unfortunately, they are not being used. They are great assets.

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (12.16 pm): I join in congratulating the new Speaker, Mr McGrady, and his wife, Sandra, on his appointment. I hope that they have a very enjoyable time in a job that can be an extremely enjoyable one. It can also be a very harsh one at times. After yesterday, I say to the Speaker and the Clerk of the Parliament that I think the standing orders need a very serious upgrade in terms of the election of the Speaker. The present running notes are completely different to the standing orders simply because new standing orders have been brought in recently. I think they need to be immediately upgraded because there was a little bit of indecision about the standing orders yesterday.

I want to compliment the continual upgrade of the outside of this building. Obviously it is costing a lot of money. It needs to be upgraded simply because of the standard of the sandstone.

As a member who has been here for a long time, I continue to remind members that we still have not done anything with the old Speaker's building, which really should be positioned as we come in the main gate towards the annexe. That lawn on the right-hand side was always set aside for an old Speaker's building which was knocked down in olden times and supposedly sits underneath some bridge near the Story Bridge. We need to make a decision on whether we are going to rebuild that building. If some pieces of sandstone need to be replaced we need to make an urgent decision on that. It would fit in magnificently with the general structure of that part of the building which goes down to the old gate.

There are a couple of things I want to make some brief comment about. The decision to make the dining room unavailable to members of parliament unless we are in session is not correct. If five or six members of parliament have a special meeting here at parliament out of session they find that they cannot use the dining room. It is even worse if members of parliament from other places in Australia come here and suddenly realise that they cannot use the dining room. I believe that in all other parliaments members are able to use the dining room out of session. In Queensland it would be easy to maintain two tables in the members' dining room. We could be served by the ladies in the cafeteria. If they are multiskilling it would not be difficult to maintain two tables in the dining room.

Can I also say to the Speaker that in my time levels 1 and 2, especially level 2, have become storage areas. It is not uncommon to get out of the lifts at level 2 and find that the carpenters are doing work. As members of parliament we realise that it is probably just for a short time. When we get out of those lifts with guests from other states they find it amazing to think that that sort of work can be going on outside the lifts. I know that the storage on level 2 is unusual. If it is that that is to be used as a storage area for many things then surely there can be a more subtle way of hiding all of that material.

However, the fact is that, when one drives in with guests and family and sees that being used as a storage area on level 2, that is something that we never had before, especially when there was a site superintendent who looked after those sorts of things.

The issue of the lifts has to be quickly looked at. It is not unusual for members to get into the lifts to find that Q-Build, with all of its storage, has used those lifts. Once again, I have no worries about that if I get in there by myself and find that that has happened. However, when one has guests from outside or interstate, quite honestly it is something which should never happen. Just in the last few hours a couple of us came down in a lift with a couple of rubbish bins that were certainly well on the nose. That does not particularly worry me because I know that that has to happen, but it certainly is a concern if we are with outside or interstate guests. The lift is also a concern when divisions occur. People like Vince Lester just would not be game to use the lifts; he was continually running down the stairs. That is something that we should look at for the future.

I have one final comment for the Speaker. It always concerned me during the last period of government that the statue of TJ Ryan was placed in the former upper house. As TJ Ryan was a very famous person, that statue should remain in the parliament. However, the previous Speaker blatantly put TJ Ryan's statue in the former upper house. I think TJ Ryan himself would have been particularly concerned. If members know the history of TJ Ryan they know that the one place he would not have wanted his statue to be was the former upper house, and there it sat boldly. Similarly, members opposite would be upset if Joh Bjelke-Petersen's photo appeared in any chamber. TJ Ryan's statue has recently been removed, and I am not quite sure why. I do not mind if he sits somewhere else in the parliament, but having TJ Ryan's statue sit in the former upper house is something about which the previous Speaker should hang his head in shame.

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (12.22 pm): I am pleased today to speak to this estimates committee report. I congratulate the member for Mount Isa on his elevation to the position of Speaker. I am sure that he will do a good job. The annexe is home to many of us, including the member for Mount Isa as the Speaker. He will spend a lot of time here, as we all do, particularly those who live in country areas. It is almost a second home to us. It is a pretty quiet old place, particularly on the weekends, when we have to fend for ourselves. That is fine, but it is home. The staff throughout the whole complex have been wonderful. I cannot say that I have ever had a bad word to say about any of them. They have done a wonderful job.

One issue I have found is that it is very difficult often in the dining room with temporary staff. I know that they have to try to find someone to come in and do the job, but it is really difficult for them to understand the language in some instances. They have been wonderful to us and have been very good, but I think it would be better to have some permanent arrangement there. I am not sure how it could be done, Mr Speaker, but it would be wonderful to come in and have people who know who we are and not have to write our names down and that sort of thing. That would be good.

The previous speaker in this debate, the member for Beaudesert, mentioned out-of-session times for dining. That is something that we should really take notice of. There is an opportunity there for us to do better, particularly when we have guests or come down for meetings. Those opposite would be the

same as us—that is, turn up for a committee meeting or whatever the case may be and the next thing find that we cannot get into the dining room. I think those out-of-session times should be reviewed and we should have an opportunity to have a meal in the dining room.

The telephone allowance has changed recently for the mobile allowance, and that has certainly affected many members, particularly those from the bigger areas who do a lot of driving and use their mobile phones while travelling. I got my first bill the other day and it was double what it was in the previous billing period. Even though I have a reasonably good rate—I am hoping to get a better rate in due course because I went on to a flexible scheme; I am sure I can get a bit better rate—I still do not think I could get anywhere near the deal that the Parliamentary Service had negotiated in the first instance. Many members will end up paying a lot more for their mobile phones than we were originally told. That needs to be considered.

With regard to electorate staff, during this debate I have noted that some members have mentioned training procedures. I do not think enough has gone into proper training, particularly in relation to the computer upgrades and so forth that are happening. Our staff need that, and there needs to be more opportunity for them to come here or for staff here to go around to the electorates to do that. I know it is a cost, but what price is there on progress? We have to ensure that our office is run as efficiently as the private sector. We have to ensure that we are up to the same level.

I want to mention one other issue, and that is procedures in relation to the opening of mail. That is important. We had the September 11 situation and the white powder incidents in various places around the world. We did have some procedures put in place then for our staff in relation to the opening of mail, such as they had to wear gloves and the like. However, since then there have been no upgrades in relation to what the staff do. There needs to be something on the web site at least for staff if they have some concerns. There have been cases around Australia that I am aware of where unknown powder substances have been sent to members' offices. Obviously it is not made known publicly; however, it has in fact occurred. It is still happening out there, so we need to be aware that that has happened.

We need a new lift. When the annexe was designed, quite clearly it was not meant to be as high as it is and we have ended up with more people here. The lift we have is inadequate. We all know that. We need to work a bit harder on that issue and work on a design that would give us a new lift.

Mr SPEAKER: First of all, I want to thank all of those members who have expressed their good wishes to me on my elevation to the position of Speaker. I also thank all of those people who have participated in this debate this afternoon. We are going through a fairly unique period, because the former Speaker helped to draft the budget for this place, the Deputy Speaker actually took it to the estimates committee and I am here today to participate in and respond to the debate. I doubt that has ever happened before. I am sure that the member for Beaudesert would correct me if I am wrong. I also recognise the work that was done over a number of years by the former Speaker, and I certainly wish him well healthwise in the years ahead. I also recognise the work the Acting Speaker did whilst the former Speaker was on sick leave.

This building from which we work is one of the finest buildings in the whole of the state. This building belongs to the people. I know that former Speakers have certainly opened up the place and encouraged people to come in, and I will certainly be continuing that practice.

We have heard from some members about the need for additional services. We have heard members talk about the fact that we will be criticised by the media and other people. No matter what we do, we are going to be criticised by the media. Members of this parliament are entitled, together with their staff and the staff who work here, to decent working conditions.

In the short time I have left, can I say that community attitudes are changing. More and more women are coming into this place and more and more young people are coming into this place which means that, on average, they have children. We have more members here who have small babies. We have two current members who are pregnant.

An honourable member: With child.

Mr SPEAKER: With child. I have already started to work with those members to see what improvements we can make for them and their children when they are eventually born. Members of the House, I thank you all for participating in this debate. In conclusion, I want to thank the Clerk and all of the staff in this place for the work that they do.

I will conclude by saying that at times we can criticise, but I would say to members that there would no venue in the whole of the capital of Queensland that provides better food than this place. All too often we forget that and do not recognise it. I want to pay tribute to all the staff who make this place tick. I say thank you all for your good wishes. I certainly hope to live up to the expectations of the members of this parliament.

Report adopted.

Clauses 1 to 4, as read, agreed to.

Schedule, as read, agreed to.

Appropriation Bill
Estimates Committee A
Report No. 2

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! The question is—

That report No. 2 of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (12.30 pm): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak about report No. 2 for Estimates Committee A. As I said previously, I thank the other committee members—the member for Southern Downs and Leader of the Opposition, the member for Robina, the member for Darling Downs, the member for Mount Coot-tha, the member for Glass House and the member for Ipswich—for their contributions to this part of the estimates committee process. I would particularly like to thank Leanne Clare and her executive support for their terrific work in assisting the committee both prior, during and after the estimates committee hearing.

Estimates Committee A report No. 2 relates to the expenditure of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Office of the Governor, the Queensland Audit Office, the Ombudsman, the Crime and Misconduct Commission, the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, and the Office of the Public Service Commissioner. The committee also considered the expenditure of the departments administered by the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport, which was Treasury, Sport and Recreation Queensland and the Office of Urban Management. We then considered the expenditure for the departments administered by the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing, which was the Department of Public Works, the Department of Housing and Queensland Racing.

As could be gathered by the number of departments that the committee examined, it was a very long day and a range of matters was discussed. The key element of the Audit Office that was addressed was the recommendations of its strategic review. In relation to the Ombudsman, we looked at the undertaking of phase 2 of the complaints management process and the delivery of the Good Decisions Training program. In relation to the Crime and Misconduct Commission, we considered the completion of major research projects. There was also talk about the commission maintaining its lead agency status in witness protection training under the Advanced Diploma of Public Safety (Police Witness Protection). In relation to the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, the key budget priorities that were examined were the annual report of the review of child deaths, enhancing employment screening, and communicating those new employment screening provisions of the blue card.

While I am talking about the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, I wish to say that I think the blue card is instrumental in protecting our young people. I think we should consider the possibility of having photo ID on these cards. I have mentioned that matter to the Premier and I have mentioned it in this place before. I think that would better protect our young people. We all know that some people look for all sorts of ways of abusing systems. My worry is that they may try to do that with the blue card system. Hopefully they will not, but it is something that we need to look at, even though it will be a very expensive process.

Mr Briskey: I agree.

Mr REEVES: I take that interjection from the member for Cleveland. In relation to the expenditure of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the committee looked at identifying alternatives for community groups that are affected by the transfer of land to Queensland national parks under the South-East Queensland Forest Agreement and facilitating the regional sittings of parliament in Rockhampton. In relation to the expenditure of the Department of Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport, the committee examined the key priority of maintaining the state's net worth, its AAA credit rating and continuing the development of the revenue and management systems of the Office of State Revenue.

It is probably an opportune moment to say that this estimates committee hearing was the last day that the former Deputy Premier and Treasurer attended parliament—not that any of the committee members knew that at the time. The former member for Chatsworth was keen to answer all the questions of the committee and ably did so.

The committee examined the expenditure of Sports and Recreation Queensland. That department's budget highlights included working with the Australian Sports Commission to implement active after-school community programs in Queensland. I think that it is very important now and in the future to try to get young people as active as possible both during school times and after school times. In relation to the Office of Urban Management, the committee considered the monitoring of the implementing of the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan. As I said, the portfolio of the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing was also examined.

I thank all the ministers who were involved in the estimates hearing and who gave their time freely. I want to thank the staff who assisted, particularly the other parliamentary staff who were there on

the day: the timekeepers and Hansard, which helped in the running of the day. I particularly want to thank the committee and the deputy chair.

Time expired.

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.35 pm): In relation to the debate on report No. 1 of Estimates Committee A, which relates to the Legislative Assembly, I acknowledge the role of the chairman and other members of the committee and the committee staff. In relation to the expenditure of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, I wish to contain my comments to some spurious allegations and some nonsense that the Premier carried on with at the estimates hearing. We again heard it in this place this morning. The Premier is making all sorts of inferences about the appropriate expenditure of opposition funds in relation to publications and advertising.

As members would expect from this Premier, we only ever get half the story, if we get any of the story at all. The story that the Premier told today is no greater example of the half-truths that we get from this slippery Premier. Today he stood up in this place and indicated that there are very, very strict guidelines that exist for government advertising and other things such as sizes of photos. I have spoken to the Ministerial Services Branch and I have said that we are very happy—in actual fact, we are extremely delighted—to follow the same guidelines that the ministers themselves follow. That is all we have ever done. Not only that, in response to Peter Beattie's carry-on we sent these matters off to the Auditor-General. He has said that he has not received a formal complaint and there is no issue.

I wish to give members an idea of what I am referring to. I checked with Ministerial Services and was told, 'In relation to pictures of the Premier in government advertising, to the best of our knowledge it seems to be that only head shots no bigger than 1.5 inches by two inches are used.' That is about four centimetres by five centimetres. The only exception is when there is an activity based shot involving more than just the Premier, for example, those appearing in *Diversity Matters* or *Sectorwide*. In those circumstances I was informed that the photos can be five centimetres by about 7.5 centimetres. Ministerial Services invited us to find anything to the contrary.

It did not take us very long. I love this little bit; I think it is really good. This photo is another example of Pete following his own guidelines in Queensland. That photo looks to be about four centimetres by five centimetres—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! The Leader of the Opposition should be referring to the members by their title.

Mr SPRINGBORG: This is another example of the Premier following his own guidelines. We were advised and invited by MSB to come up with some examples. So we came up with some examples. Lo and behold, this example is even bigger than Jack Brabham. Ministerial Services says that photos appearing in anything that is funded by the government should not be any bigger than four centimetres by five centimetres. I do not know what that logo is down there, but this document certainly seems to be government funded. So we said, 'We are happy to abide by that. We will have nothing any larger than what the Premier has.' This is another one in the eye for accountability of the Beattie Labor government in Queensland.

There is a range of other things, including the Premier saying that we cannot have publicly funded distribution of brochures or letters or anything like that. We have found some more examples of the Premier doing this. On 13 December 2004, the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing, at taxpayers' expense, distributed a mail-out to the racing clubs across Queensland criticising the opposition, criticising the National Party. The Premier would have us believe that that is in no way political.

Another example was the then minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander policy and minister for fair trading, Judy Spence, sending an open letter to retirement village residents talking about the coalition's impact on the industry if we were elected. It talked about the coalition's negative policies and the coalition's policies creating financial hardship for those good people who live in those particular retirement villages.

But we go even further, and the Premier did not talk about this. He is saying that there is no departmental guideline whatsoever covering these sorts of things. I tell him that there is. There is a guideline that if the matter is going to be political it should not be funded by the department; it should be funded by the ministerial office. Clearly, the ministers are doing this and we are only following what the ministers are doing. It goes on to say that an example may be a brochure by the office of the Minister for Education detailing coalition or Labor achievements.

So they are doing it. We have only said that we are following the guidelines. Each time we put this up the government has to come back and concede that we are, in fact, right. The Premier has done no more than he had to do, because we are following exactly what he has done. He has been caught out. He has been slippery again. It is about time he showed some honesty about how we have been knocking his nonsense over bit by bit.

Time expired.

Mr FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (12.40 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to comment on the Estimates Committee A report on the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the portfolios that existed under the previous Deputy Premier, the Department of Public Works and the Department of Housing. Since the time of the estimates committee hearing it has been my great honour to have enjoyed the confidence of both the Premier and my colleagues to be appointed as parliamentary secretary in the portfolios of Premier and Treasurer. I look forward to working in those two portfolios with the Premier. I am ultimately very grateful for the confidence in me that has been shown by the Premier and by my colleagues, and I do not intend to let anyone down in that regard.

I would like to briefly comment on the examination of the budget in detail by Estimates Committee A. The former Deputy Premier and Treasurer went through in some detail the significant increases in service provision that are budgeted for within this Appropriation Bill. All of those increases in social services, for us as Labor members of parliament, are certainly welcomed. The reason we put ourselves forward to the community, the reason we stand for election and the reason we want to do this job is to provide those services to the community. They were set out quite ably, of course, by the former Deputy Premier.

As the chairman of the committee mentioned, I should acknowledge that the day on which Estimates Committee A sat was the last day on which the deputy premier worked in and served in this House. Certainly all of us know that during his stewardship of the state's finances the idea that somehow all economic credibility resides automatically with the conservatives in this nation was not borne out by the facts. It is certainly something that was not borne out by the debate on the budget that occurred in the parliament and also during the estimates committee process. It was characterised in part by a neat diversion in the then Treasurer's opening comments, in which he informed the committee that, far from the 14 per cent that featured in the original budget papers that the QIC had managed to return to the state of Queensland, it had actually accelerated to 18.46 per cent, which whacked in another \$580 million to the bottom line and brought the budget bottom line for the previous financial year to \$3.3 billion. That was then immediately followed by a somewhat curious line of questioning by the opposition about the professionalism and the performance of the QIC, which, of course, is headed by Doug McTaggart, who does a tremendous job in that role and had been Under Treasurer under the previous coalition government.

The estimates committee process dealt at some length with the nature of state finances and, indeed, the fact that Queensland retains its low-tax status with an average of \$1,708 on a per capita basis compared with a national average of \$2,135. A highlight in this budget is the cuts to land tax, which are worth \$847 million over the next four years, which saw a raising of the threshold and a drop in the rate. That is certainly something that was welcomed by areas of the state that have experienced a quantum leap in property values, in particular in my electorate. Coupled with the changes we made to stamp duty during last year, that makes home ownership somewhat more affordable for younger people. That is something for which we have to have due regard.

However, those changes to our taxation arrangements still mean that the state, of itself, collects only around 26 per cent of its own state revenue. The other day I was reading on the Brisbane Institute web site an article by a former member of this House and a former Treasurer, the former member for Ipswich, David Hamill. He has recently completed his PhD on intergovernmental financial relations. I am sure it is a ripping read for all members of the House. In the context of the changes and the way that revenue is raised, I want to relay two comments from the former member for Ipswich. He said—

As such, ANTS—

the new tax system—

has been yet another manifestation of the "creeping centralisation" within the institutional design of the Australian federation, a dynamic which continues to be the dominant force shaping the relationship between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories. For contrary to the claims of the Commonwealth, ANTS and its embedding of the GST at the core of the complex set of financial relations at the heart of Australian federalism is further diminishing the fiscal autonomy of the States and Territories by making them increasingly reliant upon a revenue source over which they have no control.

He also said—

All of this has major implications for the future of the Australian federation. As fiscal capability is a critical contributor to state capacity, a scenario in which the Commonwealth coerces the States and Territories to vacate their already limited revenue base to rely on GST and other Commonwealth grants to fund their programs strikes at the fundamentals of a federal system of government.

Time expired.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.45 pm): I am pleased to make a contribution to the consideration of the Estimates Committee A report and particularly to make some comments about that section of the committee that examined the expenditure of the Treasury. I was able to join the committee as shadow Treasurer for that part of its deliberations.

As other speakers have said, the day of the hearing was the last day the former Treasurer served in this House. I pay my respects to Terry Mackenroth for the way in which he handled the estimates committee process. I think it is an object lesson for so many other ministers in this government and other members in this House who will one day be ministers. They should look at the way Terry

Mackenroth handled the estimates committee and use his performance as an example. There are ministers who pride themselves on not answering questions. They seem to think they have succeeded if they turn the estimates committee process into something through which no information is exchanged and they can get out of there without answering questions or they can answer every question with a written briefing note. Anybody who saw the way Terry Mackenroth handled the committee will know that he never did that. He should be paid every credit for his ability and the respect that he demonstrated for the estimates committee process.

I think the former Treasurer will be sorely missed. I think he has left a huge hole in the government ranks that certainly will not be filled in the near future and certainly will not be filled by those who have taken over the roles that he played. I publicly take this opportunity to wish Terry Mackenroth all the very best—not that I think he will be reading *Hansard* in his retirement. He is certainly one of the government members for whom I had a lot of respect, simply because of the way he handled the institutions, especially the estimates committees. I say to the government backbenchers: one day when you do get the opportunity, if you can use him as an example you will have done well.

We did look at the financial situation the state found itself in. There is no doubt that Queensland is lucky enough to have had a number of income streams come together at one particular time which means that financially the state is going through something of a purple patch. We did look at where that money is coming from and put to rest some of the understandable political myths that the government spin doctors like to promulgate about this financial success being a success of the government. We were able to establish quite clearly that the GST receipts were certainly something of a river of gold for the state government, that extra income had been derived from transfer taxes on properties and that land tax itself had contributed considerable amounts of money to the state budget over and above what was expected.

One worrying element was the degree to which gambling and its associated taxes have become such an essential part of the state budget. I think it is something that should worry every member of this House: the fact that the state budget can come to depend so much on gambling activities that can cause so many problems for individuals and for communities.

We did pursue a line of questioning relating to the biotechnology fund, which the government has insisted that QIC establish—the \$100 million fund. I rebut, of course, the nonsense remarks that were made by the previous contributor to this debate, the member for Mount Gravatt. Unfortunately, I think the member is completely out of his depth both here in the parliament and on the committee, because he did not understand the issues that were being discussed.

The issue that concerned the opposition was the way in which the \$100 million was set aside from the normal and very successful activities that the QIC had undertaken and the lack of return that was achieved with the \$100 million, not forgetting that the \$100 million belongs to the people for whom QIC invest money—and they are very much in the main either government departments or public servants. It is something we will continue to monitor in the future, and rightly and deservedly so because we need to do that on behalf of the people who own that money. That certainly was not a criticism of the QIC's core activities in which it has been very successful in the ensuing financial year.

Time expired.

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (12.50 pm): I am pleased to speak in this debate relating to the report of Estimates Committee A. I was shadowing Robert Schwarten, the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing. At the outset I wish to put on record my appreciation for the professional support provided by Leanne Clare and her team and, as well, I wish to acknowledge the tremendous effort of the Hansard team and the parliamentary attendants. That being said, I must also put on record my disappointment with the performance of the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing. Let us look at some of the areas where the minister fell down.

Despite being the minister for this portfolio since June 1998, some seven years, he has very little knowledge of the portfolio itself and its functions. The minister was unable to answer questions. I hear the minister for small business laughing over there in the chamber, but have a look at *Hansard*, have a read of the questions I asked the minister. On the very first question I asked the minister we heard exactly the same thing we have heard now.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! The member for Darling Downs will refer his comments through the chair.

Mr HOPPER: We heard the member for Bulimba roar laughing on the first question. Why did he roar laughing? Because he knew the minister could not answer the question. It was an immediate distraction. And here we have another laugh over there from another minister. That is the way this Labor Party treats us in opposition.

Mr REEVES: I rise to a point of order. The member for Darling Downs is misleading the House. He is misconstruing what occurred at the estimates committee hearing.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The member for Mansfield will resume his seat.

Mr HOPPER: There is no point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I will make the decisions. Member for Darling Downs, the chair will make those decisions, not you.

Mr HOPPER: The minister was unable to answer questions relating to apprentice numbers, departmental audits, the workplace literacy program, the PQC system and the Project Services activities and capability. Even though the minister was rushed in his delivery regarding apprenticeships, I was pleased, however, to see that Q-Build takes on 100 apprenticeships each year. It was disappointing though to learn that, after an apprenticeship is completed, secure tenure within Q-Build is not guaranteed. I have heard the minister say on many occasions that we as the opposition want to sell Q-Build. We have never said that we want to sell Q-build and we are not going to sell Q-Build. That is the last thing we would want to do. What we want to do is expand Q-build. That is exactly what we want to do. Q-Build is often criticised for its costly projects, but I think its critics are looking in the wrong place. They should start by looking at the Project Services fat cat baggage which Q-Build is forced to carry.

Further to Project Services, it was disappointing that the minister did not answer questions in relation to projects managed by Project Services. As outlined in the statement of reservations, for the second consecutive year the minister and his departmental officers have been unable or unwilling to provide the estimates committee with detail in relation to the role, function and capability of Project Services. Vague reference was made to a portfolio of over 2,000 projects with an annual turnover of some \$600 million. However, vague references—very vague references—should not be permitted in the estimates committee process when the effectiveness and efficiency of a business unit is under question.

Even though Project Services allegedly procures or project manages or risk manages some \$600 million worth of projects, which allegedly run into the thousands, details could not be provided by the minister or his departmental officers to ascertain whether the projects are on time, on budget or endured significant cost variations or whether the risk management costs were advantageous to their 'clients'—clients who incidentally are captured within the public sector and have no choice but to use Project Services. Where is the competition in that process?

The parliament and the public have no avenue through which to check the effectiveness or efficiency of Project Services. There is no documentation to support its self-proclaimed assurances regarding the capability of Project Services to deliver the projects on time and on budget. It is not good enough for evasive answers to be provided on some \$600 million worth of projects. How do the parliament and the public know with certainty that the projects are being handled and managed with the utmost integrity?

As stated in the statement of reservations, the Department of Main Roads is required legislatively to annually develop a roads implementation plan for the year. Consistent with the act, the roads implementation plan includes policies which influence the decision about the program of projects, outlines financial provisions, performance targets and a report on the previous year's performance, together with a program of projects of road infrastructure which the Department of Main Roads is planning to undertake over the ensuing five years.

Time expired.

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (12.55 pm): In speaking to the report of Estimates Committee A today, I do not want to use my five minutes to provide what could only ever be a very cursory overview of the day. I want to talk about some documents that the Premier tabled which were excerpts from the Palmer report into the Cornelia Rau case. The Premier, as I said, provided the committee with a draft of the Palmer report, which was commissioned by the federal government to report on the debacle that allowed a mentally ill Australian resident to be held in immigration for 10 months. The excerpts tabled on that day paint a picture of a sad woman who had her life turned upside down when she began to suffer from a mental illness, something which will happen to one in five Australians at some point in their lives. The documents the Premier tabled also paint a picture of an immigration system which has frequently become abusive and a federal government which markets that abuse to its political advantage. It runs the other way when it all goes bad.

The excerpts revealed that the last Commonwealth-state MOU regarding the imprisonment of immigration detainees had expired 10 years ago and that the Commonwealth had not followed up Queensland's efforts to get a new one. The excerpts showed that DIMIA officers completely ignored their own rule that detainees should be kept in prison only as a last resort and only until alternative arrangements are made. Mick Palmer also condemned DIMIA officers who did not know or accept that detainees in prison were their responsibility.

The excerpts tabled also revealed that in the six months in Queensland prisons Cornelia Rau's mental health condition was not diagnosed or treated, rather prison officers' written observations that she had an intense gaze and that she was weepy and irritated were not followed up and she was locked in the prisoners' detention unit four times—once for a week as punishment for her lack of cooperation. While Minister Vanstone defended Ms Rau's lengthy detention on the basis that she did not reveal her identity, importantly, the Palmer report specifically argues that if Ms Rau had been in community care

rather than in prison she would certainly have been more likely to reveal who she was. Having read the report, I find it shocking and amazing that both the current minister, Amanda Vanstone, and the previous minister, Philip Ruddock, under whose watch this abuse happened, continue to have a job in the federal cabinet and that the Howard government's only response so far has been to promote the responsible department head to an important strategic diplomatic post.

While this treatment that Cornelia Rau suffered was obviously shocking for a vulnerable innocent woman, it would also not be okay for a mentally ill prisoner. Fifty-seven per cent of Queensland's female prisoners have a mental illness compared to less than 20 per cent in the broader community. This figure clearly tells us that there are problems in community care. It also tells us that mental illness is a significant cause of crime and that mental health services in prisons need to be good if we are to reduce the recidivism rate which, even though Queensland has the lowest rate, is still around 60 per cent in this state.

In recent weeks voices have started to be heard in the community, arguing that across Australia the community mental health system needs to be reassessed. These voices have included David Richmond, the author of the important 1983 report which recommended deinstitutionalisation, who now says that the process has not been implemented properly. They have also included a prominent group of psychiatrists who have banded together and have argued through the *Australian* newspaper that mental health patients are now effectively being reinstitutionalised in prisons. On a similar note, a few years ago the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute found that around 60 per cent of homeless people have a mental illness.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission will in a fortnight or so release a report on community consultation it conducted with the Mental Health Council in the second half of last year. The results of the consultation process will not come in the form of specific recommendations. It did, like other consultations around this issue, hear a number of things. It found that there was a serious lack of supported accommodation in the community, something which is about to get worse as the Howard government continues to slash SAAP funding. It found that there are too few acute beds, making it very hard for mental health patients to get in, and there is limited active community mental health care. No doubt it also heard calls for mental health patients to be able to access mental health units directly rather than having to go through accident and emergency. The issues I have noted are nationwide points, not just points that have been found in Queensland.

While the medical fraternity does not tend to be shy about its talents, we do all need to understand that psychiatry is very much an imperfect science and that as a result we will never have a mental health system that prevents human tragedy. The Cornelia Rau case does, however, highlight the current system's shocking deficiencies. While it was not the Queensland system that failed this woman, it does show us that a lot needs to be done. I urge the health minister to look at the Forster recommendations and to seriously prioritise the reform of mental health in Queensland.

Sitting suspended from 1 pm to 2.30 pm.

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (2.30 pm): I heard compliments earlier about the Hon. Terry Mackenroth. Terry Mackenroth had plenty of time over here in opposition. He was obviously most determined that when he became a minister he would not give anything to the opposition side. Clearly that has happened and continually so. When the standing order covering the first hour of parliament was organised, there was going to be half an hour for government ministers and half an hour for the opposition and government backbenchers in which they could talk for two minutes. Terry Mackenroth has always been determined that the Leader of the Opposition should get no more than two or three minutes. I still believe that many of the backbenchers could make a better contribution in that first hour than just listening to some of the ministers.

One of the things that Terry Mackenroth has clearly done is that before elections he is very generous to members of the ALP. It is quite obvious that before elections comments are made about what projects members want in their particular electorates. The difficulty is proving this. We know that it is going on but the difficulty is proving it. It is the same with the minor sports grants that Mr Mackenroth had to administer in the department of sport. Mr Mackenroth used to get his department to go out and judge all of these minor sports facilities. The department would come back and make its recommendations. It would also list all those projects which went close but, as the assessment says, were 'assessed as not ready to proceed, ineligible or lack of funds.'

Mr Shine: You never said this when Terry was here.

Mr LINGARD: That is not right because, as I said during the estimates—and those people who were there would know this—we found a list of all of the projects for 2001. Of those listed as ready to proceed, the department listed all of those up to the amount of money that it thought was going to be spent. The minister said that it was not him. The minister said that he did not know who it was. The minister said that he was not really interested; it had happened in 2001. However, with all those projects assessed as ready to proceed, someone went through—and this document was tabled during the estimates committee hearing—and found 21 projects in coalition electorates and put a cross next to them. There was not even one in an ALP electorate. Stupidly, this person has gone through and against

the ones for Gladstone has put 'Independent' and against the one in Surfers Paradise has put a cross. So they have crossed out 21 projects all listed by the department as ready to proceed, capable of proceeding and being good projects—the whole lot.

In the second list which is headed by the department 'assessed as not ready to proceed, ineligible or lack of funds' they found 15 in ALP seats. This document was tabled during the estimates process. Against projects such as the one in Gladstone it was written, 'Construction of an early field will increase participation. Good community consultation and project. Ready to proceed.' The whole 21 of them have these sorts of comments.

Because I can see that the time is rushing by, I will go through and find the 15 projects that they found. Let us look at the big one—a big Rugby League club in a very safe ALP electorate. The comments were 'not recommended'. It was for a grandstand. I know, because I have played football at this particular place, that the grandstand was there; it was being leased. They wanted to buy the grandstand; pay it out. The department had said no. The comments were, 'Not recommended. The club has sufficient financial resources to complete the project without Sport and Recreation Queensland assistance.' This is an extremely well-financed Rugby League club in Brisbane. There is another one, too, very close to yours.

Mr Lucas: All right, come on.

Mr LINGARD: The two of them have a big tick and the handwriting reads 'ALP electorate'.

Time expired.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (2.35 pm): In responding to report No. 2 of Estimates Committee A, I want to comment in particular on the Office of Urban Management. As we know, a lot of portfolios are handled within each of the estimates committees, and so there is a fairly limited amount of time available to address these particular subareas. The Office of Urban Management has been a very important initiative that has been rolled out. We have given bipartisan support to the concept as there was a need to address appropriate management and appropriate planning, particularly within south-east Queensland. The National Party opposition also flagged that there was a need to look not only at urban management issues but also population issues in regional Queensland and areas where there is a decline to find an integrated solution, not a piecemeal response to growth and population decline.

I wish to speak specifically to the Office of Urban Management. It was an important initiative to have that tied to the Treasury portfolio. Now that the former Deputy Premier and former Treasurer, Terry Mackenroth, has left that role, there is certainly a fair amount of concern as to whether there is any real commitment on the part of this government to the timely and cost effective roll-out of the necessary infrastructure which must match the South East Queensland Regional Plan. There is a lot of concern outside of the south-east as well as to what the infrastructure plans will be for other regions and how they fit into the greater picture of Queensland.

It was significant that only a couple of months after the infrastructure plan was released for south-east Queensland the Premier released the small print for the plan which was, 'We just may not be able to deliver this on time and on budget because we have just found out there is a skills shortage and this is terrible. If we cannot deliver, don't blame us.' That is basically paraphrasing what he said. We warned the government that, as there has been an infrastructure drought for seven years, it will have to eventually deliver the infrastructure but it will be harder to ramp it up given the fact that when infrastructure spending is wound back at a time of growth it is harder to then recruit and crank up the machine and get it rolling.

That is bad planning. This government says that it is all about good planning, but for the last seven years we have seen bad planning and quite predictable shortages in these areas with the windback of infrastructure delivery. It is not rocket science. If members talk to engineering firms and related industries which are at the coalface of delivering infrastructure, they will find that they have been warning about this for years. The growth in Queensland is high but not extraordinary and certainly not unpredictable.

The growth rates for Queensland for the last 30 years are quite predictable. It never ceases to amaze me when I hear people throw up their hands and say, 'Growth is so high,' as if it has suddenly popped out of the box. That is just dumb. If members look at the figures—I got them from the library; other members can get them, too—they can easily see the growth and realise that it has been quite predictable. Good government should plan and deliver things in a timely way, and this government has not.

The roll-out of the infrastructure plan is something that we flagged well before the Premier did. We said that there was a concern about it being done in an appropriate and timely way. We will continue to pursue the government about this issue because it promised initially to deliver this, and it has failed to deliver it in the last seven years. Now, with gridlock on our roads, a breakdown in infrastructure services and a lack of services that should have been rolled out three, five and even seven years ago, people are facing such difficulty today. Certainly it was also our policy to have—

Time expired.

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (2.40 pm): The Leader of the Opposition is keen to criticise the estimates hearing process—as he does everything else, I might say—and has raised a number of issues that I will address. I said on 18 July this year that I would be happy to talk to the opposition leader and the Liberal leader to come up with a better system if they could suggest one without their usual petty, juvenile point scoring. It is important to point out here with regard to the former Speaker that investigations by the Crime and Misconduct Commission and the Director of Public Prosecutions resulted in the former Speaker having no case to answer.

I provided the estimates committee and Leader of the Opposition with the answer to a question regarding the number of people charged with offences relating to illicit drugs. I repeat that I will reconsider the issue of performance audits. I continue to have reservations about the impact of telephone-tapping powers on people's individual rights, but I repeat that I am willing to consider the introduction of telephone-tapping powers, provided they are limited to areas such as drugs, organised crime and terrorism. However, we need the federal government to shift its position in order to achieve that.

In relation to health, my government acted immediately to address issues raised by the interim report of the Bundaberg Hospital Commission of Inquiry of 10 June. I took further action on 28 June when I announced a tightening of the rules governing the declaration of the areas of need as well as a raising of the standards for the registration and re-registration of overseas trained doctors. My government again acted immediately to address the most pressing principles identified in the interim report of the Forster review, which was released on 2 August. I anticipate that even more initiatives to address work force shortages will be implemented following the final recommendations of the Forster review and the Morris inquiry.

It is highly inappropriate for the Leader of the Opposition to pre-empt the outcomes of the Bundaberg Hospital inquiry by suggesting that action be taken to recover money from Dr Stable. I add that Dr Stable was supported by Mike Horan when he was health minister. To date, the action taken by my government has been in response to the written recommendations of the Morris commission as contained in its interim report.

The Bundaberg Hospital Commission of Inquiry has required numerous Queensland Health employees to give evidence to the inquiry including Dr Darren Keating and Mr Peter Leck. Both were granted indemnities in relation to legal costs and representation at the inquiry. I have made clear from the outset my view that the indemnity provided to Queensland Health employees did not extend to taking action in the Supreme Court or otherwise outside the inquiry.

As I said during the hearing and many times before, my government does not tolerate bullying or discrimination. We have taken steps in the past to address the issue, and we will continue to strive to stamp out bullying. I will wait, with strong interest, to see the final recommendations of the inquiry and the Peter Forster review.

I turn now to the matter of the ex gratia claim by Ms Fingleton. Discussions are continuing with Ms Fingleton's legal representatives in relation to her claim for an ex gratia special payment. Ex gratia payments are only made in exceptional circumstances which, in the government's view, is the case with Ms Fingleton. The government is willing to consider such a payment on the basis that under the Magistrates Act 1991 Ms Fingleton was entitled to protection and immunity that was wrongly denied to her. The High Court unanimously found that Ms Fingleton should never have been charged. By contrast, the Queensland Court of Appeal decision in the Pauline Hanson case made it clear that Ms Hanson was accorded due process during the hearing leading up to her conviction by a jury.

On the matter of administering the Queensland Investment Incentives Scheme, we will make sure that taxpayers' interests are always protected, no matter what happens. As Treasurer I point out that a rigorous process is in place to monitor and capture the anticipated savings to be delivered from the shared service initiative. Budget deliberations for 2005-06 confirm that the government is on track to achieve annual savings of about \$100 million by 2010-11. To ensure that these savings are realised, they have been factored into the budget forward estimates for shared service providers. In the first two years considerable savings have been made, and detailed information is available in the Ministerial Portfolio Statement—at page 1-36 for the shared service initiative and page 1-55 for corporate technology.

I also want to respond to some nonsense in the Leader of the Opposition's contribution in relation to the National Party advertisements which the opposition has been using and trying to pretend it is entitled to use taxpayers' money for. The opposition has raised concerns regarding government advertising compared to its recent disallowed advertisements. The opposition expenditure has been tested against the opposition handbook, as are all of its expenses, in particular 'Achievement brochures', section 4.131.1. This clearly shows that the office of the leader can distribute information regarding the opposition's official accomplishments. It does not allow for political advertisements or statements to be paid from public funds. This is referred to in paragraph (e). The opposition raised a technicality—that the *Queensland Ministerial Handbook* section regarded achievement brochures as slightly different—but the current government has never used this section to advertise itself. I have now

approved the removal of that section from the handbook to ensure there is no confusion. Discussions did occur between Ministerial Services and the opposition regarding images in advertisements; however, no expenditure was disallowed purely on this aspect. The advertisements in question were all rejected because they were either shadow cabinet related, which is not payable under the handbook, or party political. I table more of that detail for the information of the House. We will not allow party political advertising to be paid for by the taxpayer.

Time expired.

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (2.46 pm): It gives me great pleasure to speak to Estimates Committee A report No. 2. We had the opportunity to closely scrutinise the portfolio areas of the Premier and Minister for Trade, the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport, and the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing. As I have stated in previous years, the estimates process gives the people of Queensland the chance to hear about budget initiatives and is the chance to hold the executive accountable for all expenditure.

The process was first started by the Goss Labor government in 1994 to ensure that government is open and accountable to the people of Queensland. I note that the Leader of the Opposition put in a statement of reservation and proceeded to whinge about the process. If he was not part of the best resourced yet laziest opposition in the history of the Queensland parliament, then he and his team would be able to ask relevant questions and scrutinise it clearly.

Under the National Party government leading up to and including the 1980s, there was no accountability process, there was no estimates committee process and there was no chance to adequately question ministers in parliament and especially not in question time. I am honoured to be a member of a government that has implemented and continued the principle of openness and accountability.

During the estimates process we were afforded the opportunity to look at the appropriation for the Queensland Audit Office, increased from \$4.118 million in 2004-05 to \$4.565 million in 2005-06. The key elements in the budget relating to the QAO include addressing the recommendations of the strategic review, completing development of an audit methodology tool set and undertaking a range of performance management system audits.

The accountability of the Queensland government is seen through the increased funding of the Crime and Misconduct Commission again this year and an increase for the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. The budget this year provides the funding over the next four years which will implement the Smart Queensland initiative. We are seeing significant funds—\$470 million—being allocated to innovation, smart classrooms, the smart explanation initiative, ethanol initiatives, new water initiatives and vocational education and training—a very important part of the strategy to increase the skills that we have in our young people today.

The South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan, which coordinates with the recently finished South East Queensland Regional Plan, sets out the expenditure that will mean Queensland gets the infrastructure it needs for our rapidly growing state—money for roads, education, health, the environment, electricity and other infrastructure that is needed.

I was very pleased with the Premier's pronouncement about the increased capital works spending in this budget, which is 32 per cent larger than last year's record \$6 billion. This \$8 billion budget includes \$2.83 billion in 2005-06 for road, rail, busways and port infrastructure and \$2.27 billion for energy projects. As a regional member, I was pleased to note that almost 60 per cent of these capital works are outside of Brisbane, with almost \$360 million for rural and regional roads.

Many speakers in today's debate have highlighted the many benefits that flow from this year's state budget, and rightly so. Queensland maintains its mantle as the engine room of economic growth in Australia, demonstrating again that Labor governments are good, trusted managers of our state finances. For the 10th successive year, our economy will outperform the nation. Economic growth in 2004-05 is estimated to be 4¼ per cent—more than double the two per cent growth estimated for the rest of the country.

As has been outlined by other speakers in the budget debate, this budget delivers the dual objectives of investing in the infrastructure to make our economy grow and, at the same time, providing the funds to support service delivery, particularly to Queenslanders in need of some extra help. Some other key measures in the budget include an unprecedented program of tax reform which will secure our competitiveness. Taxpayers in other states and territories paid on average 25 per cent more state tax than Queenslanders in 2005-06. There is an 8.4 per cent increase in the Health budget. As I mentioned before, there is a long-term plan for infrastructure development and comprehensive measures to assist the most disadvantaged people in our communities, including an additional \$180 million over four years for disability services.

The government has not forgotten its obligation to continue improving services, particularly for those most in need in our community. This is a good Labor budget with a good heart behind it. Our former Treasurer, Terry Mackenroth, deserves credit for crafting another budget. However, the unsung heroes of the budget process and the day-to-day work that ensures an efficient collection and

disbursement of the finances needed to deliver the works of government are our professional and efficient staff in Treasury and its various agencies. They, of course, do much more than just make sure that the books are balanced.

One area of Treasury that rarely gets a mention or is the subject of questioning at an estimates committee is the constructive steps that have been taken to streamline and refine taxation administration to make it easier for businesses to meet their obligations. We often hear about how difficult and time consuming it is for businesses to do their tax paperwork. A classic example has been the onerous requirements imposed by the federal government's GST returns. Queensland Treasury has developed and implemented a new revenue management system which will provide easier payment methods and modern business applications. The new revenue management system will be in addition to the changes made to the innovative business processes brought in by the Taxation Administration Act 2001. I commend the estimates committee process to the House.

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing) (2.51 pm): I note from the dissenting report that the shadow minister has again excelled himself as somebody in this process who does not know what is going on. I will answer the charges that he has made. With respect to the assumptions made in the report about the apparent lack of detailed information on projects managed by Project Services, the opposition spokesperson should recall that I indicated that there were more than 2,000 projects on the books with Project Services. It is unreasonable now and it was unreasonable then to expect me to provide information on all of these projects as this would be both time consuming and a waste of valuable departmental resources.

As I said at the time, I am prepared to provide any detail on any project that he wants. He should also be aware that the Auditor-General passes his beady eye over our books. In no small way the spokesperson's comments are reflective of the opposition's attitude towards the Auditor-General.

In relation to the financial performance of the department's business units, I agree that a number of them are experiencing difficulties. Blind Freddy can see that. Goprint faces challenges in that the print industry is by nature highly competitive and based on small margins. However, this government recognises that there is a need for a government printing operation to print the reserve matters that service the needs of this parliament—for example, the *Hansard*, legislation, electoral ballot papers and budget papers.

In relation to Q-Fleet, I have already commented in this parliament on other arrangements where government fleets have been outsourced to private sector interests. These arrangements are costing governments a fortune. For example, Western Australia was spending \$4 million a month on its fleet. Q-Fleet's performance as well as that of the overall industry is impacted by the current market for second-hand six cylinder vehicles. The government is employing a range of strategies to address this situation, such as a major transition from six to four cylinder vehicles, extending expiring vehicle leases and exploring various alternative modes for selling vehicles.

All business units have strategies in place to improve their performance. The bottom line is that the Leader of the Liberal Party and I have a philosophical difference of opinion—and I said this at the estimates—on the role of business units. Take, for example, the full sale of Telstra. The opposition has made it very clear that it would sell or wipe out the majority of business interests that currently exist in the Department of Public Works. This government would simply never do that.

In terms of the Department of Housing, the report asserts that the housing policy area is perilously close to collapse. This is a bit rich coming from a shadow minister who has not put one policy word together and an opposition that has not put one policy word together over eight years. I acknowledge that there is a continuing need to use creative ways to meet the demand for housing assistance, but we continue to do that against a background of federal government cutbacks and other issues such as poverty being driven by the Howard government.

We have recently endorsed a new strategic direction for the Department of Housing to ensure that housing assistance provided is well targeted to the housing needs and risks of clients for the duration of their need and operates in an integrated and coordinated way as one part of one social housing system. The Department of Housing is working hard to put these new strategies into place as soon as possible. In the meantime, it continues to assist people in housing need.

The department provides assistance to the major proportion of Queenslanders wait listed for public housing. Around 21,500 households on the waiting list have received some form of assistance from this department or this government. Overall, the department assists more than 240,000 Queenslanders annually.

The Community Renewal Program has never been stronger. The program has expanded to 10 zones across Queensland and involves increasing numbers of partners from government, business and the community sector and continues to build the community's capacity to generate improvements.

Finally, I just want to say that it is all too easy for people to criticise—and the shadow minister is an expert at it. He has shown over the years at these estimates committees that he is about as useful as a sombrero in a cyclone in terms of coming to grips with policy or providing any decent or sensible policy for taking this forward. The day that he can stand in this place and properly point to any policy that he

has ever made, that he has ever created, that he has ever thoughtfully put together is the day, as far as I am concerned, that he can afford to criticise this government in terms of what we are trying to do with housing people, Project Services, Q-Build or any of the extensive responsibilities that I as a minister have and that this government willingly takes on. The reality is that it is a very complex portfolio that requires a lot of attention to detail.

Report adopted.

Estimates Committee B

Report

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lee): Order! The question is—

That the report of Estimates Committee B be adopted.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (2.56 pm): Firstly, I congratulate the new Speaker, the Hon. Tony McGrady, the member for Mount Isa, on his appointment. I am pleased to address the House in relation to the Estimates Committee B hearing held on 6 July this year. Firstly, I would like to record my appreciation of the work and responses of the three ministers involved—the minister for the new portfolio of Child Safety, Mike Reynolds, the Minister for Police and Corrective Services, Judy Spence, and the former minister for state development and innovation, Tony McGrady. I commend the ministerial and departmental staff from each of the three portfolios for the highly detailed work undertaken in research and follow-up in preparation for the day's hearing. A diverse range of departmental activities were covered during the estimate's question time and the scrutiny of each portfolio was at a very high level.

I also thank the research staff and the research director, Rob McBride, for their enormous effort in coordinating the committee's work to ensure that everything ran smoothly on the day. Thanks also to all Parliamentary Service officers for their assistance at the hearing. Last but not least I would like to mention the work and conduct of the committee members from both sides of the House—Mr Michael Choi, Miss PK Croft, Mrs Liz Cunningham, Mrs Rosemary Menkens, Ms Barbara Stone and a special thanks to the deputy chair, Vaughan Johnson.

The estimates process is very important in ensuring accountability of government in a unicameral parliament. It complements the role of the Auditor-General and other accountability mechanisms that are built into the modern state and government instrumentalities that we now have in Queensland. The committee considered the proposed expenditure using the various budget documents along with written and verbal evidence from the relevant ministers and public officials.

The Department of Child Safety was established in February 2004 following the recommendations of the Crime and Misconduct Commission, CMC, report entitled *Protecting children: an inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care*. The department's key focus is in child protection activities. The 2005-06 budget provides for a 45.3 per cent increase in the department's operational budget of \$394.8 million.

Some of the issues raised were improving the skill base for up and coming child protection workers, individual case plans for children in care, education plans for children and young people in care, avenues for people who wish to make a complaint to receive further information from the department, training support for foster carers, the Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect system, case loads for child safety officers, notifications of child abuse and neglect, mental health disability support and education support services to children in care, early intervention and prevention strategies—an important aspect of child safety is to be able to act quickly in a crisis situation—and the implementation of the integrated client management information system, which is very important.

The Department of State Development and Innovation provides business and market development services as well as infrastructure in project facilitation. The 2005-06 budget provides for a 62.8 per cent increase in the department's operational budget to \$286.8 million. Some of the issues raised were the implementation of the government's coal infrastructure program of actions; the State Development and Innovation centres at Cairns, the Sunshine Coast, Springwood, Mackay, the Gold Coast and Brisbane; initiatives to encourage the participation of women in business; initiatives to assist developing knowledge based industries in regional Queensland; the PNG gas pipeline; and the Ethanol Industry Action Plan.

The Police and Corrective Services portfolio comprises the Department of Police, the Department of Corrective Services and the Prostitution Licensing Authority, a statutory body which reports to the minister. The QPS operating budget for 2005-06 was \$1.178 billion, an increase of \$132.748 million or 12.7 per cent over the adjusted 2004-05 budget. Some of the issues included the number of sworn officers, the establishment of the Office of Child Safety, funding for the processing of DNA crime samples at the John Tonge Centre, drug related samples as a proportion of the total number of cases at the John Tonge Centre, and supervision and investigation of registered offenders to ensure compliance with the child protection reporting act 2004. The Department of Corrective Services provides

correctional services, delivering containment, supervision and interventions for offenders. The committee looked at issues such as escapes from high security facilities, a survey of the gambling habits of offenders, the provision of DNA samples by offenders on post prison community based orders, the capacity of Queensland prison rehabilitation programs for sexual offenders, expansion of the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre and accommodation of prisoners according to risk. At a recent visit to Corrective Services—

Time expired.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (3.01 pm): I rise to speak in this debate on the Estimates Committee B report 2005 relating to the Department of Child Safety. Firstly, the Nationals and I have to state that we have serious concerns about the current state of the administration of the child safety department. These concerns have not been alleviated by the responses that the minister gave at the recent estimates committee. As detailed in my dissenting report, some of these concerns are as follows. The minister has failed to provide the committee with key performance data regarding the operation of the department. The government has failed to implement the recommendations of the Crime and Misconduct Commission *Protecting children* report that is currently due. There are ongoing complaints regarding the operation and culture of the department, and I also note the admission that management lacks access to key management data.

It was clearly identified by the CMC report that high case loads numbers for staff were impacting severely on the performance of the department, and this was acknowledged by the minister last year at the estimates committee when he said—

... significant work has already been undertaken to reduce the case loads of child safety officers from 32 towards a case load of 15. There are many areas that we now need to reform to ensure that those case loads go down to 15.

The minister went on to say—

What I am clearly indicating today is that we are driving it down and you can be assured that that will continue. I would say to you that over the next six months we will see that case load go down.

Twelve months ago the minister stated unequivocally that case loads would be reduced in line with this key CMC recommendation, yet we still have reports of case workers with up to 57 cases. Not only do we find that this CMC recommendation has been ignored but that the minister is this year blaming the department's workload for his inability to report on this lack of progress. Indeed, only one week after this year's estimates committee we saw departmental staff in Ipswich walk off the job in order to highlight the huge backlog of cases within the department and to register their concern at the risk this was placing children in.

I also note comments from the minister that no single case load measure exists. I understand this. I understand what he is saying, but could I also say that this goes against the recommendations as laid down by the CMC. We also heard last year the minister detail how important the new ICMS was going to be, and he said—

The very fact that we have a \$44 million integrated client management system going into place over three years shows that it is an ongoing task.

He also stated—

... when you look at record keeping and look at every government, irrespective of the political persuasion of governments, it has been an absolute disgrace.

However, how much of a disgrace is it though that 12 months down the track we still have no indication of when the ICMS will be in place? It is quite the opposite in fact. In answer to further questions this year, we are now told that due to costs of delivery alternative options are being explored. What are these options? The minister described it in 2004 as the centrepiece of the information renewal initiative and said it will provide improved and more accessible, accurate and complete information on children and young persons to allow more effective case management and case planning. I am sure it will if we ever see it in operation.

Departmental staff have told me how much this is needed, but they are also saying that it is a long, slow process. Why is it such a long, slow process? The minister has continually said that all of the recommendations of the CMC report will be implemented in accordance with the date set by that report. We are disappointed that this has not happened. These have not come into play in the time that they are due. The minister is either unable or unwilling to follow through on his undertaking with regard to some of the key recommendations from the CMC. He seems to consistently fail to deliver on these promises. He pleads for time and understanding in carrying out the reforms.

A very worrying trend is the number of representations received at my electorate office from people concerned about the handling of cases, and in many other electorate offices these numbers are continuing to increase. This is happening around the state and it is indicative of the problem we all face. That these concerns have been confirmed by outside authorities is not surprising and we can no longer give the department the benefit of the doubt. The opposition has provided an opportunity for bipartisan support for the implementation of the CMC recommendations, and we continue that support. However, I am concerned that the government is using this bipartisan support as a cover for its inability to deliver.

Time expired.

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (3.06 pm): Estimates Committee B examined the expenditure in the portfolios of State Development and Innovation, Police and Corrective Services and Child Safety. Firstly, I will speak on Police and Corrective Services. The Beattie Labor government has been improving community safety with more police on the streets, along with a tougher and smarter approach to crime prevention. This is demonstrated once again in this year's state budget with the 2005-06 record Police budget which is providing a 57 per cent capital works increase on last year's budget. The government is also funding an extra 228 new police positions. By September this year, the government will have met its commitment of 9,150 police officers and by September 2006 the community can look forward to 9,378 police officers in our state. This budget also has a strong emphasis on young people. The government is committed to reforming the child protection system, with funding for a further 50 Juvenile Aid Bureau detectives to respond to child protection issues. These 50 officers are in addition to the extra 50 Juvenile Aid Bureau officers funded last year, and that means an increase of more than 30 per cent.

Queensland was one of the first jurisdictions to sign up to the national child offender registration scheme which enables police to monitor registered child sex offenders, and already two offenders were charged for failing to comply with that register. This proves that the system is working. This is another resource that enables police to track offenders, so if they slip up they will be caught. The budget is giving police more support to deal with the growing issues of mental health. Up to 1,200 officers will receive specialist training under an initiative to establish mental health crisis intervention teams across the state. Police will be trained as first-response officers to improve the response of crisis situations involving people with mental health disabilities.

Crime continues to fall in key areas. This year's budget ensures that the Queensland Police Service is equipped to continue its fight against crime. The Beattie government is proud of its record of no escapes from secure custody. This is a budget that further boosts the capacity and security of Queensland's prisons with a total of \$52.2 million which will be spent this year on capital works, plant and equipment in Queensland's correctional centres. This is the first year of a massive investment over three years to fund the planning and construction of extra beds in our state prisons. This expenditure is vital to Queensland as it has experienced a 142 per cent increase in prisoner numbers since July 1993, and this is testimony to the good work done by the Queensland Police Service. However, the trend will be for the prisoner population to increase. It is expected that over the next 10 years there will be a 90 per cent increase in the prisoner population. This budget also focuses on the rehabilitation of prisoners.

With respect to the portfolio of Child Safety, I acknowledge the unprecedented 45 per cent increase in the operating budget. That represents an extra \$123 million. An amount of \$28 million supports dedicated professional staff and provides for 151 new permanent positions. Funding has been set aside for the major expansion of child safety officer accommodation statewide. This massive project will deliver 12 new safety service centres, two zonal offices and new service delivery hubs. This financial year will see a multiagency therapeutic services model that will greatly benefit hundreds of children and young people in care across the state.

As I said, I acknowledge the 45 per cent increase in funding for Child Safety. However, it is very unfortunate and sad that we have to spend that type of money on protecting children in our state. It will be a good day when we can say that we do not need a child safety minister or a department because children are safe, well looked after and happy.

The questioning of the former minister for state development and innovation revealed that there were some really exciting developments happening in Queensland. This is good news for the Queensland economy. Footlocker, IBM and Almax Aluminium are just a few of the well-known names in their respective industries that are creating opportunities and, importantly, jobs in Queensland. In 2004-05 Queensland created 140,000 new jobs, has accounted for 40 per cent of all new jobs nationally and has delivered the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years. The unemployment rate for May was 4.9 per cent. Queensland is experiencing an unprecedented growth in project developments. Access Economics states that Queensland has \$60 million worth of projects either under construction, committed or possibly under construction. We are certainly showing the world that Queensland is the place to do business. All of this means a continuation of good news for jobs and for our state's economy.

I want to take this opportunity to compliment the chairperson, the research director, the parliamentary staff and the departmental and ministerial staff on their efficient handling of all of the procedures involved. But the person I most want to thank is our former Treasurer, the Hon. Terry Mackenroth. I thank him for the budgets in the past years which have driven our state to being in the good economic state that it is now and have set us up for the future and for his wonderful achievements over 28 years—and they are too many for me to list. I am very proud that he was our Treasurer, but I am more proud that he is my friend. I wish Mary, Terry and his family all the best in his retirement.

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (3.11 pm): Today I am pleased to speak to the report of Estimates Committee B. I also want to thank the committee as I had leave of the committee to ask questions. I wish to raise a few issues. One is that replies to questions on notice came in less than 24 hours prior to the scheduled time of the committee hearing. That is very unreasonable. I think we have to have a

better system—whether we start earlier or something—so that at least departments have the time to answer those questions and to get those answers back in time. It is just a total farce to receive a bundle of responses to questions on notice that one has to analyse the day before the hearing is scheduled. Some departments—in fact, quite a few departments—did not lodge their responses to questions until 12 hours later. That process needs to be improved. Also, this year only 90 minutes was set aside for questioning of the department of state development. I request that next year the committee set aside at least two or 2½ hours for questioning of that department, which is the time for questioning allocated for most of the other departments.

An important point that arose out of this particular estimates committee hearing was the amount of money that is being allocated this year for business grants. It is almost double what it was last year—about \$77 million last year. This year it was \$152 million. It was less the previous year and very much less the previous year. So there is a vast increase in the amount of funds that are being allocated to business grants. Therefore, there needs to be more scrutiny of those grants. Are they appropriate and what will be the end benefit of those grants to the taxpayer? We found that 13 firms that had received grants either had subsequently been placed into liquidation or an administrator had been appointed. I ask: did the state receive any benefit through the allocation of grants to those companies? Is there a better process by which these companies can be analysed when they make their applications? I appreciate that not every business is a winner. It is a tough world out there, but it is important that we make sure that we do it right.

We have to analyse these matters during the estimates committee hearings. One matter that we found out about during the estimates committee hearing was that two grants were given in the same financial year to a company. The Queensland Investment Corporation also happened to buy about \$3.2 million worth of shares in that company. Those shares were subsequently devalued. They would be lucky to be worth \$800,000 now. That is a dramatic reduction in the value of that company. So the company is being assisted with state government grants to help it increase its productivity and the QIC is buying shares in the company to boost it as well. There seems to be a bit of tick-tacking between the two. Yet the minister said that there was no relationship between what the QIC does and what the department of state development does. But there are also some linkages in relation to advisory boards. We need to examine these grants and make sure that everything is going as well as it should.

The Ministerial Portfolio Statement estimates the overall targets that businesses will achieve under the output titled Business and Marketing Development Services and Innovation Program. Yet when the minister was questioned on the matter he refused to take a question on notice relating to the terms, conditions and targets set for each of the companies, corporations or entities receiving state government support and assistance. The fact that the MPS makes glowing references to the number of jobs created, the expected output and the capital investment flowing from such assistance really makes a mockery of the minister's response. The MPS states that these are the wonderful things that we are achieving. Yet when I ask the minister how the department is estimating those wonderful things that are happening, I am told that it cannot put that information together. There seems to be a bit of guesswork going on there to help boost the MPS. I think the department has to explain these things better. A lot of taxpayers' money is going into that assistance and it certainly needs to be accountable.

The minister also failed to provide all the information that is required. Information about another company under the FIG program was not provided. Unfortunately, the minister is now the Speaker. So that put me in a very difficult situation. It gave me no joy personally to refer the Speaker to the privileges committee. I think we have a serious matter there.

Time expired.

Hon. MF REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (3.16 pm): For at-risk children and young people in Queensland, the Beattie government's 2005-06 budget is outstanding. This budget underwrites the government's very strong commitment to child protection in this state and will allow the Department of Child Safety to power ahead with its vital work. This record-breaking budget highlights the government's commitment to reform. In total, the department receives a significant 45 per cent increase in funding to take its 2005-06 operating budget to \$394 million—an extra \$123 million. Capital expenditure increases to a total of \$58.8 million.

The increased funding means more people, more child safety services, increased skills and strong links with community organisations, other government departments and learning institutions such as universities. As a result of these measures, there is a greater level of protection for Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people.

An extra \$28.8 million has been allocated to support dedicated professional staff and provide for an additional 151 new permanent positions. These additional positions plus the 318 people employed in the last financial year will help us to achieve reasonable workloads for all staff and ensure that each child gets the individual attention that they deserve.

Although I have appreciated the opposition's largely bipartisan approach to child protection thus far, of late I have become quite concerned that the opposition—and through its opposition spokesman again today—seems to be looking to score cheap political points, often at the expense of Queensland's

most vulnerable children and young people. The shadow minister has made some unfounded criticism of the department for what she calls the lack of indicative data on case loads, even after I went out of my way at the estimates committee hearing to explain how we are working to drive down those case loads. Case loads are being determined and will continue to be determined by taking into account the complexity of each individual case. Some cases by their very nature will take longer to deal with than others. That may not fit the opposition's agenda, but I will make no apologies for putting Queensland's children first.

The CMC acknowledged in its report that it had difficulty attempting to calculate workloads for child safety officers, and yet we are tackling this issue and will achieve reasonable workloads for all staff. I must say I am proud of the tremendous efforts of staff at this time of increasing notifications. Far from failing to implement the CMC recommendations—another absurd claim made by the opposition shadow spokesman today—we have almost reached the halfway mark. We have fully implemented 54 of the 110 recommendations and work is well advanced on the remaining reforms with two years still to go.

The opposition has made much of some time lines not being met with our information renewal initiative, but they fail to realise that the reform blueprint is a dynamic document. Indeed, we have brought forward some areas of reform and held back others as required for effective implementation. Importantly, the critical integrated client management system is on target for implementation next year.

The vital work of foster carers is recognised in this budget with planning for foster carers rising some 37 per cent. There is an extra \$25 million in capital funding over two years. This investment will support 38 projects delivering safe and secure workplaces including 12 new child safety service centres, two zonal offices, and new service delivery hubs at Normanton and Weipa. Greater attention is being focused on an increasingly skilled work force and the introduction of new systems and strategies for Department of Child Safety staff.

The implementation of structured decision making, new practice manuals and new training for staff and foster carers are already, I believe, making a big difference. Stronger links have been forged with higher education through child safety curriculum development and scholarships, and additional support programs have also been introduced.

Developing skills in other government agencies is also a high priority. Developments this year included a \$22.6 million program for a new multiagency therapeutic services model. This whole-of-government counselling model will greatly enhance the mental health and behaviour of children and young people with complex needs and it will benefit hundreds of children and young people in care across the state.

In summary, this is a child safety budget that the government, the department and the people of Queensland can be very proud of. It demonstrates the government's wholehearted attempt to provide greater protection to Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (3.21 pm): I rise today to support the report on Estimates Committee B. I want to put on record my support for the chair, the member for Mount Ommaney, Julie Attwood, and also other members of that committee. I congratulate Mrs Attwood on the professional way in which she always carries out that area of responsibility.

I have some reservations about some of the questions that were answered by the honourable Minister for Police and Corrective Services. The number of samples taken from crime scenes that are waiting to be processed at the John Tonge Centre continues to rise despite the budget allocation of \$3 million this year. It is concerning that 132 clandestine drug samples await testing, which is delaying the process of prosecution of those offenders. This is giving Queensland the name of the amphetamine capital of Australia. This is an area of concern to Queensland police. Whilst we are not in the business of implicating the police, they have certainly been frustrated by this lack of response at the John Tonge Centre. I know myself that other jurisdictions around the country are suffering the same fate. When we see the processing of DNA samples taking so long, this delay in trying to solve crimes in this state certainly falls far from the mark.

Another issue that concerned me was the minister's announcement that civilians will be employed to assist the State Drug Investigation Group in its work at drug scenes. This concerning revelation indicates that the government is not willing to provide sufficient police officers and resources to the group to undertake its important investigations. I would have thought that this was a police role. Regardless of the crime, I would have thought hands-on police who are specifically trained for that area of investigation would be needed.

Another issue is the minister's blase attitude towards the purchase of a permanent helicopter. From the outset I say that I have spoken with numerous police officers around the state and not one has told me that it would not play an important role in their asset base and in the apprehension of criminals. It would certainly play an important role in making the Police Service a more secure place for its officers.

The commissioner has also recommended the purchase of another fixed-wing aircraft. I believe there is also the need for helicopters—one based in the north but, more importantly, one based in the south. In response to that the minister states that they have access to State Emergency Services

helicopters and other helicopters, but that is not the point. There needs to be a dedicated helicopter that is manned with the appropriate professionals as needed in that particular pursuit or investigation. It also needs to be fully equipped and on stand-by at all times for the police surveillance work it has been destined to do. I believe that is a paramount issue and one that needs to be addressed. That process needs to be expedited.

I turn now to an issue in my own electorate in which the minister has failed to commit to the time frame. We have seen capital programs for police stations in the budget going back two years. We see the one in the Longreach district, which was claimed to be the dump of the month in which the single persons' quarters were located at one end. There were young men and women living in those quarters in almost Third World standards in comparison to other stations. I am disappointed to see that the Longreach station is not on the forward plan. As the minister said, there are other important issues to address at the moment. It is very disappointing to see that it has been pushed back when \$200,000 was allocated in the budget a couple of years ago towards that project.

There are many issues in relation to corrections, and I know the minister canvassed some of those in the House yesterday. It is extremely alarming for the safety of our children that an unacceptable number of prisoners convicted for serious sexual offences over the last two years have completed a custodial sentence. Only 23 per cent had participated in sexual offender treatment programs. I find this very concerning. As we have heard previous speakers say—and we just heard the Minister for Child Safety speak about the money in his budget to put programs in place to address the two or three per cent of the state's children who are affected—these offenders should stay in prison until such time as they complete those programs. There is no room for them in society. When it comes to our children, that is not negotiable.

Time expired.

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (3.26 pm): At the outset, I say that it was my privilege and pleasure to be part of Estimates Committee B. In my opinion all of the participants on the committee conducted themselves with bipartisan professionalism, dignity and good humour. I first of all thank the chair, the honourable member for Mount Ommaney, Julie Attwood, for the way that she conducted the committee and for her dedication and her commitment to ensuring that all of the information got to the committee members on time. I would also like to thank the other committee members for their contributions and the way that they conducted the hearing.

Over the last four years or so I have always involved myself in the estimates committee that deals with State Development as I have a very keen interest in the business and development of our great state. It is great news to know that State Development is doing wonderful things in our state. The former department of state development and innovation provides business and market development services as well as infrastructure and project facilitation. It is great to know that the 2005-06 budget provides for a 62 per cent increase in the departmental operational budget.

Many wonderful initiatives are proposed by the department, and some of them are certainly worth mentioning today. There has been an allocation of \$128 million for the Innovation Building Fund as well as \$60 million over four years for the Innovation Projects Fund. There is also \$12 million for the Innovation Skills Fund over four years and \$20 million for the Smart State Research Facilities Fund. As honourable members can see, this is a clear initiative to push forward the Smart State agenda.

Because I was a small business operator before I entered parliament, my passion is small business. Clearly, that is also a major focus of State Development in the past. It is wonderful news to hear that the new minister for small business, the Hon. Chris Cummins, has been engaged to manage the small business portfolio of Queensland. Even though they are all business, at times small business has conflicting interests with the big end of town. I believe that it is timely and fitting that a separate minister be engaged to manage the small business sector of our state.

Small business is the backbone of the Queensland economy. As many members would realise, more than 96 per cent of businesses in Queensland are small businesses. They are our employers, our innovators, our wealth creators and our future. In fact, over half of all Queenslanders working in private enterprise are working in small businesses. Small businesses are often driven by entrepreneurs, people with vision who want to work for themselves and succeed. It is that energy and willingness to think outside the square most of the time that has made so many small businesses in Queensland so successful, and that has also driven the Smart State agenda.

State Development in the past has had many interesting programs for small businesses, and I think a few of them are worth mentioning today. The Small Business Accelerator Program, the Regional Business Development Scheme, as well as the Queensland Industry Development Scheme are all part of this government's push for a Smart State agenda. I was the chair of the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council, which was established in 1999. It is a very important grassroots link between the government and the small business community. It identifies and investigates the issues impacting upon small business and provides policy advice, recommendations and practical solutions to government. Many good research projects have been undertaken by the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council, all members of which are there on a volunteer basis. Some of the achievements of the council

are a report on home based business and research on the Trade Practices Act as well as the public insurance liability scheme. In closing, I take this opportunity to thank the research director, Rob McBride, and the executive assistant, Stephanie Catlin, for their support on the committee.

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (3.31 pm): Estimates Committee B covers the awkward area of foster parents. This is probably one of the most unbelievable departments to run, especially when trying to have a very definite policy because most of the decisions that the minister has to make are anomalous to the system, and that makes it very difficult.

I ask the minister, who has unfortunately just left the chamber, whether there has been a change in the department's policy on foster parents. I will give an example. I have been approached by a long-term foster parent—she has had foster children for a long time, over 20 years—who, with her partner, has had many foster children of all ages, starting from a few months old through to 12, 13 and even older. In this situation the partner was guilty of committing an inappropriate offence. Fortunately, the lady moved that partner out of the home immediately. The difficulty is that the department has made a decision to remove those children immediately from that foster parent.

This is exactly the same as a domestic violence situation where if the partner is guilty the police remove the partner, with the priority being for the children to stay and not be upset at all. In this situation the lady's partner was the one who committed the inappropriate behaviour. If the department were to stick with its domestic violence policy, those children would have remained with the foster mother. The department, I believe, has judged her to be a very appropriate foster care parent over many years. My question to the department is: has there been a definite change in policy? Are the children the priority? Should the children be the priority and be left with the foster mother, particularly when the partner has moved out of the house?

What has happened in this situation is that four foster children who have been with their foster mother long term have been moved out of the house. From what I hear—and there are always different sides to every story—they are having difficulties in the new foster home that they have been placed in. They are distraught and I believe that they need attention. I believe that the foster mother also needs attention and support. My other question to the department is: just exactly what support does the department provide to a mother who has been a long-term foster parent, for well over 20 years, when all of a sudden her foster children are taken away from her, she will not provide that foster support again and she is distraught because she has had indirect contact with those children who say that they are extremely unhappy?

My second question to the minister for police is about the Beaudesert police station, and I know from reading newspaper articles that she has been to Beaudesert and has seen the police station there. When we were in government I saw the police capital works program, and Beaudesert was on the capital works program for a new police station for 2005. My question to the minister is: has there been a definite change in the capital works program? Has the minister changed the capital works program so that Beaudesert is not on the capital works program? Why would Beaudesert have been taken off the program? It is a growing area which needs 24-hour policing. Areas like Kooralbyn need to be served with 24-hour policing. Whilst Jimboomba has a magnificent police station, Beaudesert clearly cannot provide 24-hour policing unless it is serviced by police travelling from either Beenleigh or Jimboomba. Beaudesert has a very poor police station as far as size is concerned. There is absolutely no possibility of Beaudesert or Kooralbyn receiving 24-hour policing if it has a police station that cannot have many police officers. Beaudesert was on the capital works program for a long time for a police station to be completed in 2005.

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (3.36 pm): The 2005 budget has been a good budget for both of my departments. The police budget of \$1.178 billion is a \$132 million increase or a 12.7 per cent increase on the budget of last year. In the police budget we have a commitment to employ an additional 228 officers this year. That builds on the strong growth we have seen in the last seven years under the Beattie government. By next month we will have in excess of 9,100 police officers in the state. When we were elected in 1998 there were only 6,800 police officers. We went to the election with a commitment to keep the police to population ratio above the national average, and we expect that the additional 228 officers will enable us to do that. In this year's budget we have also allocated money for 50 new juvenile aid officers. That builds on the 50 juvenile aid officers we added to last year's budget and acknowledges the tough work that our juvenile aid officers do, particularly with their increasing workload in the child protection areas.

There is also good news in the police capital works budget, which we have increased by 50 per cent this year. This will enable us to refurbish and build new police stations around the state. The member for Beaudesert just spoke about the Beaudesert police station. I say to the member for Beaudesert that, yes, I have visited that police station. I have no doubt that in time it will be a priority of government to build a new police station at Beaudesert. However, Beaudesert is not the growth area of the state at this point in time. We have more important pressures on our police stations other than Beaudesert in 2005, and when those population pressures reach Beaudesert I have no doubt that we will want to allocate a new police station to that site.

It is also a good news budget for the Department of Corrective Services, with \$52.2 million being spent this year and \$231 million allocated over the next three years for capital investment in Corrective Services. What we will be doing with this money is building new beds around the state. We know that we will have at least 90 per cent growth in our prisoner population in the next 10 years because we have had 132 per cent growth in the last 10 years, and these new beds must be built to plan for the future. The fact that we have to build more prison beds in the state is not anything to be too proud about. That is why we are also working on a project called 'Managing growth in prisoner numbers'. We will do all we can to try to reduce prisoner numbers. But even in doing that we know that we are going to experience this growth, and it is a sound and proper course of events that the government is planning for that future growth.

In my remaining time available I would like to address a couple of the issues raised by the shadow minister. He raised concerns in his statement of reservations about the new positions, the civilianised positions that will be helping the drug squad. I say to the member for Gregory that we have been civilianising many positions in the Queensland Police Service since the early 1990s. In fact, we have the highest civilianised Police Service of any state in Australia. What does this mean? It means that we have more police officers than any other state and they have more support staff than any other state. He should be very happy about that; I know that our police are.

We will continue to civilianise positions. In fact, we have a commitment to civilianise another 500 positions over the next few years. I think that is what the general public want. They want police officers on the beat and in their streets, and police officers want their colleagues in the cars and on the streets next to them. They do not want police officers in positions which civilians could rightly fill. We will continue with this process of civilianisation. I will take my directions from the Police Service and the police union, which is sitting down with the service, talking about these issues and identifying which positions could be civilianised. I think that is a very sensible course of action.

Finally, in the very short time allotted to me I would like to say a little bit about the helicopter, because the opposition is obsessed with this concept of a helicopter. Recently we saw a very tragic aeroplane accident at Lockhart River. The police SERT team was there immediately, being dropped down to that scene by a helicopter. I ask opposition members: if we owned a helicopter in Brisbane, would it have been in Cairns to go to Lockhart River? It certainly would not. How did the police get access to a helicopter? Like they always do, because the State Emergency Service owns a range of helicopters around the state and they are accessible by police any time police need them. Would the police like a helicopter? Yes, someday they think it would be a nice thing to have, but at the moment they acknowledge that they have access to our Emergency Services helicopters and it is not their highest priority.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.41 pm): In rising to speak to the Estimates Committee B report, I place on the record my appreciation of the committee chairmen and other committee members for the approach taken to the estimates committee hearings.

I would like to speak to various elements of the report. I am looking forward to working with the new minister for state development and innovation, particularly because I believe there are some matters that have been longstanding and several of those are in my electorate. They are more localised and may benefit from a set of fresh eyes. I certainly look forward to talking with her about those matters. The Department of State Development in my area was particularly politically sensitive—I cannot think of another word—and I look forward to its working more objectively in terms of the relationship not only with my office but also with others in furthering the development potential of our region.

In terms of small business, quite a number of individuals have come to my electorate—and I am sure they do to other members' electorates—with wonderful ideas of new business and opportunities and they are looking for small seed funds or some start-up capital to get their projects off the ground. I usually refer them to State Development because that is the area of government that is supposed to foster and encourage small business as well as larger businesses. They come back to me subsequently usually with not a great deal of encouragement in terms of their ability to access funding. So I would ask that the budget be looked at in order that more small grants can be made available to those individuals or partnerships who have tremendously inventive ideas but lack the wherewithal to get them started.

We have had a couple of successes with the Coconets and also with some of the medical equipment that has been designed and patented by a gentleman who now lives in the south-east corner but who once lived in Gladstone. That couple predominantly made it without help from the government. However, if we are purporting to encourage the establishment of new and small business and industry, they sometimes need that hand up.

In relation to Police and Corrective Services, we held an interesting discussion on the requirement for sexual offenders to undertake counselling courses and rehabilitation programs. The minister at the time said words to the effect that to obligate offenders in that situation will not gain them any great improvement. If they do not want to recognise their problems and attempt to rehabilitate themselves, there is no point forcing them to be in a program. I have thought since that, rightly or wrongly—and it may be a wrong equation—we have children who often say, 'I don't want to go to school.' We know that they will learn something positive from their time at school and we require them to

attend school, and I wonder if some of those sexual offenders may unwittingly improve themselves if they are required to undertake those programs. I was concerned to hear that prisoners with a custodial sentence of fewer than two years are not able to access those programs, and I look forward to that being reviewed.

We have police stations throughout my electorate. Tannum Sands is the one that has been in the closest focus more recently. It is a very fast-growing community and it is not a 24-hour station. Certainly 100 per cent of the community down there would like to see that station expand to a 24-hour service. It has accommodation now. The previous minister for police opened up a renovated police station at Tannum Sands that now has the room to facilitate a 24-hour station.

I also raised during the estimates hearing concern about the overuse of strip searching for relatively minor crimes. I know the response is that police are looking for materials that could be a danger either to themselves as officers or to the prisoner. However, I do believe that caution has to be exercised so that strip searching is not used as a routine procedure rather than the purpose for which it was brought in, and that is those circumstances where genuine concerns are held.

I do not have a lot of time left to deal with child safety, yet it is one of the really important areas of government responsibility. I want to raise the issue of case loads for safety officers and the inability to give statistical information. It was stated by the minister even today that it is difficult to ascertain those statistics because each case differs. It is then almost contradictory to say, 'But we're working toward officers having appropriate workloads.' We need those statistics to project future staffing levels.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (3.46 pm): I am pleased to be able to make a contribution to the consideration of the report of Estimates Committee B. In particular, I want to make some comments regarding the department of state development and within that department one particular issue, and that is the issue of the western hardwood timber industry. It is an issue that I have spoken about many times in this House and it was an issue that the shadow minister pursued at the estimates committee hearings.

As I have indicated to the House before, it is a particularly important issue for the electorate that I represent and for the communities that I represent because the timber industry in that region plays a very important part in forming an economic base for a range of communities including Monto, Eidsvold, Theodore, Mundubbera and Wandoan—very important communities within my electorate.

For some years now we have struggled with the uncertainty of the government's intention in regard to the western hardwood forests, and it is worth reiterating that we are talking about large areas of forestry land that were set aside when these areas were settled for the long-term sustainable production of timber. Those areas have been managed for the long-term sustainable production of timber and managed very well by the forestry department over many years. Most of those areas have been harvested at least once, some of them twice, and on a progressive, rolling, harvesting regime that has proven to be sustainable in the long term.

It is therefore absolutely ludicrous for the government to even be considering closing down the timber industry in those areas. It will achieve nothing in terms of a better environmental outcome. I fear that it will actually make the environmental outcome worse as the timber industry is forced out of those forests and they become susceptible to wildfires and the sort of destruction that we have seen in the Snowy Mountains and in the southern parts of Canberra.

It is an issue that causes a lot of anger and frustration amongst people who understand and know the bush; people who understand and know the effect that the locking up of these areas is going to have. It is not just the impact on people's jobs; it is the impact on the whole community. In a small community, as I have said many times in this House, every job is important and every job is connected to the community's future. Once jobs start to go in a community it has a snowballing effect. It has an ongoing, rolling effect which means that the numbers of children at the school are reduced and the community loses teachers. The small businesses lose business and therefore staff lose their jobs. It very quickly begins to threaten the whole fabric of the community.

It is particularly important in towns like Eidsvold where the timber industry is very much the mainstay. In Eidsvold, along with Theodore, we have the ridiculous situation in which the government actually bought the timber mills, as part of its deal with Boral, to lock up the areas in the south-east Queensland bioregion. The government actually bought the timber mills. I spent a lot of time making representations to the then minister, Jim Elder, to ensure that the government onsold those timber mills to commercial operators. Now, two or three years down the track, those commercial operators are faced with the threatened closure of those mills because of another government decision.

There is room within the western hardwood zone for a sustainable timber industry and protection of environmental values as well. Just as those two things have coexisted for the last 100 years, they can coexist into the future. If government proceeds with the plan as it has been put forward, the economic outcomes will certainly be worse but the environmental outcomes for those areas of land will be worse. As the timber industry and the grazing industry are forced out of those areas, they will become time bombs that will be susceptible to wildfires that will inevitably destroy those forests to an extent that nobody wants to see happen.

It is a situation where commonsense needs to prevail, and some scientific basis needs to be used for decision making rather than the emotive, politically driven, slogan type decision making that has been used in the past.

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Minister for Finance and Minister for State Development, Trade and Innovation) (3.52 pm): It is a pleasure for me to rise and speak in response to the report tabled by Estimate Committee B. I thank the committee for its examination of the expenditure of the State Development and Innovation portfolio, and for its recommendation that the proposed expenditure be agreed to without amendment by the Legislative Assembly.

Under the new ministry of Finance, State Development, Trade and Innovation, Queensland's economy is set to continue to thrive and flourish. As the minister appointed to drive this new portfolio, I am looking forward to immediately working hand in hand with Queensland business and industry to meet some of the key challenges that our state will face in the coming years. Appropriately, in this year's budget the state government has directed funds to help meet those key challenges, to increase our efforts to diversify our economy, and to create new businesses and industries which will provide wealth and jobs for Queenslanders. In addition, the budget is designed to create a new business environment with an increased emphasis on exports, to secure jobs for our future Queenslanders and to generate a self-perpetuating cycle of business development.

The 2005-06 budget represents an increase of 62.8 per cent in the department's operational budget of \$286.8 million. There are substantial new initiatives to continue our commitment to building Queensland as the Smart State of Australia. Key elements of those new initiatives include \$128 million for the Innovation Building Fund, \$60 million over four years for the Innovation Projects Fund, \$12 million over four years for the Innovation Skills Fund and an additional \$20 million for the Smart State Research Facilities Fund. It also includes \$7 million over two years for the Queensland scale-up manufacturing facility, \$7.3 million for the Ethanol Industry Action Plan over two years and \$18.8 million to implement the \$25 million western hardwoods plan.

During the estimates committee hearing in July, the former state development and innovation minister, Minister McGrady, canvassed a host of initiatives that continue to deliver good news for the Queensland economy. These included the PNG gas pipeline, the Ethanol Industry Action Plan, the feasibility for a Gold Coast cruise ship terminal and the Queensland cruise shipping industry in general, grants and incentives allocated by the department for the 2004-05 year, the BioStart Investment Fund, the ICT industry development initiatives, the Queensland Investment Incentives Scheme and the development of Queensland as a major aviation hub for the Asia-Pacific region.

These were just some of the topics that Minister McGrady responded to in answering questions from both government and non-government members. I note the statement of reservation subsequently lodged by the shadow minister for state development and innovation, which specifically makes four allegations in relation to the answers provided regarding the administration of Queensland government business grants schemes. The statement alleges that in relation to grant recipients—one, due diligence processes are unsatisfactory; two, pecuniary interest statements rely on an individual's honesty; three, processes that are used to determine whether an individual has received or applied for a grant from another department are not satisfactory; and, four, there are no satisfactory due diligence programs to determine if GOCs have invested in a firm applying for a grant.

Let me address these points in turn. Firstly, the department has a detailed due diligence process in place designed to review all applications for financial assistance taking into account the risk profile of the project, the applicant and the industry. Due diligence is undertaken to cover the usual business risk appropriate to the circumstances. For larger grants, and consistent with the risk profile, it is a requirement of the agreement that the grant recipient must comply with all the legislative requirements for the term of the project. Secondly, the routine registration of personal interests by senior executive officers and employees in sensitive positions provides an effective means of protecting the integrity of an agency and individual officers. Thirdly, the current applications for financial assistance ask for information on any assistance received from other government departments on the respective project. Finally, payment to grant recipients is subject to meeting performance based obligations and milestones.

Measures are put in place by the department to protect the state's interest and may include the use of bank guarantees and making payment only as a reimbursement after the company has demonstrated compliance. The guidelines do not discriminate on the composition of the company's owners, including any shareholding by a GOC such as QIC, which is an independent investor, undertakes its own analysis and is responsible for its own investment decisions.

I would also like to remind the House of two key announcements that were made during the estimates hearing. My colleague Minister McGrady announced that Foot Locker, one of the world's leading retailers of athletic footwear and apparel, will establish its Asia-Pacific headquarters at Murarrie in Brisbane. That is good news. The \$15 million expansion by Almax Aluminium of its Lytton premises was also announced. These two developments are just an indication of what is ahead for our state.

Some 140,000 new jobs were created in Queensland last year. That accounts for 40 per cent of all jobs created nationally. Our economic growth is forecast to be 4.25 per cent for the same 2004-05 period, which is more than double the estimated national growth. When one considers those two facts, it is no wonder that Queensland is a sought after business location.

Report adopted.

Estimates Committee C

Report

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order! The question is—

That the report of Estimates Committee C be adopted.

Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (3.57 pm): I was pleased to chair Estimates Committee C, which examined the portfolios of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and Education and the Arts. Indeed, it was a privilege to do so. Three years ago I chaired the same committee. As that time passed, I was able to see the real progress and development of the Smart State's key policy priorities.

These portfolios encapsulate the Education and Training Reforms for the Future, which are now in their third year of implementation. While the Education portfolio carries the bulk of the reform agenda, the vocational education and training and employment portfolios are also a vital component in an agenda that is shaping the future generation of Queenslanders and putting them on the front foot in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

Queensland is enjoying its lowest unemployment level in three decades. While the members opposite and the federal government try to give credit to the Howard and Costello regime for this, they fail to recognise in doing so that Queensland has the lowest unemployment rate in the country while experiencing the highest growth and so the greatest demand for employment, and that it is this state which, throughout the term of the Beattie government, has become the economic engine room of the nation.

There is no doubt that Queensland, like the rest of the nation, faces some real challenges in the future, not least of which is a current and looming skills shortage in some traditional trades and service industries. The estimates committee heard some detail regarding the \$812.9 million allocated to vocational education and training services to respond to enterprise skills and to meet the need for skilled workers in crucial industry sectors. TAFE Queensland's 15 institutes in 108 locations across the state are playing an increasingly important role in the provision of skills for Queenslanders, and they train 78 per cent of all apprentices in the traditional trades.

It concerns me greatly—and it should concern every member of this House, particularly members representing regional and rural areas—that the federal government's response to the national skills shortage is to duplicate the activity and training provided by the state's TAFE institutes by developing new technical colleges rather than putting that funding into supporting and expanding the existing institutes. However, I think it is typical of a federal government that is hell-bent on undermining the ability of the states to respond to their own unique individual circumstances. There is no greater example of that than the family- and job-destroying federal industrial relations agenda that Prime Minister Howard is trying to ram through now that he has achieved his Holy Grail: control of the Senate. Queensland enjoys the best industrial relations record in Australia regarding industrial action as well as some of the best pay and conditions for workers, considering in particular the challenges of distance and remoteness which many face. I fear that this will not be the case for long if John Howard gets his way.

Contrary to the claims of members of the Liberal and National parties, Queensland is leading the nation on the education front. They keep trying to make comparisons between Queensland's funding and funding interstate. That does not recognise Queensland's unique challenges and also the enormous growth that Queensland has constantly experienced in primary and secondary state school enrolments. This means that many schools are at capacity. In other states enrolments are steady or maybe dropping.

The estimates committee hearing of the arts portfolio was wide ranging and interesting, covering everything from public art to film production and the controversial *Big Brother* program. For the record, I am no fan of this program. I have had constituents raise concerns with me about the content that they have found offensive. From the very little I have seen or been told about it, I tend to agree with them. As I have had pointed out to me and I try to point out time and time again, the state government is not the regulator of the content; the federal government is. We are concerned about job creation, boosting the local economy and providing opportunities for local people involved in film and television to gain experience. That is why funding is made available to the production.

More importantly, the hearing covered in some detail the progress of the Education and Training Reforms for the Future and the roll-out of these reforms in the early, middle and senior phases of learning, in particular the prep year trials. These trials will identify and iron out some of those concerns

regarding the capital works program, teacher aide time and other issues. I know that the new minister, Rod Welford, will have his eye on those issues as he evaluates and considers the matters.

The previous minister, Anna Bligh, was particularly respected and revered throughout education circles. Everywhere I went she was spoken of very highly. I know that she will be spoken of very highly of in her portfolios of Deputy Premier, Minister for Finance and Minister for State Development, Trade and Innovation. It was a little disappointing, but not surprising, that the opposition members put in some statements of reservation and in particular that they raised objections to the estimates process but never discussed that in our pre-estimates meetings. Despite all that, I commend the report to the House.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (4.03 pm): Today I rise on behalf of my colleague the member for Hinchinbrook, the shadow minister for industrial relations, to make a contribution as he has leave from parliament. On his behalf I thank the chair of the committee, the member for Mudgeeraba, and her committee for the way the process was conducted.

There are a couple of issues that I want to reflect on. The shadow minister has made reference to the minister not answering certain questions in the area of industrial relations and other areas of his portfolio. He finds it very concerning that in other portfolio areas those questions were answered or passed on to other departmental staff. This is one area of concern.

The estimates process is about questioning the ministers and departments in detail on issues relevant to the budget. I believe the democratic process provides that we get outcomes and satisfactory answers. The minister's inability to provide details of the number of new training places budgeted for in the skills shortage area under the User Choice program was of concern. The User Choice program is intended to provide flexibility in training for employers and their apprentices and trainees. Without these details the opposition cannot be satisfied that the government is maintaining a commitment to new places under this program.

This program is very important. We have for too long seen an emphasis on young people going to university to gain some professional skills—whether it be in the area of medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, law or some such thing. Everybody seemed to set a high goal of doing some academic course through the university. The skills shortage we have today is due to the mentality that has existed for far too long.

There are many young men and women out there now who we are encouraging to do apprenticeships as carpenters, electricians or hairdressers. These people make the world work every day. It is absolutely paramount that we see the skills shortage addressed and encouraged, whether through the industrial relations area or through other training areas.

I want to make note of the number of young people we are losing to the mining conglomerates right across rural and regional Queensland. The big money is in the mines. A lot of these people do not need skills to go there. They learn to be miners, plant operators or whatever. We have to look with employers and the department to see how we can progress a program that will lock these young people into fulfilling their programs as apprentices and give some time to their employers, who put them through the process, so that they get some sort of return on their investment. I think that is paramount and I think out of courtesy that should have happened.

The other area that I want to touch on today and that is close to my heart is the minister's failure to commit long-term staff levels at the campuses of the new Australian Agricultural College Corporation. That will be crucial to ensuring local jobs and the continuation of the high standard of training provided by colleges in rural and regional Queensland. There has been a big cloud over these colleges for far too long. I have spoken with the minister about this on numerous occasions. He assures me that there is not going to be a lot of change in relation to the training of young people in agriculture.

I know that one of the areas of concern to the minister was interstate students coming into Queensland and taking advantage of our campuses. I believe that is an issue for the executive government to resolve. I am very anxious to see the structure of the new board and who the new director will be. I will be interested to see the representation on that board, where those people come from and their expertise and background. I have heard a couple of names mentioned for the new executive director. I hope that person will be fearless in their campaign to see that agricultural training is done in detail at these four campuses in question and that we do not see a TAFE institution evolve. We have seen a lot of failures in TAFE in Queensland over recent years. These agricultural campuses have had virtually a 99 to 100 per cent success rate of students and placements. I believe that reflects the calibre of the institution in question. That is paramount to the ongoing viability of our agricultural industries in Queensland.

Time expired.

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (4.08 pm): I rise this afternoon to join the debate on the report of Estimates Committee C. Firstly, I congratulate the chair of the committee, the honourable member for Mudgeeraba, Di Reilly, on her chairing of this estimates committee. Estimates Committee C reviewed the expenditure of two ministerial portfolios: Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and Education and the Arts.

During the examination of the portfolio of the minister for employment there was a lot of discussion of the federal industrial relations proposals. I would like to say that this was time well spent. I acknowledge the work done in our TAFE colleges across Queensland, particularly Moreton Institute of TAFE at both its Bayside and Mount Gravatt campuses. I stand before members a proud product of the TAFE process, having done my electrical training at the Eagle Farm TAFE college and some further police training at the Bayside campus of the Moreton Institute of TAFE.

During the discussion of the federal industrial relations proposal, we need to ask one important question: why? Why is the federal government doing this? Why when Queensland is leading the jobs growth compared to every other state in Australia? Why when Queensland is leading the economic growth compared to all of the other states in Australia? Why is the federal government doing this when Queensland has one of the lowest strike rates across the country? The federal government is unable to answer this, and I am concerned that the main driver for this is John Howard's ideological hatred of workers. John Howard hates people who work for a living. John Howard loves people with a silver spoon in their mouths, but he hates people who work for a living.

This legislation that John Howard is proposing aims to decrease workers' rights. There is a distinct power imbalance between the employer and the employee. I have spoken to many elderly people in my electorate about how their grandson or granddaughter will feel when, at the age of 17 or 18, they are looking for their first job out of school and they are sitting down with an employer trying to negotiate an Australian workplace agreement. I am going to say part of what the federal government says—that is, it is illegal to discriminate on the grounds of motherhood, on the grounds of religion and on a range of issues. However, there is a big difference between knowing it and proving it.

There are many good employers out there, but there are also many grubby employers. If a grubby employer threatens and intimidates a young worker into signing a below-standard Australian workplace agreement, there will only be two people in that room. The poor worker walks out of there with their signature on a piece of paper and then complains, 'But he threatened me. But the employer threatened me.' All the employer has to do is say, 'It wasn't me. I didn't say those words.' Despite the actions of that dodgy employer, the poor old worker will have no rights. The employee will not be able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that he or she was threatened by that employer.

Whilst it may be illegal to discriminate in a range of ways, the poor worker will not have the resources to prove their case. Therefore, the power imbalance is maintained, and this federal industrial relations system will allow workers to manipulate, to coerce and to threaten workers into signing agreements that will reduce public holidays and reduce their annual leave. Despite the fact that they might not be allowed to do it in law, the poor old worker will not be able to prove it. Knowing it and proving it are two different things. Every worker in Australia needs to be concerned, particularly those young employees just out of school who might not know their rights. They will too easily be able to be threatened and intimidated and unfortunately will not have the knowledge or in some cases the financial access to those appeal mechanisms that are in place, because John Howard is talking about introducing—

Time expired.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (4.13 pm): I rise with great joy in fact to speak about the Estimates Committee C report. I have listened very carefully to other members' points in their contributions to this debate. Now that the federal Liberal-National coalition looks to have a majority of one in the federal Senate or the house of review, we have seen members of the Labor Party saying that national democracy has been reduced to a dictatorship. I have heard that repeated often in the media. I ask the members here today: if a majority of one in an upper house of government can be called a dictatorship, then is not a government which has no house of review and a majority of 63 out of the 89 members in the lower house a dictatorship?

One of the estimates committee purposes is to serve as a de facto house of review, and I have seen or witnessed nothing in this year's estimates process that proves Queenslanders are not living in a dictatorship. In fact, Mr Beattie is nothing more than the uber Premier and he expects us all to bow down before him and his jackbooted political thugs and agree with their cover-ups and lies.

Mr MICKEL: I rise to a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker Croft. I think if you look at the standing orders you will find that debates should be conducted in an appropriate language and a manner befitting the House. I think those sorts of descriptions are demeaning to the honourable member who is making them, and they certainly do not accord with the appropriate language and manner of the House.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Croft): Order! I ask the member for Burnett to use parliamentary language and I now ask you to withdraw those comments.

Mr MESSENGER: Which particular comments?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I just ask the member to withdraw.

Mr MESSENGER: I withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, and I now ask the member for Burnett to return to his speech.

Mr MESSENGER: As we have seen, when that does not happen, they get very upset.

An important issue which was raised during the estimates committee was the asbestos threat to our children and teachers. The same stench that leaked from Peter Beattie's health department is now leaking from Peter Beattie's education department. This place has been told time and time again by Labor that there was no crisis in health in Queensland, there was no 'Dr Death'. The same excuses—the same cover-ups—that were made for 'Dr Death' are now being offered in explanation of the Peter Beattie asbestos crisis. I well remember the rhetoric from this Labor side of the House when faced with the truth: 'You're making it up. You're grandstanding. You're trying to build a political profile. No lives are being placed at risk. Trust us. Everything is just fine. There is no asbestos risk to students.'

Premier Peter Beattie announced in May this year that the government would replace more than 1,100 asbestos roofs at 370 state schools over the next 10 years at a cost of \$120 million. A very quick calculation shows that Peter Beattie thinks that the average cost of an asbestos roof replacement is approximately around \$109,000 and will remain \$109,000 for the next 10 years. I walked past Wavell Heights State School in Brisbane and I was told that the going price for an asbestos roof replacement there is approximately \$160,000, which means that, if that price does not rise, the \$120 million pledge by Labor will only replace around 750 roofs, 350 roofs short of the 1,100 target. I have not even factored in an increase in that cost due to inflation.

Disturbingly, I have recently been given information that asbestos is being left behind at the Wavell Heights school. Peter Beattie and Robert Schwarten's Q-Build are only doing half a job. Yes, the asbestos roof is being removed and replaced, but what about the asbestos lining on the eaves, the roof overhang or the soffit? Is that asbestos being removed and replaced? No! Can the remaining asbestos be damaged by cricket balls or if it is knocked, and will the remaining asbestos building products still pose a risk to Wavell Heights students? Yes. That is the simple answer. Why does the government not get some political will and increase the \$120 million to an amount that would do the job more quickly and there are sufficient resources left to—

Time expired.

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (4.18 pm): I rise in support of the report of Estimates Committee C that scrutinised the appropriation in the portfolios of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and Education and the Arts. I begin, Madam Deputy Speaker Croft, by congratulating the member for Mount Isa on his election as the Speaker of the House and ask that you convey that directly to him. Additionally, I note changes in the ministry since the meeting of the estimates committee and I welcome the member for Everton as the Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts.

Scrutiny of the estimates of the Department of Education and the Arts included the massive capital works program under way in education, funding the development of smart academies and the additional \$14 million committed to state and non-state schools for the Smart Classrooms initiative. I was also pleased to ask the minister about the Art Built-In project, a project that has created 1,012 jobs for artists and artworkers across the state. I take this opportunity to thank the former minister for education and the arts for her stewardship of these portfolios that represent a significant portion of the Queensland state budget.

In the brief opportunity I have today I will comment primarily on some of the issues raised in the scrutiny of the departments overseen by Minister Barton. The first item that must be commented on in relation to the Employment, Training and Industrial Relations portfolio is the commitment of more than \$900 million to training and employment and the continuation of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program. This program has delivered on the government's jobs, jobs, jobs campaign and has seen unemployment in Queensland fall to its lowest level in 20 years.

The appropriation contained in this budget continues to deliver jobs, jobs, jobs but also advances programs to deliver skills, skills, skills to Queensland's current and future workers. Government commitments in my electorate of Yeerongpilly indicate the success of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program. Since my election in February 2004, this program has provided almost \$900,000 in my electorate and assisted 234 people.

The government's commitment to skills development includes the construction of a new training facility in Acacia Ridge that will see the relocation of courses from Yeronga TAFE and targeted facilities and programs to address skill shortages. Although this site is not located in my electorate, the relocation of Yeronga TAFE courses will please many residents in the Yeronga area. People in the suburbs in my electorate will have ready access to this facility through public transport, particularly the rail line to the upgraded Coopers Plains and Banoon railway stations.

The committee also considered matters related to training in the construction industry and the success of the Building and Construction Training Industry Fund that has created more than 5,500 additional apprenticeships and traineeships in Queensland since 1999. This levy has enabled the establishment of specialist training centres and centres of excellence in high-priority industries. The Construction Training Centre in Salisbury in my electorate has benefited from this levy. It has developed

an excellent program for apprentices and trainees and also upskilled many people employed in the building and construction industry. I congratulate Rick Elliot and his team on the work they are doing to address skills shortages in an area in which the federal government is failing miserably.

The committee also addressed the references in the MPS to Queensland's level of industrial disputation and the strength of Queensland industrial relations system. The minister outlined historic low levels of industrial disputation in Queensland with a quarterly strike rate or days lost ratio of 4.3 working days per 1,000. This contrasts with industrial disputation under the National and Liberal party government, which presided over a staggering quarterly average strike rate of 26½ days per 1,000.

This government's Industrial Relations Act has brought in high levels of industrial harmony in the state, and the work of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission is delivering stable and fair industrial outcomes. State industrial systems like Queensland's work because they can respond rapidly, they are close to the action and they are based on fair outcomes. I ask members to contrast that system with the federal industrial relations system that governs Victoria and is failing that state with more than double Queensland's level of industrial disputation.

The problems in Victoria are a signal of what happens when a government takes an ideological approach to industrial relations. They send a loud message about the Howard government's intentions. The Howard government's proposed industrial relations system is based on ideological zeal. It is about trying to kill off organisations that have fought for and protected workers' rights in this country. If Howard succeeds he knows that he can reduce or take away paid annual leave, superannuation entitlements, parental and sick leave, casual and shift loadings, and a whole range of other workplace arrangements that have provided Australia's current standard of quality of life.

If anyone has any doubt about the motivations, they only have to consider one thing: the Howard government's plan to legislate to allow unfair dismissal. There are not many better examples of un-Australian behaviour than governments giving the economically strong the legislative power to treat the economically weak unfairly. The Howard government is going too far this time and Australians cannot afford to vote Liberal.

The scrutiny of the estimates of the department overseen by the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations demonstrates the need for Queensland to resist the Howard government's destruction of state industrial relations systems.

Time expired.

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (4.24 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate of the report of Estimates Committee C. I did not sit on this estimates committee, but as someone who has previously held the shadow portfolio of education I obviously still have a very keen interest in what is going on with the Education portfolio. I ceased being the shadow minister for education 18 months ago, but a lot of the things that I expressed concerns about then are still concerns now, particularly when it comes to the implementation of the full-time prep year. From memory, every member of this House has supported the theory of the full-time prep year, but there are significant concerns both within this House and among the general public about how that prep year is going to be implemented, how effective it is going to be and the cost that is associated with it.

Obviously, we have had significant concerns relayed to us about the up to 15 hours of teacher aide time. That is a matter that has been of concern ever since that proposal was put forward by the now previous minister for education. That is simply not going to be enough teacher aide time for an effective prep year and for the prep year to really live up to its expectations. During the election campaign the former minister made a commitment that a school could reallocate teacher aide time from its whole-of-school allocation to the prep year, but that is not acceptable because it is simply taking from one area of need to address another area of need. We need to make sure that the teacher aide time is sufficient for the implementation of the prep year, because if it is not it is going to be a lost opportunity.

The difference in age between children going to preschool and the starting age for the prep year is only six months. It is not a significant age difference. The requirements for children to attend preschool five days a fortnight are going to be the same for the full time prep year, but we do not have the same assistance from the teacher aides. I think that is going to be a real problem.

The other concern that has been raised is how effective the capital expenditure is going to be for providing prep facilities in all of the schools across Queensland, particularly for those schools that may have restricted facilities, that have a restricted number of classrooms or that do not have a preschool on campus. Those schools that have a preschool on campus are significantly down the track, but those facilities are going to have to be doubled in size when the prep year goes from a five-day fortnight to a 10-day fortnight. That is of concern.

The cost of this prep year has been underestimated by this government since the policy of introducing a prep year was first announced. Way back then it was going to be started in 2006 at a cost of \$200 million. During the last election campaign that blew out to starting in 2007 at a cost of \$500 million. I have to say that I think \$500 million is still significantly underestimating the cost for implementation.

One of the concerns I have is the sell-off of off-campus preschools to go into the funding for the implementation of the prep year. I have three preschools in my electorate that would be described as off-campus. One is the Drayton State School, which is located just across the road—and it is a very quiet road. I just could not for the life of me see why that preschool should be sold off, because it is a fantastic facility. I thank the former minister for her answer to a question on notice that I put to her at our last sitting of parliament. She has confirmed that Drayton preschool will not be sold off and that it will be able to continue as part of the Drayton State School. But the other two preschools in my electorate—one at Cecil Plains and one at Clifton—are still slated for sell-off. The former minister advised in her answer to my question on notice that that sell-off will not happen until extensive consultation has taken place with the community. I have repeatedly advised the community, particularly the school communities in those two towns, that they should make their views known to me so that I can relay them direct to Education Queensland and the minister. Those preschools are very significant facilities in those towns. For example, in Cecil Plains it is not only the preschool that uses that preschool facility; a kindergarten also uses them. What happens to the kindergarten when the preschool is sold off? Where is it going to go? What is it going to use for the provision of that service? All of those things have to be taken into consideration before the step is taken to sell off these facilities.

Another matter of concern is the design for the prep year classrooms. Someone who lives in my electorate is expert in this area in the independent school sector and has had a lot of experience. She has very real concerns that the design that has been put forward as the template is not a terrific design and that much better use could have been made of the facilities that are going to be provided to get the best educational outcomes for those students who will be participating in the prep year. We have to remember that it is a play based curriculum; it is not school based.

Time expired.

Ms STRUTHERS (Alger—ALP) (4.28 pm): I am very pleased to contribute to the debate of the report of Estimates Committee C in my new role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. We face major challenges in the area of fixing our skill shortages. The minister has some very clear and determined directions in which he is moving with his department to deal with that issue. We are dealing with the threat of a major devastation of our industrial relations system from the federal government's proposals. In that regard we are certainly doing a lot, as witnessed by the introduction of legislation in this House yesterday to try to deal with the issues proposed by the federal government.

There are a lot of initiatives in the training area. We are working closely with Education Queensland, particularly in one of the key areas of interest and that is the education and training reform agenda for the future. That is a critical area and I think it has been one of the most important areas of youth policy in the many years that I have been involved in government and public life. If we can give young people aged between 15 and 17 the best possible opportunities in life, the most flexible pathways and really match their interests, skills and needs to our industry needs and offer those flexible pathways, we will be going a long way to solving a lot of problems. It would solve not only our need for skilled young people in our work force but also some of the side effects of having young people out of the system which leads them to drugs, crime and other problems. It is certainly a very important agenda and it is great to see both departments working together closely on those issues.

Although Queensland is experiencing one of the lowest levels of unemployment in many decades—it is hovering at under five per cent—the government cannot be complacent. Over the last seven years of the Beattie government we have implemented one of the most innovative labour market support programs ever seen in Australia, and that is the BUC program, the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program.

Sadly, in 1996 when the Howard government was elected, what was one of the first things it did? It destroyed the labour market programs that the federal Labor government had introduced under our very clear Working Nation program of reform. \$4 billion worth of labour market programs were gone in a whim once Howard came to power in 1996. You cannot do that to people. People need a leg up into the work force. You cannot rely on the market itself to deliver to all people. Our BUC program, Breaking the Unemployment Cycle, has been a very important initiative and well funded at the state level. This year our budget continues to support a range of innovative programs through BUC.

The budget also contains around \$140 million directly for ETRF through Education Queensland, including \$18.8 million for the introduction of the government's specific learning or earning reforms in 2006. They have initially begun as pilot programs. There is a pilot program on the south side of Brisbane that covers my area. It has been a really useful way of getting the schools working more closely with industry and getting the TAFEs and others working more closely with schools. It is really good to see how well that has taken off in the Corinda district and out to Ipswich in my local area. I commend all of those people involved in that because it is setting a model for the state to follow in how well we can work together. Similarly, the member for Logan has in his area a very effective ETRF pilot program. I have been to Logan TAFE and other facilities in that area where people are—

Mr Mickel: You are welcome there any time.

Ms STRUTHERS: Thank you, Minister. I have been to Logan TAFE and other facilities in that area where people are working really well together and showing that the ETRF agenda can be a very good one for local areas, getting the best out of the existing resources and offering a lot of opportunities for young people.

A lot of people do have particular problems finding work through their own lack of educational skills, disability and other issues. One of the sad things about our work force is the attitude of some employers that people over 40 or 45—and many of us have reached those sorts of ages—are past their use-by date, and we certainly are not. There is plenty of petrol in the tank for all of us and that is the way employers should be seeing employees. If employees are over 40, they have not passed their use-by date. It is very important that we continue the program Experience Pays through our BUC suite of initiatives. I am pleased that in my local area some of our funded programs have been working particularly with those mature-age workers to try to improve community attitudes of employers. It is very important that we have programs that continue to do that. I am very pleased that we are committed to these programs and I urge their continuation.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (4.33 pm): I am pleased to participate in this debate on Estimates Committee C, particularly in the education area. I would like to take this opportunity to relay the concerns I and many other members have heard from teachers, parents and P&C committees about the introduction of the preparatory year and its ultimate cost. In the proceedings the minister stated quite openly—

I am unable to answer that question definitively because we have not finalised the building program.

This comment was certainly not designed to inspire confidence in those concerned teachers and parents. Despite not being able to give any detail at all on the final cost of this introduction, the minister has insisted that adequate planning has been undertaken.

Understandably, there is a great deal of concern and apprehension being expressed by parents of prospective preparatory students. To this effect, I would like to acknowledge the regional directors, particularly in my area, who are doing their very best to alleviate these concerns and provide assistance to these parents. I also acknowledge that the transitional years into the preparatory year are putting staff and the department under much extra pressure.

Teachers and P&C committees are also very concerned about the planned reduction in teacher aide hours with the introduction of the prep year in 2007. I have written to the minister on behalf of one particular P&C, and I thank her very much for her response. In this letter I detail the effects that the particular members of the P&C feel this reduction will have in the classroom. They fervently believe that the quality of care and education will greatly decrease as a result. The concern is felt by many other teachers and parents, particularly within my electorate of Burdekin and also across the state, that not only will the lack of adequate funding for teacher aides and other resources affect students' learning experiences; it will place unrealistic workloads on already overworked teachers.

The Teachers Union of Queensland is similarly worried and is calling for increased funding to cater for special needs students. It is asking the minister for increased funding so that all students receive the support they deserve: funding for more teacher aide time, more specialist staff, professional development and facilities and equipment. I have personally spoken with union representatives who have expressed their very serious concerns about the underresourcing. Numbers of special needs students seem to be on the increase, not on the decrease, and this puts a huge impost on staff and also causes a lot of stress. Further resources for behaviour management programs are also needed. There are some wonderfully innovative ideas out there among staff for behaviour management. I believe that giving them the ability to implement these would be a really good move within the department.

There are 34 schools within my electorate of Burdekin and all can and will be affected if the education department does continue to ignore or dismiss calls for better long-term planning. It did happen with Health and it can happen with Education. Asbestos dust within schools remains a major concern for parents and staff and students. However, I do note that the new minister is taking this situation seriously, and certainly the opposition will be monitoring the speed at which this is addressed. When it comes to the health and safety of our children, there certainly is no excuse.

The members of this parliament and the Queensland public have an honest expectation that the education department is being responsible in planning for the future education of our children. They and we also have a right to be able to determine that the health and welfare of teachers and students is not being compromised for budget-cutting purposes.

Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (4.37 pm): It is my pleasure to speak this afternoon in support of the report on Estimates Committee C on Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and Education and the Arts. Mr Deputy Speaker, firstly, I ask you to convey to the new Speaker my congratulations on his election to that high office. I express also my appreciation to the whip for this opportunity to speak in relation to Estimates Committee C. It is indeed a very strong report; it is comprehensive and more than passes the scrutiny that the estimates committee process applied to the budget portfolio areas covered by it.

The public policy areas of Education, Employment, Training and Industrial Relations are of paramount importance not only to Queensland but also to every Queenslanders and for generations to come. A key focus of my contribution will be on the important role that the Beattie Labor government is playing in relation to apprenticeships and training.

I want to acknowledge that there are obviously many important aspects of that portfolio area as well as within Education and the Arts that are worthy of attention. I will just mention a couple in the education area. For example, there is the important initiative that we are taking around the issue of healthy foods in schools and the strategy for implementing that. Of course there is also the preparatory year program, and the Beattie Labor government will go down in history as introducing this much-needed and very innovative program not only to put Queensland on an equal footing with the other states in Australia but also to give us a kick-start in leading the way in this area as we do in others throughout Australia.

Of particular value to me is the work that we are doing in this portfolio area on speech language therapy services. That is of great value to a number of my constituents whose children have had difficulties getting an adequate education because of the obstacle of poor speech.

The backdrop to apprenticeships and training in Queensland is our booming economy, which is leading the way. The unemployment rate of 4.6 per cent is the lowest since 1974-75 and is significantly lower than the national average. Employment growth is at about 2½ per cent per annum, which is significantly ahead of the national growth rate of 1¼ per cent. The state's economic growth of 4.25 per cent is significantly ahead of the national average.

Against that backdrop, we have an enormous skills shortage. This is a problem not only in Queensland's economy but also across the national economy. It is a problem that the Howard coalition government has failed to address in the nine years it has been in office. Figures released earlier this year about which I spoke in this House show that, when measured against the states' contributions to training and apprenticeships, the Howard government has a shortfall of \$830 million per annum in its contribution towards training in the national economy.

Queensland's record is well documented. The figures released at the end of the December quarter show that an estimated 69,900 apprentices and trainees were in training across the state. This is an increase of 2,800 on the previous year and is 21,300, or 43.8 per cent, higher than the number of trainees in the year 2000. The figures show that almost half of the apprentices and trainees in Queensland are undertaking trade related training, often in the construction, metals, engineering, automotive and hospitality industries. It is good news for Queensland because these are some of the industries in which we need to develop our skills base. Our policy is focused on ensuring that the most needed skills for our burgeoning economy will be addressed through Queensland state government initiatives to enable those skill shortages to be met.

As I intimated earlier, Queensland continues to lead the country not only in apprenticeships and training generally but also in school based apprenticeships and traineeships. In the quarter just gone, we have again set a record for the country. I commend the report to the House.

Time expired.

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (4.43 pm): Before I begin the substantive part of my speech, I place on the public record my appreciation and thanks to the staff of the departments of industrial relations, training and vocational education, as well as the staff and advisers from the department of education and the department of the arts.

The estimates process is a vitally important one. It gives members the opportunity to go through the Appropriation Bill with a fine-tooth comb. Without the staff and advisers this process would not be possible. I thank them for their assistance.

With regard to the process, as I mentioned last year there are some problems with the way in which ministers answer questions. While the opposition is happy to hear background information during the first part of an answer, it is unacceptable for a minister to simply not answer a question and use it as an opportunity to deliver a diatribe about a program that may have some vague relevance to the question. Many times during the process I asked a question and the minister would go off on a three-minute tangent, then loosely link it back at the last moment. In many cases, this prompted the question being asked again or reworded. This wastes the committee's valuable time. It has only one day to get through a great deal of material. By the time government members have put questions on a golf tee for the minister to hit for miles, actual scrutiny of the department occurs for only a short period of time—time that cannot afford to be wasted. In fact, in the words of the Labor Party's leader in the Senate just a couple of nights ago, everyone knows the dorothy dixer, that is—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the honourable member of relevance. He should address the matter before the House.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Everyone knows that the dorothy dixer—that is, the government asking the government a question—is not a measure of accountability; it is a farce. I do not often agree with Labor senators, but I could not agree more with Senator Evans on this point.

There are specific parts of the process that I would like to highlight. I will first refer to the time that was spent dealing with the Department of Industrial Relations. I was surprised and disappointed that the Minister for Industrial Relations could not answer a very simple question about the shared service provider Corporate Solutions Queensland. As I have stated in the statement of reservations, the purpose of this question was to give the committee an opportunity to find out if this particular regime was or was not working and if the new regime was more efficient than its existing counterpart. I cannot understand how a minister whose director-general is in charge of the shared service provider cannot answer a question and why he would clearly try to skirt the issue. To make matters worse, he even said that he was not ducking the issue but that it was a matter for the Treasurer to give a whole-of-government figure. The fact that these figures were unavailable and that the minister decided to deny the opportunity for scrutiny is not in the spirit or intended ambit of the estimates process. As I have said—and I will say it again—I was disappointed at the unprofessional and unacceptable answer to this question.

I was also disappointed by the response of the minister with regard to safety switches in schools. His view and the view of the government is letting down the children of Queensland. While there is some merit in spending half a million dollars on advertising the importance of safety switches in homes, there is a great need to spend some of that advertising money on protecting our teachers and children by putting safety switches into every classroom in Queensland.

I was similarly disappointed by the response from the former education minister with regard to asbestos dust testing. As it has turned out, the former education minister has misled the House on two occasions with regard to this issue. The bottom line is that the children of Queensland are not being treated fairly by this government. Its policies on safety in classrooms, including a lazy approach to asbestos testing, asbestos removal and implementation of safety switches, highlight its poor approach.

Again, I am pleased to have had the opportunity to participate in the estimates process. I thank all of the parliamentary and departmental staff who were involved. I am also honoured to have served on the committee as deputy chair. It was a great learning experience that I thank the committee for bestowing on me. I hope that next year ministers will be more willing to answer questions properly and fully. I look forward to some improvements in the policy areas that I have highlighted.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (4.46 pm): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee C. The issues of industrial relations and skills are important right across Queensland—all the more so with the recognition of our skills shortage. A number of members have spoken about the proposed national industrial relations system. A number of issues have arisen in my electorate in relation to the proposed industrial relations changes. It is really a very difficult situation because no legislation has yet been tabled federally. However, we have a lot of anecdotal information. A group came through Gladstone for a briefing. It gave notification of the actual meeting with a very short lead time. The turnout was quite small because of that lack of information.

A lot of anecdotal information exists about the proposed changes. If some of that information is true, I am not surprised that workers, particularly those in small businesses, are worried about the proposed differences that may occur in their working conditions. I look forward to the federal government actually putting a piece of paper on the table so that we can evaluate, with a high degree of accuracy, exactly what is proposed rather than relying on press releases and statements of intent by either the Prime Minister or the relevant minister.

I return to the skills issue. The skills shortages in Queensland and across Australia have been well documented. A lot of programs have been put in place to address those skill shortages. However, the information that I have been getting more recently about changes to the way in which training will be given under the RTO process gives rise to concern that it will be more and more difficult for people who are looking to achieve competencies, particularly in areas such as forklift driving, scaffolding, working on elevated platforms et cetera. It will be quite difficult for them. The theory part will be achievable through an RTO, but it is my understanding that they will be required to do their practical experience inside an established industry. I can see that being counterproductive in that there would be a number of workplaces that would not like to have people within their workplace not necessarily employed by them but specifically there to get workplace training.

The other area of difficulty I can see relates to those people who are unemployed who currently gain a number of qualifications in order to make themselves more attractive for employment. They are not going to have a workplace in which they can gain that experience. I do not know that there has been an accurate response to that problem, but I know that having a licence—a forklift licence, a rigger's licence or an elevated platform licence—is not a guarantee of a job. A person has to be suited to the workplace and experienced in temperament for the workplace—all of the broad spectrum of issues that are looked at when someone goes for a job. Making it more difficult for people who are unemployed to achieve those certificates—they can do the theory but they will not have a workplace in which they can gain their practical experience—or making it more unattractive for workplaces to bring in a non-experienced person to gain practical experience will exacerbate our skills shortage, not enhance the number of people who will have the skills to fill those vacancies.

I really believe that the NOHSC standards that are being drawn up now—and I believe that they will be run in tandem with the current situation until about mid-2007—need to be reviewed in terms of their practical application. They may be fine in theory, but there are some real practical problems in terms of addressing the skills shortages. I believe that as they currently stand they will make the skills shortage worse. They will make it more difficult for people who are currently unemployed to gain employment and make it more difficult for those who are employed who are trying to enhance their skills base. Those issues aside, I commend the Estimates Committee C report to the House.

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (4.51 pm): I did not participate in the hearing of Estimates Committee C. However, I support the report of the committee, which examined the proposed expenditure for the Department of Employment and Training, the Department of Industrial Relations and the Department of Education and the Arts. The committee considered the estimates referred to it by examining information contained in budget papers and ministerial portfolio statements, answers to prehearing questions on notice, oral evidence taken at the hearing, documents tabled at the hearing and answers to questions taken on notice at the hearing.

I will make one general observation on a point made in the statement of reservation by the member for Burnett and also referred to by him today. At dot point 3 he refers to 'the limited time available for the conduct of hearings for each department, thus limiting the capacity of the parliament to explore issues of concern to finality'. The inference, of course, is that he wants unlimited time. This is impractical and of course impossible. There must be some finality to the process.

It is interesting also that a member of the National Party should continually raise objections of this nature to the estimates committee process. He raised exactly the same issue word for word last year. Members will remember that the Nationals refused point blank to implement estimates committee hearings in order to make the government accountable and budget expenditure transparent. This was a real point of conflict between the Nationals and the Liberals in the days of the coalition government—fortunately, in the dim and distant past.

With regard to the 2005-06 budget for the Department of Employment and Training, \$911.7 million will be invested in jobs and training. I will not mention all the initiatives, but they include large amounts such as \$114.5 million for the User Choice program budget—an increase of 3.8 per cent—with a focus on improved access in thin market areas and new training places in traditional apprenticeships for the building, construction and engineering industries, a major driver of the Queensland economy.

There are also smaller but just as important amounts such as \$2.2 million for the mining centre of excellence. That, in partnership with the industry, will continue to build a skilled, flexible and innovative work force that sustains and grows the Queensland mining industry—a major export earner. Another important initiative is the \$9.4 million to enhance the department's maintenance program for TAFE institutes, an increase of \$4 million from 2004-05. This additional funding will provide improvement to the TAFE facilities and enhancement of learning environments throughout the TAFE network. This department contributes significantly to the unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent—the best in the country. This is at a time of record participation levels of 66.6 per cent.

In relation to the Education and the Arts budget, it is significant that \$455.1 million has been allocated to the Education capital works program. Additionally, there are other important initiatives such as a \$3.5 million allocation to provide laptops or personal computers for state school teachers. Asbestos issues were also considered including roof replacement, removal procedures, dust and air monitoring, and testing and signage regarding an asbestos materials register. It is pleasing that the new minister is carrying on and progressing the asbestos removal program of the previous minister.

I also note that the Southport State High School is scheduled to have one roof replaced in 2005-06—this financial year. Of course, the priority listing, which the Southport State High School falls into, is not the end of the matter and must be managed properly. When asbestos is removed, there must be no people on the premises and weather conditions must also be taken into account. The asbestos removal industry is small. For those reasons, it is difficult to schedule precise removal time frames, even with the best will and determination in the world. I commend the report to the House.

Report adopted.

Estimates Committee D

Report

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! The question is—

That the report be adopted.

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (4.56 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, as this is the first time that I have risen this sitting, I, too, wish to join colleagues in congratulating Mr Speaker on the attainment of high office and ask that you express those wishes to him.

I rise to support the report of Estimates Committee D in which the organisational units and portfolios of the Minister for Health, the Attorney-General and the Minister for Justice were examined. The committee held its public hearing on 8 July and, as the chair of that committee, I would like first of all to thank my fellow committee members—my deputy chair, the member for Cunningham, and the members for Whitsunday, Toowoomba North, Burleigh, Caloundra and Moggill—for the professional and congenial manner in which they conducted themselves during the consideration of the committee's proceedings.

Whilst acknowledging that I chaired what was possibly a contentious estimates committee for 2005, I would like to bring to the House's attention that at all times respect for each other's views and the decisions of the committee were retained by all members of the committee and by visiting members, and I commend honourable members for that. I would also like to thank both ministers Nuttall and Welford and their departmental and ministerial staff for their earnest preparation, diligence and attendance during the committee's deliberations.

Estimate committee hearings are often onerous exercises for ministers and departments that must continue to deal with the usual business of the busy portfolios that they oversee. I would also like to thank committee staff and parliamentary staff for their efforts during the committee's deliberations, in particular Ms Renee Easten, the research director, and Ms Carolyn Heffernan, the executive assistant, for their patience and hard work on behalf of the committee and the parliament.

The budget consideration for the Minister for Health sets out a record appropriation for Health of nearly \$3.25 billion for 2005 to provide for comprehensive health care services for Queenslanders. The depth and breadth of information given by the Minister for Health in response to government questions demonstrated the extensive range of services that Queensland Health, in particular, is required to provide each year.

The capacity of Queensland Health to provide all health services for all Queenslanders is an enormous challenge. It is one that is tested further every year. It is tested with each advance in medical nursing and health science that becomes available because, quite frankly, new technology is often very expensive and is a huge pressure on the Health budget. It is tested resource-wise with workload pressure on available skilled practitioners in medicine, nursing and allied health that is compounded by a combination of an ageing health work force, the plethora of career choices for young people rather than traditional health care professions and also poor planning practices by the federal coalition with respect to available training places in particular for doctors and nurses.

What was revealed, however, in an estimates process in which the opposition focused on political point scoring and little budgetary examination, was the irrefutable fact that the Health budget under the Beattie government continues to grow and continues to deliver comprehensive health care to all Queenslanders often under difficult circumstances. Those challenges are not to be understated.

During these times when Health is under the microscope I believe that the Minister for Health demonstrated that the Beattie government has been, and is absolutely committed to, providing Queenslanders with quality health care. It is my hope and expectation that we will, as a result of the Forster and Morris inquiries, be the first government brave enough to hear the forthright and passionate views of our clinicians at the front line of health and then, in the future, deliver further budgets on whatever extra funds are needed to further provide quality, equitable, realistic and comprehensive care to Queenslanders and to support the people who provide that service.

The examination of the Attorney-General and Justice portfolio revealed a minister and a department that provide measured, humane and committed services in their approach to justice, human rights and the protection of our community. Despite, yet again, the lack of any real rigour by the opposition in their budgetary examination, we were advised of the success of the drug courts, the provision of capital works to provide locally based justice services, comprehensive support of JPs and, in particular, assistance to children who have had contact with the courts. It demonstrated the breadth and depth of the service delivery by the portfolio of Attorney-General and Justice.

To both ministers, their departments and my committee members I would like to say thank you once again to everyone involved in the Estimates Committee D report. I commend the report to the House.

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (5.00 pm): I follow the member for Aspley to speak to the report of Estimates Committee D. It was a contentious estimates committee and, if nothing else, it raised the profile of the estimates committee process in the general public. It is one of the more extraordinary estimates committee hearings I have been involved in since I have been elected. We had a division on the opening statement, which I do not think has happened before and certainly was something that was unexpected. We had to go into private to consider a question. We had a range of views that were expressed. It was certainly something that we are still feeling the fallout from today.

It was an extraordinary estimates committee hearing because following the hearing we saw the former health minister dumped from that portfolio and put into DPIF. We have seen two senior bureaucrats leave the employ of the government because one of those gentleman contradicted the

evidence that the minister gave at the hearing and then on the Tuesday after the hearing the director-general supported the evidence that Dr Scott had given. What have we seen? We have seen those two gentlemen depart the employ of Queensland Health. It has to be asked where the justice is in that when the former minister remains in cabinet yet Drs Buckland and Scott have been shown the door by the government.

The crux of the issue was what the minister knew and when he knew it. That took up an awful lot of time in our estimates committee hearing, as the member for Aspley said. It did take a lot of time, but I disagree that it was political point scoring because I believe the honesty of the minister and the ability of the ministerial office is absolutely fundamental to the operation of a \$6 billion budget with 65,000 staff. If the minister and the ministerial office are not effective in what they are doing, then we have to question how effective the operation of that department is going to be.

We have heard time and time again over the last few years former ministers Edmond and Nuttall and the Premier say that there was nothing wrong with Queensland Health and there was nothing wrong with the health system. They have been dragged kicking and screaming into having these two inquiries. It is not a question of making a virtue of the fact—as the Premier says—that they are the only ones who have had enough courage to put a royal commission and the Forster review in place. They were dragged kicking and screaming, because of the revelations of the Nationals, into having these two inquiries that are actually getting to the bottom of this. The dedicated doctors, nurses and staff of Queensland Health now have the opportunity to talk out in the open about the problems with Queensland Health and not be on the receiving end of the bullying, intimidation and vilification that we have seen for so long.

The real crux of the issue is what Minister Nuttall was told and when he was told it about the proficiency and screening of overseas trained doctors. We saw a lot of twisting and turning at the Saturday press conference by Minister Nuttall when, 24 hours after the questions had been asked, he and the Premier obviously came up with an exit strategy. However, at the hearings Minister Nuttall was asked 15 times about whether he was briefed on this issue. He confirmed eight times that he understood the question, and on 12 occasions he denied that he had been briefed. Dr Scott, the director of medical services, directly contradicted that position. Dr Scott said that he, both individually and with other members of the department, had briefed the minister and the minister's office and, further, that other people outside of the department had also briefed the minister.

When the minister fronted the media on Saturday he said, 'Oh, well, I misunderstood the question. I wasn't briefed on Patel-like issues; I was only briefed on the general issues of overseas trained doctors.' I would like to draw the parliament's attention to the statements that the minister made in the press conference that he held following the first session of questions to the estimates committee. In answer to one question he said, 'But I can assure you, in relation to the issues around Dr Patel there were no briefings provided to me.' The journalist said, 'But it's not just in relation to Dr Patel that you were asked. It was about the wider issue of competencies of overseas doctors.' Minister Nuttall said, 'That's right.' The journalist said, 'You can't now say that it was about Dr Patel.' Minister Nuttall said, 'No, I'm very relaxed about that, as I said.' It is clear that what was said to the estimates committee was not true and was not accurate. On Saturday the minister was trying to provide—

Mr NUTTALL: I rise to a point of order. I find the comments that what I said was untrue offensive. Those comments are untrue and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr COPELAND: I am sure that every Queenslanders finds the lies offensive. I will withdraw. I urge everyone to read the transcript of *Hansard*. I am sure the MEPPC will rule accordingly.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (5.05 pm): May I say that having served on that Estimates Committee D, the same as the former speaker, with the benefit of hindsight one struggles to see the relevance of the questioning on the day when really it should have been an exercise in the study of the estimates and the budget rather than a fishing expedition. Nevertheless, first of all, I congratulate the former Treasurer, Mr Mackenroth, on his splendid budget. I thank him for the attention that he gave to my city of Toowoomba and my region of the Darling Downs. It again fared very well under this budget. I wish him well in his retirement.

With respect to the portfolios that are the subject of this estimates committee, I want to concentrate on just a few points in the limited time available to me. The first is the subject matter of the disability law project which was raised in the estimates questioning. The Attorney indicated that in March this year Legal Aid Queensland provided the funding for a six-month disability law pilot project to provide legal help to the mentally disabled to be run by the Toowoomba Community Legal Centre. The project offers a range of services to adults and children and includes duty lawyer representation for people suffering from mental illness, intellectual disability, representation for children with mental disabilities, representation of patients on a forensic order before the Mental Health Review Tribunal and the Mental Health Court, advice and support to people with mental disability, victims of crime, and representation and advice to patients at the Toowoomba Acute Mental Health Unit and at the Baillie Henderson Hospital.

This project has been run under the leadership of a young Toowoomba solicitor, Dan Toombs, whom I encouraged years ago to study law. I am glad to see him doing so well. He is a man of many attributes and he is doing a tremendous job at the Toowoomba Community Legal Centre.

I supported his submission to the Attorney to obtain recurrent funding to extend this scheme. I am very keen to support it, as I know the member for Toowoomba South is. I know from the discussions I had with the previous Attorney-General that he was very impressed with the pilot scheme, with the project and with Mr Toombs personally. I am very pleased to say that I have raised the matter with the current Attorney, and I will be seeing her later in the week to further that project.

I also want to comment on the Legal Aid regional solution program. This is a program whereby the Attorney-General's department is financing young solicitors in private practices throughout Queensland and country areas. The idea is to provide solicitors to take up the responsibility of providing legal aid in regional and remote areas of Queensland. This is something that never happened in my day as a practitioner. It is great to see that the west, which I now have a special responsibility for, is also being looked after in this regard.

The drug court trials are proceeding well in Cairns, Southport and elsewhere. The former Attorney was good enough to last year take several members of his legislative committee to see the drug court operating in Parramatta. It is a very impressive project that is being undertaken there. It is an expensive project but, in my view, one well worth while considering the savings it makes to the community in terms of the rehabilitation of the people who undertake that course. I would love to see it adopted in Toowoomba.

Finally, I indicate that in the budget there were many initiatives in the Health area. These include \$10 million towards preventing chronic disease and their key risks, \$5.8 million to improve secondary and tertiary cardiac care, \$4.5 million to enhance the multistrategy tobacco control initiative, \$5 million to improve access to renal services, \$8.2 million towards the staffing of clinical community health professionals, \$9.6 million allocated for a joint funding agreement with the Australian government with respect to transition care for older Queenslanders being discharged from acute care, \$7.6 million to improve the health of Indigenous Queenslanders and \$5.6 million to develop five multidisciplinary homelessness intervention teams. The list goes on. It also includes \$146.2 million for major hospital—rural and metropolitan centres—redevelopments.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (5.11 pm): Most members would realise that I have more than just a passing interest in Health. So it is with pleasure that I rise to speak in the debate on the Estimates Committee D report. Queensland does not have the best health care system in the world. Indeed, we do not even have the best health care system in Australia. I have sat in on many of the Morris royal commission's hearings and I have been absolutely stunned, amazed, disgusted and angered by the evidence given by victims and their families and medical professionals.

How could our public medical system be mismanaged and run down to such an abysmal state? How could patients be abandoned and led like lambs to the slaughter? How could the cover-ups and lies be allowed to continue? These are the questions that the uber Premier will have to answer. He still refuses to answer them. His favourite excuse is that the royal commission will make the recommendations, the royal commission will take care of that.

He makes a virtue out of the establishment of a royal commission. The Premier did not establish a royal commission because it was the right thing to do; he had to establish the royal commission because he had no other option. The Nationals cornered him, the media cornered him and the victims cornered him and he was made to do the right thing. At every step along the royal commission journey the uber Premier was dragged kicking and screaming.

Take for example the case of a 15-year-old boy who lost his leg because of the incompetence of Dr Patel. The lad survived because of the grace of God and the good work of doctors in Brisbane. He is now trying to cope with a Peter Beattie Labor induced disability. The Premier created a health system which allowed 'Dr Death' to carve a trail of destruction. The Premier may not have been there physically operating with 'Dr Patel' but he was there in spirit. The uber Premier allowed and still allows a culture of fear to flourish. The uber Premier was 'Dr Death's' protector.

One would think that the Premier would have learnt his lesson and provided everything that the young lad and his family needs to recover from this near tragedy. But no, once again the Premier has had to be led kicking and screaming down the moral path—the path which has the signs 'The right thing', 'The moral thing', 'The thing that humans do'. Members might recall that this young Burnett lad was once a promising sportsman. He became a victim of Dr Patel's negligence and incompetence.

His femoral vein was severed and his femoral artery damaged in his left leg following a motorcycle accident on 23 December 2004. It was later discovered that the boy also had a fracture to his hip and pelvis which was not detected by Dr Patel. Despite this young lad's condition worsening, his temperature rising to 41 degrees and his foot described by nurses as mottled purple, swollen up to four times the size of his other foot and oozing large amounts of ooze, his transfer to Brisbane was delayed nine days—until 1 January 2005. Because his transfer was delayed for such a lengthy period his leg became gangrenous and Brisbane doctors had no choice but to amputate his leg in order to save his life.

I spoke with the boy's mother who told me that her son was promised a computerised prosthetic, a C-leg, and that it would be provided to him by Queensland Health. However, it now seems Queensland Health is being uncooperative. The mother was informed by Queensland Health that it may take another 12 months before he will be provided with this particular prosthetic leg. The family feel let down by Queensland Health. They feel let down by the Beattie Labor government.

All of a sudden, miraculously after the mother's testimony at the Morris royal commission, the media brought this issue to the Premier's attention and he is now saying that this is an urgent matter and that the boy will get the C-leg. The fact is that the Premier is acting as though it is the first time he has heard about this problem. On 28 July this year I faxed a letter containing the details of this matter and requesting that he attend to this matter urgently. I ask the Premier to do the right thing, to not be dragged kicking and screaming, and to provide this young lad with the much-needed computerised prosthetic leg. I ask the Premier to do the right thing. The mother of this child wrote a letter to me. In that letter she wrote that she was utterly disappointed by the reaction of this government.

Time expired.

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (5.16 pm): As a member of Estimates Committee D I had the responsibility of reviewing the proposed budget expenditure for Queensland Health. There are no easy answers in this area of government responsibility. In fact, I believe that no other department has faced the challenges and opportunities that belong to Health at any stage of its history. I would particularly like to raise the issue of fast track, an initiative of considerable interest which was first developed on the Gold Coast to help alleviate the waiting time for people accessing the accident and emergency department of the Gold Coast Hospital.

Members of the regional ministerial community forum developed the idea. I am happy to say that it has been adopted by Queensland Health. The scheme is designed to quickly treat patients with conditions where it is expected that they will not be admitted. Most patients treated under fast track are categories 4 and 5. Following the introduction of the fast track services, waiting times have reduced across all categories.

Between December 2004 and March 2005, 18 per cent more patients were seen within the recommended time frame. This means over a thousand more Gold Coast patients were seen on time in the emergency department. The additional \$2 million allocated will allow the Gold Coast Health Service District to address the growth and demand at the Gold Coast emergency department and will provide additional staffing to allow the fast track area of the department to increase its hours of operation to 24 hours a day seven days a week.

Another program that I am very impressed by is the BreastScreen Queensland service. This program aims to screen 70 per cent of women between the ages of 50 and 69 as this is the age group where the benefits from screening have been most clearly demonstrated. In the 2002-03 financial year 59 per cent of women in that age group were screened by BreastScreen Queensland. This is well on the way towards achieving our target of 70 per cent.

There is a significant difference between the number of women participating in the program in metropolitan areas and the number participating in rural areas. The participation rate varies from 55 per cent in metropolitan areas to 62 per cent in rural areas. That is right. The participation rate is significantly higher in rural areas. This highlights the need to increase the number of women attending screening in the south-east corner of Queensland.

In order to improve these figures, the Brisbane City Council and BreastScreen Queensland have joined forces to install a screening clinic in council premises within the CBD. Since its commencement just under one year ago the service has screened 2,527 women. Some 46 per cent of them are new clients to BreastScreen Queensland. This is an outstanding achievement.

The drug court pilot project was also raised. The program diverts offenders who are dependent on illicit drugs into treatment rather than into the traditional criminal justice system. It aims to help offenders overcome their drug dependence and associated criminal behaviour through court enforcement and supervised treatment programs. The south-east Queensland pilot commenced in June 2000 operating from Magistrates Courts in Beenleigh, Southport, Ipswich, Cairns and Townsville. The north Queensland pilot commenced in November 2002.

Offenders who are eligible for diversion receive a suspended sentence and then an intensive drug rehabilitation order as an alternative to prison. Offenders must actively participate in intensive rehabilitation programs for 12 to 18 months, submit to regular drug tests and comply with strict conditions set by the court. Offenders then return to court for final sentencing. In the first 48 months of the drug court operation in Queensland, no-one who successfully completed the rehabilitation program went to jail. Instead they received community based sentencing options like probation.

Since the commencement of the program 148 people have graduated from the program, with a further 105 currently participating in their intensive drug rehabilitation orders. An independent report by the Institute of Criminology has found that the drug court works for those offenders who complete the program. It found that offenders who had completed it had lower reoffending rates than those who did not participate in the program. I take this opportunity to thank the ministers, committee staff and Hansard for their assistance during this process.

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.20 pm): I had the opportunity to participate in the proceedings of Estimates Committee D by invitation. One of the challenges that we on our side of the parliament have is the way that the estimates committees get broken up at the end of the budget process and having to marry the different responsibilities between shadow ministers and other non-government members.

Of particular interest to me was the performance of the then minister for health that day and also some of the evasion of the then Attorney-General. I did very much enjoy and appreciate the opportunity of the committee to provide me with the leave to question the then Attorney-General. However, I want to make comment with regard to the then minister for health. I just sat back that morning and was absolutely amazed and astounded at the way he conducted himself during the procedures of Estimates Committee D where he continued to deny that he had any knowledge whatsoever of problems with overseas trained doctors. He had backed his public comments. He had backed his public statements in the past where he said that he had not been briefed.

Of course when Dr John Scott, his then deputy director-general, was asked if he had briefed the then minister and if the then minister was aware of it, Dr Scott said that his recollection was that, yes, he had been briefed and that the then minister's understanding and what the then minister was saying was not in fact right. Then we had this absolute nonsense story from the then minister that he was not going to allow his then director-general, Dr Buckland, to provide any form of testimony to validate this issue one way or the other to Estimates Committee D knowing full well that Dr Buckland was going to further blow the then minister out of the water and also indicate that the then minister's knowledge of the issue of problems with overseas trained doctors was much greater than what the then minister was saying. It was just an absolute comedy of errors.

If I can remember the way that it went that day, the shadow minister, Mr Copeland, put in an absolutely exemplary performance. I think he asked the then minister on no less than 15 occasions if he had been briefed. The then minister himself clarified his understanding of the question on about eight occasions and then he went on to deny any knowledge of previous briefings to do with these overseas trained doctors on 12 occasions. If that is not deliberately misleading a parliamentary estimates committee, then I do not know what is. Afterwards, the then minister walked straight out and did a press conference and once again confirmed his understanding of the issue and said, 'Yes. It was very, very clear. I was talking about the issue to do with overseas trained doctors in general.' The very next day, after the Labor Party spin doctors had got to him, he had managed to reconstruct his story to say, 'I thought they meant Dr Patel,' notwithstanding the fact that the question was very clear. It just goes to show the incompetence of the person who held the position of health minister in Queensland—that is, Mr Nuttall.

What have we seen transpire since that time? We have seen the two public servants who told the truth sacked and the minister remain in a ministerial position. Who does the buck stop with in Queensland? Certainly there is no notion of ministerial responsibility—absolutely no notion of ministerial responsibility whatsoever. It just goes to show that this government is more intent on getting even with the people who tell the truth against ministers than it is in making ministers tell the truth. That is an indictment on this government and its lack of accountability.

With regard to the then Attorney-General, there were a couple of issues which gave me some concerns. I asked him during the course of the estimates committee process what the Premier actually meant when the Premier said that it would be impossible to replace Leanne Clare as the Director of Public Prosecutions in Queensland when she was considering the Ray Hollis prosecution matter. What did the Premier mean by that? The then Attorney-General was not able to give any clarification to the committee. The then Attorney-General was not able to confirm to the committee that there was not a level of political interference or some sort of behind-the-scenes reasoning for that particular comment. It just goes to show the whole bizarre nature and the reasoning behind the appointment of the current DPP in Queensland, the incompetence surrounding it and also the way that this government went about the reappointment process.

The other thing that stood out to me on the day was simply this: we saw a government which was prepared to sit down and negotiate with Di Fingleton, who was wrongfully prosecuted and wrongfully jailed, yet it did not show any of the same desire to treat Pauline Hanson the same way. She was also wrongfully convicted and would be just as deserving of some form of compensation or some form of remuneration for the impact on her life and her—

Time expired.

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (5.25 pm): As a member of Estimates Committee D, I was pleased to participate in the examination of expenditure for the portfolio areas of Health and Justice. It is fair to say that the proceedings were, at times, fairly robust, and I congratulate the committee chair, the member for Aspley, Bonny Barry, for using a firm but fair hand in presiding over the hearing. There are probably few issues that are of greater importance to people than those that affect our health and physical wellbeing. This is especially so in a comparatively affluent, ageing society in which more of us will live longer and will increasingly expect to be treated for and cured of a range of age related illnesses and conditions.

While this government readily acknowledges that there are issues within the health system that require serious and prompt attention and that these issues will be addressed once Messrs Forster and Morris have handed down their respective recommendations, it should also be acknowledged by all sides of politics that some of the challenges facing the delivery of health services in this state result from conditions beyond our control. Minister Nuttall pointed to the chronic national and international shortage of trained medical professionals, the increased costs associated with medical treatment and the changes to our lifestyle that place pressures on the ability of the system to meet expectations and demands.

Indicative of the issues surrounding the shortage of doctors in this state is the fact that in Queensland last year 226 medical students graduated from our universities—the exact same number that graduated in 1976, since which time our population has more than doubled. It is simply not feasible to expect the health system to cope with increasing demand when we are faced with a decline in the number of medical graduates. This is an issue that I know the new Minister for Health will take up with the federal government, just as the previous minister championed this state's need for fairer treatment.

I also want to put on record my personal thanks to the previous minister, Gordon Nuttall, who was a passionate advocate on behalf of the people of this state and who visited my electorate on more than one occasion to speak with staff and to ensure that staff were given the opportunity to speak to him. I am particularly grateful for his assistance in securing a full-time speech pathologist for the Proserpine Hospital. This service is greatly valued by the community. I also want to thank the former minister for his commitment to the Healthy Hearing program that for the first time provides a statewide universal hearing screening program. Had this program been in place when my niece and goddaughter Rachel was born, she would not have spent her first 18 months of life in a silent world that has had a profound impact on the development of her speech and educational opportunity.

As a regional member of parliament I am also keen to acknowledge this government's commitment to the establishment of telehealth links between low dependency services and senior clinicians at major hospitals. For renal patients in regional areas this service is a commonsense approach to the delivery of services such as pre and postoperative consultations, predialysis education and patient supervision. I would encourage the new minister to consider other areas of health service delivery that may benefit from the use of the telelink program.

As time is limited, I turn briefly to the area of Justice, and in doing so I want to congratulate the former Attorney-General, Rod Welford, for his custodianship of this portfolio over a number of years. I believe that we as a state have benefited enormously from the role played by the member for Everton, particularly in relation to his role in introducing the Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act and other reforms that protect society and individuals, particularly children, from the cruel and predatory actions of paedophiles and violent offenders.

The other significant legacy left by the former Attorney-General is the court modernisation program that has seen courts throughout the state refurbished and fitted out with appropriate technology. The Bowen Court House in my electorate is about to undergo such a renovation and I thank the minister for this consideration. The upgrade will see the historic building remodelled to accommodate a greater level of security for witnesses and jurors, increased privacy for court workers and magistrates and a greater level of comfort for everyone using the building. I commend the program and I hope that it will continue to roll out under the guidance of the new minister, Linda Lavarch. I commend the report of Estimates Committee D to the House.

Debate, on motion of Ms Jarratt, adjourned.

HORNIBROOK HIGHWAY

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this House calls on the Beattie government to retain the iconic and historic Hornibrook Highway bridge for tourist and recreational purposes.

In recent times it has emerged that following the state government's announcement to duplicate the current Houghton Highway, it is going to tear down the historic Hornibrook Highway bridge. This bridge has been an icon for the people of the Redcliffe peninsula and the northern part of Brisbane as well as for many other Queenslanders for generations. It is also quite obvious that, given the comment within the local Redcliffe community in recent months, there is a great deal of community concern and a great deal of community support for maintaining this historic highway bridge as a place for recreation, as a tourist opportunity and as an iconic part of the history not only of that part of the world but also of Queensland in general.

We should consider for a moment the history of this magnificent structure. Only earlier in the week I had the opportunity to drive parallel to that old bridge and to appreciate its engineering. I ask members to keep in mind that that bridge has been there for some 70 years. It is quite an extraordinary structure and it is in pretty good order. It has cement columns and cement piers. I understand that the ironbark timber in the bridge came from Fraser Island. That bridge has stood the test of time. It is very well engineered and it is something that we should be proud to keep.

The bridge was constructed between 1932 and 1935 and was the major impetus for the development of Redcliffe. The bridge is 2.685 kilometres long. As I said, it is mostly a concrete bridge. It spans Hayes Inlet and Bramble Bay between Clontarf Point and Brighton linking to Sandgate and Redcliffe. The Hornibrook bridge was closed to vehicular traffic in 1979 when the Houghton Highway bridge was opened. Since then the Hornibrook bridge has been used as a pedestrian thoroughfare and a bikeway. It is also a popular recreational fishing spot.

It is also interesting to note that the bridge is a permanent entry on the Queensland heritage list. In its listing the Queensland Heritage Council states—

It is notable as a major public work constructed by private enterprise at a time of economic depression in Queensland... In its planning, construction and operation it represents a major innovation in construction activities in Queensland at a time of economic crisis.

As I said, the history of this bridge goes back some 70 years. Its construction started during the depression period in Queensland—at a time when the money to pay for such a remarkable structure would have been very, very difficult to come by. So it is a marvellous historical structure that has stood many Queenslanders, particularly those on the Redcliffe peninsula, in good stead.

As I indicated, the government has said that it is going to duplicate the Houghton Highway. It is going to construct a new 2.7 kilometre bridge at a cost of \$149 million. It is envisaged that that construction will start late in 2007 and will be completed sometime in late 2009. It is also said—and I say to this House that this will be the excuse used by those honourable members opposite—that the new bridge will include a new pedestrian lane, a bike lane and a new fishing platform. The state government has said that it will knock down all but 300 metres of the old Hornibrook Highway bridge.

So we are going to see this new bridge built, there will be a pedestrian lane and there will be a bikeway. But that is going to be nowhere near as effective as what we have at the moment with the Hornibrook Highway bridge, which is designated for recreational and tourist use. If people want to ride a bike across the bridge, they have a very, very wide berth. If people want to walk across the bridge, they have a very, very wide berth. If people want to go fishing on the bridge, they are well separated from the traffic. That is the real advantage of this bridge.

This bridge is also in very, very good condition. On Monday I certainly noticed people cycling across it, walking across it, jogging across it, and fishing off it. Some people may think that it is easy to engineer and it is the most practical thing to put a pedestrian lane and a bikeway on a bridge. I jog over the Victoria Bridge. It has some bikeways and all of those sorts of things, but I can tell members that, as a jogger, you are very, very jammed up against the traffic. I have also noticed that in these very confined areas pedestrians and cyclists do not always mix very well. Certainly, if a fisherman is placed among cyclists and joggers on a bridge, it is not going to work anywhere near as well as the current arrangement on the Hornibrook Highway bridge, which has been designated for recreational purposes since 1979.

The government claims that it costs too much to maintain the bridge. Main Roads says that it would cost \$8.5 million over the next 10 years or \$22 million over the next 30 years to maintain it. Main Roads is doing what this government does best: it is pulling figures out of thin air. Those figures do not stand up to any sort of reasonable test or scrutiny. The *Redcliffe and Bayside Herald* reported that in November 2003 the Main Roads Department said that in 1999-2000 it spent \$63,351.03 on maintaining the Hornibrook Highway bridge. In 2000-01, maintenance costs fell to \$46,244.15. In 2001-02, the figure was \$98,206.50. Then in 2002-03, the cost was \$36,088.91. But now the government wants to rip this bridge down. It wants us in this place to believe that the costs have somehow ballooned out miraculously from the few tens of thousands a year to millions of dollars over the next 10 years and more than \$1 million in a year. So where are these figures coming from? What sort of justification is there for them?

On the one hand the minister says that the old bridge has to be knocked down because it would cost \$8.5 million over 10 years to maintain it. On the other hand the minister is saying that it will cost \$7.3 million to rip it up. That does not seem to make any sense. For my money I would be putting that \$7.3 million into maintaining that bridge over the next 10, 15 or 20 years or beyond.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: We are going to see 'Minister Stone Mastic'—the Minister for Transport and Main Roads—stand up and say, 'That is all justified. That is fantastic economics.' That bridge is in pretty good condition. Based on what has been spent on it in the past and what will be spent on it in the future, the minister cannot justify ripping it down if that is going to cost \$7.3 million. That is a false economy. It does not make any sense whatsoever.

This government is planning to spend money on pedestrian bridges in Brisbane over the next few years reportedly costing up to \$120 million for two of them. To put a few million dollars, even if the figures are right—and I do not believe them—into maintaining the Hornibrook Highway bridge is a very, very small price to pay for preserving such an icon and providing wonderful recreational opportunities for those people who live on the Redcliffe peninsula and just south of it.

Anyone who believes that we are a lone voice on this issue only needs to read the local newspaper to read the comments from the local community and the comment from Sunfish Queensland representative Bill Turner who said that elderly and disabled anglers would suffer most from the bridge's demise. In that same article local anglers Ronny Hydes and Todd Sowah said that they regularly made the trip from Sunnybank to hang a line into Hayes Inlet. Mr Hydes went on to say—

I travel a long way to come and fish here and I'll be very sad to see this thing go.

Moreton Bay Road Runners secretary Tracey Franks said that the running group often used the bridge and did not want to see it pulled down. Ms Franks said that while pedestrian access would be available on the new bridge runners would face traffic noise and pollution. They are real issues. Runners can appreciate those sorts of issues.

Mr Lucas: What about along Coronation Drive?

Mr SPRINGBORG: How many times has the minister been out running with Ms Franks? As I said a moment ago, I regularly run along the bikeway and across the bridge. There are conflicts between pedestrians and bikes. When anglers are mixed in the same sorts of issues arise.

This is false economy. It is silly that the government is proposing to do it. We are putting forward a reasonable proposition. It is good for the people of Redcliffe. It is good for the people who live at Sandgate. It is maintaining a marvellous part of our heritage. I find it very difficult to understand how the government is proposing to heritage list the Goodwill Bridge yet it is proposing to tear down something that is already heritage listed.

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (5.40 pm): I rise to second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. The Hornibrook Highway bridge is an icon of Queensland and made Redcliffe what it is today: a vibrant, picturesque community that prides itself as a partner of Brisbane, not a part of it.

Before the bridge's construction Redcliffe was in deep trouble. The population was growing to the south and the tiny hamlet could only be accessed by ferry and a road that was impassable in wet weather. It was the brainchild of Manuel Hornibrook, who saw the passing of the Tolls on Privately Constructed Road Traffic Facilities Bill as an opportunity to finance the bridge, give his sizeable bridge-building work force something to do and keep his company afloat during the depression. Despite some financial difficulties during its construction, the Hornibrook bridge was finished and opened to the public on 4 October 1935 with the words of its creator, 'The hour has come.' At that time and for many years the Hornibrook bridge was the longest road viaduct over water in the Southern Hemisphere, measuring some 2.68 kilometres.

During the Second World War the bridge played a vital part in the defence of Australia. Military road convoys were able to use the highway to move war material efficiently to points in Queensland. It became apparent in the 1960s and 1970s that a new bridge was needed to be built. With the opening of the Houghton Highway in 1979 the bridge was closed to vehicular traffic.

Let me put on the record that the Liberal Party is 100 per cent behind the duplication of the Houghton Highway. After years of government neglect shown to the area, the former Labor member being investigated by the CMC and an administration lurching from one crisis to the next, we could be mistaken for seeing the announcement as something of another episode of our Premier trying to buy and smile his way out of some trouble.

The Liberal Party is in favour of this long overdue duplication of the Houghton Highway. However, the Liberal Party is staunchly opposed to the knocking down of this iconic bridge. This is a heritage listed structure. It is significant for being one of the first toll roads—a major public work constructed by private enterprise during the Depression. It was a major impetus for the development of Redcliffe and a major innovation in construction activities at a time of economic crisis. Its significance is also connected to Manuel Hornibrook's vision to develop the city of Redcliffe.

There are only a certain number of historical landmarks in Queensland. As important as building capital works for the future of the state is, it is equally important to preserve and protect those iconic landmarks that still exist today. I realise that maintaining the bridge is not a cheap option, but for the preservation of and respect for our past it is a vital one.

There have been many questions about the actual cost. Main Roads says that it will cost some \$7-odd million to tear it down and some \$8 million over the next 10 years to preserve it. I am quite willing to take those as the real costs. The reality is that it costs to preserve our heritage. If this is a listed landmark on the Queensland Heritage Register, it costs money to save these things. You simply do not tear it down because it is cheaper than maintaining it over a period. If that were the basis on which we made decisions about which buildings we would preserve and which we would demolish, most of our heritage listed buildings would be gone. They cost money to preserve. It costs dollars to preserve our heritage. In common with any number of other major landmarks around the city, it costs money to maintain them. The role of government is to assume those costs to make sure that the buildings are preserved for future generations.

As I said, we ask the residents of Redcliffe, Sandgate and nearby suburbs what they think of the bridge. We can ask the runners, the cyclists and the fishermen and anglers what they think. They all want the bridge preserved. It is essential to Redcliffe. It is essential to the identity of Redcliffe. It is essential that the historic links between the bridge and the city itself are preserved.

If we ask people how they feel about the Hornibrook bridge, the overwhelming majority of people will tell us that they want it to stay. We want it to stay, too. This is not about living in the past; it is about preserving the past so that future generations can enjoy it. I ask members of the parliament tonight to preserve one of Redcliffe's icons. Whether the government thinks it can win the by-election or not is immaterial. It should just preserve the bridge. This is about preserving the past. It is not about winning a by-election.

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (5.45 pm): I move—

That all the words after 'House' are omitted and the following words are inserted—

- welcomes the Beattie Government's \$149 million new Houghton Highway which includes cycling, walking and fishing access for all Queenslanders regardless of age or ability;
- notes the innovative heritage plan which will protect certain sections of the Hornibrook bridge for fishing and other recreational uses; and
- acknowledges the environmental and economic costs of maintaining the old timber Hornibrook Highway which precludes its retention.

The people of the Redcliffe peninsula are justifiably proud of the unique heritage of their community which includes being Queensland's first European settlement in 1824-25. The government shares their delight in history, and we have funded the council to help identify places of cultural heritage. The government will continue caring for the old Hornibrook bridge while we build the new \$149 million bridge to the peninsula. When the new bridge is open we will preserve the iconic parts of the Hornibrook bridge—300 metres at the Redcliffe end as well as the southern approach. People will be able to cycle, walk and have a picnic on the old structure and also fish from it.

Sadly, the old bridge is deteriorating. The steel is corroding, the timber is rotting and it has been vandalised in places. Concrete is breaking away from reinforced steel. There are stress fractures. We will restore the retained 300-metre section using sound timber salvaged from the remainder of the bridge. In approaching weeks the Department of Main Roads will begin load testing on the old bridge. Essential maintenance work will take place to keep it safe for pedestrians until the new Houghton Highway bridge is built.

Celebrating heritage is vital, but what really matters to the people of Redcliffe is the future. The government is duplicating the Houghton Highway bridge to ensure that road access into and out of the peninsula remains safe and efficient and keeps pace with population growth. Planning and design on the new 2.7 kilometre three-lane bridge is under way. It is scheduled to open by Christmas 2009. The project will create 200 jobs.

This is infrastructure to protect and enhance the peninsula's unique way of life. For an average journey under normal conditions the new bridge will save motorists about five minutes. Breakdown shoulders will eliminate lengthy delays due to traffic incidents. Its surface will be smoother than the Houghton Highway as it will have fewer expansion joints. The structure will be built to last about 300 years and will add to Redcliffe's appeal as an irresistible place to spend a weekend or a holiday. The bridge will have a shared pedestrian cycleway and a specifically designed fishing platform. Anglers will not be dangling a line from 30 metres above the water; they will be able to hear the fish jumping. The platform will be roughly as big as an Olympic pool—about 50 metres by 10 metres. It will have wheelchair access and be joined on the bridge by a five-metre-wide walkway. It sounds fantastic, I have to say. We have committed to build this platform after listening to the community and to Sunfish.

Mr Springborg: Maybe the fish will jump on the platform.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, that is your final warning.

Mr BEATTIE: The bridge itself will be of a similar design to the Houghton Highway bridge. We will investigate the inclusion of transit and bus lanes to encourage public transport into and out of the peninsula. Residents will soon notice a barge moored between the Houghton Highway and Hornibrook Highway bridges as geotechnical work gets under way later this year. Planning will soon begin, and it includes ground surveys along Elizabeth Avenue, the Hornibrook Esplanade and the Deagon Deviation to accurately map the local topography. Hydrological surveys to identify the depth and contours of the Bramble Bay seabed, geotechnical investigations examining the soil profile under the seabed and foundation requirements of the new bridge are to start later this year.

A review of environmental factors will include studies into Redcliffe's significant plants and animals. Engineering facts and figures include—and I know the minister for transport and I are not the only ones interested in these—800 optimal piles, each able to bear 250 tonnes, to be sunk into the bedrock of Moreton Bay; 900 steel girders and 99 prestressed concrete spans between the piles; and the concrete deck will have an average thickness of 180 millimetres covered by 60 millimetres of asphalt. The new bridge will be the centrepiece of a \$380 million transport plan for this region.

The truth is very simple: we will build a bridge. If Lillian van Litsenburg gets elected, she will be the proud deliverer of this bridge. It is that simple. This bridge is important. So a vote for Lillian is a vote for the bridge.

I am grateful that the opposition brought on this debate because it gives us an opportunity to say that we will build a bridge, we will deliver and we will ensure that the people of Redcliffe—

A government member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, that is right. We built the last one. We will protect the lifestyle of the people of Redcliffe while giving them great transport and good opportunities. This is an important commitment not only for the people of Redcliffe but also for Queensland. I am delighted about this. The Deputy Premier will second the resolution, which highlights exactly what we are going to do. Our amendment highlights the importance of the cycling capacity and enjoyment factor of the bridge.

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Minister for Finance and Minister for State Development, Trade and Innovation) (5.50 pm): I rise to second the amendment moved by the Premier. Like many members of this parliament, over the years many of my visits to Redcliffe have been made with family. We have enjoyed the unique lifestyle that Redcliffe has to offer. On many weekends we have been there to enjoy the sun, the water and many of the special features that make it such a wonderful place.

A government member interjected.

Ms BLIGH: Yes, fish and chips on the esplanade. When I am there I experience something that I think must be shared by many visitors, which is envy of the people who have the good fortune to live there. Those people who live in this very special part of the south-east corner live in a unique environment and they enjoy a unique lifestyle. It is an exceptional place and, as a government, we need to make provision to preserve the unique features of this very special part of the world.

Why are people putting forward the view that we should keep the old bridge? The main argument advanced in favour of that is that it provides for recreational fishing, which is an important activity. The bridge also provides great pedestrian access, particularly for runners—and I take the point made by the Leader of the Opposition in that regard. It is also an important link in a very long cycle track. I have not run across the bridge, but I have cycled across it and can speak from personal experience that the bridge is a very important link in a very large cycle path in Brisbane.

That is why, when we put together the proposal for a duplication of the existing bridge, we took a great deal of care to ensure that we put in place special provisions to cater for the needs of those people who have articulated concerns about the old bridge. We have put in place special provisions to cater for those who want to fish off the old bridge. We have listened to the community and taken their needs on board. As members have heard the Premier say, the new bridge will have a specially designed fishing platform that will enable people to carry on the tradition of fishing from the bridge. From all the accounts that I have heard so far, I believe that platform will actually expand the capacity for recreational fishing. In some ways the existing bridge is not very accessible for some people. The new bridge will give them an opportunity to access this specially designed platform and enjoy the pleasures of recreational fishing. Hopefully, some of them will catch more fish than they do now. As I said, the new bridge will also cater for people who currently use the old bridge for pedestrian and cycle access. It will have specially designed cycle pathways and provision will be made for pedestrians and running groups.

There is a real need for us to listen to the community. I am very happy to stand here and say that I think that the transport minister and his departmental officers have taken those issues into account and have done a very good job of listening to the community.

Tonight I did not hear members of either the National Party or the Liberal Party talk about a new bridge for Redcliffe. I heard them talking about the old bridge. They were focused on the past. We will be focused unequivocally on the future. Our focus will be on the duplication of the Houghton Highway. That will happen as soon as we can make it happen. In fact, as I understand it we are already out there. The Minister for Transport and Main Roads can confirm that we have people out there, although probably not as we speak—do not think they are working in the dark—

Mr Lucas: I hope not.

Ms BLIGH: They have already started on some of the work that needs to be done to make this bridge happen. Ground surveys are being done along Elizabeth Avenue, the Hornibrook Esplanade and the Deagon Deviation to accurately map the local topography. Similarly, hydrological surveys are being undertaken, as are geotechnical investigations. Teams of experts are ensuring that the bridge piles are appropriately placed. People are out there now making sure that the people of Redcliffe get a new bridge, get the best possible bridge that they can.

I can understand the affection that people have for the old bridge. It is a unique piece of infrastructure and many people would have fond memories of it. However, I believe that the priority for our government, and for any responsible government, has to be the completion of a new state-of-the-art modern bridge for the people of Redcliffe to relieve their traffic pressures. That bridge should last for 300 years and it should give improved access for fishing, cycling and pedestrian activities.

If the people of Redcliffe had to rely on those opposite to deliver a bridge, they may well have to wait another 300 years to make it happen, because it is not on their agenda. I have not seen it on their agenda at all. The people of Redcliffe who want a new bridge have a clear choice: they need to support this government and they need to support our candidate.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.55 pm): The previous member was not listening. We have supported the duplication of the bridge in that area. We do not support ripping down the iconic, heritage listed existing bridge that is loved and used by hundreds—in fact thousands—of local community members. The government estimates that ripping down this bridge will cost about \$7.3 million. Yet, according to reports, the estimated cost of maintaining the same bridge over the next 10 years is roughly equivalent to that amount—about \$8 million. One has ask: where are not only the financial considerations but also the social considerations? This bridge is loved by thousands. The government talks about building a fishing platform and leaving about 300 metres of the old bridge. But that is supposed to replace a 2.6 kilometre bridge, the full length of which currently people can fish from. That bridge is also available for people to ride their bicycles and to walk or run along.

I find it amazing that, in this day and age when we are talking about not only the environmental issues of the bridge but also the benefits to foot traffic and alternative transport such as cycling, this government still takes a very narrow view about what defines adequate cycling and pedestrian pathways. To date, we have not seen a recognition that in future footpaths and cycleways need to be far wider and need to be separate. The government needs to recognise that there are not only recreational cyclists but also commuters who cycle. Those cyclists can travel at great speeds and they need to be separated from the walkers on the pathways. Cycleways are still being treated as second-class or even third- or fourth-class thoroughfares when they should be given a higher priority in the construction of new and the maintenance of existing paths which are loved and thoroughly used by communities.

We say that, although the drivers need to be looked after through the provision of a new bridge, we must not take away what has been a very well-loved and very well-used cycleway and footpath through the area. In this day people who love the outdoors like to get out of their cars and use alternative methods of transport and the government has not given fair dinkum recognition of that. To date the government's recommendation has really been only a token attempt to address the genuine concerns of the members of this community and others who come to visit the area and a token recognition of the tourism value of this great local asset. The money should be made available to maintain the heritage value of the old bridge and also to maintain what is a very important public thoroughfare, which should be enjoyed into the future.

What the government has put forward to the House, as I have said, is only a token effort. The government discovered this electorate only after it got into trouble with the previous Speaker as a result of his not looking after his local area. He had failed to address not only public transport needs but also vehicular needs and alternative pathways in this area.

We saw that in the lead-up to the previous Speaker taking leave. It was rumoured that there was going to be a by-election. Suddenly the government started talking about Redcliffe. It is too late, it is not good enough, and what is on the table in regard to the proposal by the government does not adequately address not only the public thoroughfare issues but also the fishing issues as I have explained. To replace the bridge with a fishing platform and hope that the fish will be attracted to that compared to the 2.6 kilometres of available open space that is there now for people to access for fishing still does not recognise just what this bridge means to people. The government can build a new bridge but it should protect the values that are attached to the existing bridge so that it is there not only for today but maintained as a viable and very much appreciated asset into the future.

Hon. DM WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (6.01 pm): The duplication of the Houghton Highway bridge will make life very much easier for the people of Redcliffe. I am very pleased and proud that my repeated representations have led to the achievement of this result. At the same time, like every citizen of Redcliffe, I will be sorry to see the old bridge go. It has been part of our lifestyle for many years. My family, like thousands of Redcliffe families, use the old bridge for recreation. Often we have gone walking or cycling over the bridge. The last time any of us did that was last weekend. My son, who happens to be in the gallery at the moment, cycles the bridge very often. Nobody in this House understands better than me the heartstrings that the opposition is trying to tug at with this motion.

The government understands that the old bridge is an icon, and 300 metres at the Redcliffe end will be preserved for fishing, strolling and sightseeing, as will a short distance at the other end including the gracious old portal. But preservation of the entire old bridge would not be a responsible use of the Queensland people's money. The fact is that the old bridge is decaying; it is hard to maintain. The cost of maintaining the old bridge for the next 10 years would be \$8.5 million if planning to maintain it to a level that would keep it serviceable merely as a footbridge. But if we wanted to give it a longer life it would cost \$22 million and even then it would only last for 30 years. The solution which the government offers of including a pedestrian and cycleway with the new bridge and attaching a dedicated fishing platform will provide a better outcome for walkers, cyclists and anglers.

Mr Shine interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Toowoomba North!

Mr WELLS: The total cost of a new bridge is \$149 million. If the choices were, on the one hand, the \$149 million worth of new bridge with pedestrian and cycle traversability and a fishing platform plus 300 metres of the old bridge maintained and, on the other hand, a new \$127 million bridge without pedestrian or cycle access or a fishing platform but with the old bridge preserved, though only for 30 years, then most practical decision makers would choose the first option. Redcliffe is full of practical people.

The people who moved this motion, whatever their virtues, nevertheless come a long way away from the peninsula. Those of us who actually live in Redcliffe know the old bridge, and it will always be a part of our life's experience and a precious memory. But we also want the new reality that will exist in a couple of years—a new, safer, less traffic jam prone bridge with pedestrian and cycle access and an attached fishing platform, plus that part of the old bridge which now we most often use preserved to remind us of the old days when we had to risk a three-lane, two-way tidal flow traffic system to go over the sea to Brisbane.

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (6.04 pm): Many members tonight have told us about the iconic nature of the Hornibrook Highway bridge, about how many people of the peninsula have played, walked, worked, fished, ambled, proposed, watched many a sunrise and sunset and adopted this piece of history into their hearts. This bridge is heritage listed and rightly so; it is a bridge of great value and great worth to the people of the Redcliffe peninsula. However, that is not exactly a major priority for those on the opposite side of the House. Here we have a government that is so concerned about its precious egos that it preselects someone completely unsuitable for the job of representing the people of Redcliffe.

It is not as if the Labor Party does not know this. Listen to the ads on the radio telling everyone how good the Labor candidates are. These ads are 30 seconds long and the Labor Party's faith in the candidates amounts to seven seconds because that is how long the candidates actually talk. The rest of the time we hear the drab voice of the Premier going on about how the by-elections in Redcliffe and Chatsworth are a referendum on the federal government's IR reforms. Shane Warne would not be able to turn a ball that much on a spinning Mumbai wicket. If this is a referendum, this is a referendum on the failing state of our health system, on the 'Dr Death' scandal, on the over 80 dead patients, on the culture of bullying and cover-up in the Department of Health. If this is a referendum, it is a referendum on our schools, on asbestos in the roofs and dust on school desks and work benches.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I suggest that the member for Surfers Paradise come back to the motion.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Mr Speaker. That is why the Labor Party does not know the importance of this bridge. We all know that the information that the bridge was important to the peninsula would not have been passed on by the former member, as it would have been difficult to hear residents when in South-East Asia or other parts of the globe.

Besides that, I think we should see exactly how important this bridge is. The bridge is so important that a local artist has written a song about the beauty of the bridge.

Mr Shine: Sing it!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I warn the member for Toowoomba North.

Mr LANGBROEK: Peter Marcon, a local singer-songwriter, has released a single on his debut album entitled *The Bridge*. If people go to his web site, they will see that the song was inspired by the magic of Bramble Bay, especially the old Hornibrook bridge. Perhaps members opposite should support local artists, which they say they like to do, and buy the debut album from this talented local singer-songwriter and listen to the song that was inspired by the bridge that members opposite want to pull down.

While I like the Goodwill Bridge and welcome other footbridges for people in the city, the same level of nostalgia and history—a level that warrants a local to write a song on his debut album—is not there about those bridges. I certainly have not heard any songs to that effect. In fact, I encourage members opposite to buy Mr Marcon's album. It has some fantastic songs on it with some very relevant titles—titles such as *When I Leave You*, which could be about the former member for Redcliffe or indeed the Labor Party's feelings towards the people for Redcliffe. There is another song, *I Wonder*, which could sum up the thoughts of locals as to whether the government has decided not to build a rail line to the Redcliffe peninsula despite Labor councillors supporting the idea.

I think it is wonderful that the member for Robina made comments in favour of retaining the bridge, and I wholeheartedly endorse those comments. If the Premier commits \$30 million for pedestrian bridges in the city, why will he not pay for the upkeep of one of Queensland's most historic bridges? When residents of south-east Queensland think of Redcliffe, they think of the Hornibrook bridge, with its odd-looking bump in the middle, teeming on a weekend with walkers, runners, cyclists and more fishermen than you can imagine. Award-winning paintings, plenty of stories and even a song have been inspired by this bridge. I encourage members to support the motion.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (6.08 pm): It is absolutely surreal standing in this parliament listening to the National Party talking about the preservation of historic timber structures in Queensland. Talk about conversion on the way to Damascus! Here is a party which presided over the demolition of the Bellevue Hotel in the middle of the night.

Mr Lucas: Cloudland.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS: Cloudland—another historic venue. How many members in this House have danced the night away at Cloudland? To stand here and listen to National Party members lecturing members of the Labor Party about the preservation of historic timber structures is really something to be believed. We know that the National Party lacks credibility totally on these issues because of its past history, and this is purely a by-election stunt supported unfortunately by the Liberal Party as well.

I am pleased to support this amendment, moved by the Premier and seconded by the Deputy Premier, both as a supporter of the heritage values of this bridge, which many members have spoken about tonight, and also as someone who recognises the legitimate interests of the many recreational anglers and cyclists who use the bridge. Other members have spoken about their experiences of the bridge. I can remember, going back 30 to 40 years, traversing that bridge as a youngster on many occasions. To say that the National and Liberal parties are the only ones who recognise its historical value is absolute nonsense. As has been outlined by a number of speakers, we have taken steps not only to preserve the important parts of the history of the bridge but also to ensure that appropriate and adequate recreational opportunities are provided to people by the provision of some infrastructure which I will detail shortly.

The new Houghton Highway bridge, which the Premier announced on 20 April, will make it easier to access the Redcliffe peninsula by road. Road access to and from both the peninsula and back to Sandgate has been identified as a key issue by local residents on the peninsula and in the Sandgate area. As we know, Redcliffe is a great place to visit and has been well served by Labor governments in making sure that both locals and visitors can continue to enjoy the laid-back seaside attitude and lifestyle of that locality.

When the new bridge is finished by Christmas 2009 and members, their families and visitors are able to drive over to attend picnics and visit some of the local beaches on the foreshore, which the council has spent a lot of money upgrading, it will be noted that they are driving over the equal longest bridge over water in Australia. As they drive past the dedicated fishing platform, they will be reminded of how the Beattie government does listen to people's needs and does deliver on those needs.

The dedicated fishing platform will be a huge benefit to the people of Redcliffe and to all other keen anglers who throw a line into Bramble Bay. I notice that the Leader of the Opposition quoted from the local paper in relation to this issue, but I have a later edition of the local paper which quotes Sunfish as being elated as a result of its lobbying of Minister Lucas. That relates specifically to the provision of the new fishing platform.

People driving on the new bridge will also be able to witness an example of this government's recognition of the significant historical values of that bridge. We have made a decision to preserve the historic portals on the Hornibrook bridge and also to preserve 300 metres of the timberwork at the northern end of the bridge. As we know—it has been mentioned several times—this bridge is predominantly constructed of timber, a great deal of which, at this stage, is degraded. The Department of Main Roads is experiencing increasing difficulties in sourcing the precious hardwood materials that are required to continue with the day-to-day repairs of the bridge. It is reassuring to know that, in an era when we are facing a global shortage of timber, particularly the precious hardwoods, and when rainforests in the Third World are being plundered, the government will ensure that the timber salvaged from the rest of the bridge will be recycled and used for the on-going maintenance of that section that is to be retained.

When a government occupies the treasury benches some tough decisions have to be made. It would be great if we could make decisions of this nature purely based on sentiment, as appears to be the proposition put by both the National and Liberal parties. But let us look at the long-term costs of actually maintaining the Hornibrook bridge. That cost is estimated at \$8½ million over the next 10 years and \$22 million over the next 30 years. That is just to provide pedestrian and cycle access, which will be provided by the new bridge.

Mr RICKUSS (Lockyer—NPA) (6.13 pm): I support the motion to preserve and maintain the old Hornibrook bridge. This government is a great user of the environment and heritage to try to prop up its vote. Now it is talking about building a \$149 million bridge with a fishing platform for fishers. This will be unsuitable for the fishers with the traffic roaring beside them. The government should build a bridge but not destroy the old bridge.

I have been down to Redcliffe recently and spoken to Sunfish executive Bill Turner. We moved along the bridge and spoke at length to people fishing, jogging and walking on the bridge. It was almost a small community of people in itself including people from all over Redcliffe, Sandgate and Brisbane for that matter.

As I have said, the old bridge is used by different groups and different people for different reasons. The fishers have their favourite spots. The joggers and the cyclists use the bridge to get fit or to clear their minds while they proceed across this magnificent strip of water. People have said that they will chain themselves to the bridge if it is going to be demolished.

The minister has used some shonky figures for maintaining this bridge as the reason for demolishing this south-east Queensland icon. The average amount of money spent on maintenance of the bridge over the four years from 1999 to 2003 had been \$64,000 a year. In 2003 only \$36,000 was spent on the bridge. The government has been slowly reducing the spending on this south-east Queensland icon so it can say that it is in such bad repair that it has to be knocked down. This is typical of this Labor government. It is the great supporter of heritage issues if it suits it.

Its management is so poor that it cannot manage the maintenance of a 70-year-old bridge. If the minister thinks the government is going to get any support from the locals for knocking down a bridge, I am afraid he will be in for a shock. The groundswell of support that will come for this bridge will be astounding. The Heiner Road bridge in Ipswich, which is nowhere near as conspicuous, created a lot of angst in the local community until eventually the developer decided to change the plans to incorporate the bridge. Here is a government that is not as responsive as a modern-day developer.

Bill Turner, who has been involved in community groups and organisations for more years than he cares to remember, said that he had never seen such a groundswell of support for an issue as the Hornibrook bridge. People stop him in the street and congratulate him for the effort he is putting in to save the bridge. When speaking to Bill on the bridge, every second person would say to us, without prompting, that it is ridiculous to knock down the old bridge.

When the full details are explained to the people of south-east Queensland—that this government has not maintained the bridge for years and that the figures quoted are very rubbery—then I am sure that support for the bridge will be overwhelming. When speaking to a friend of mine about this matter I was told that her mother and father met on a trip to Redcliffe just after the opening of the Hornibrook bridge. People from all over south-east Queensland have an attachment to the bridge.

I call on the member for Sandgate and the minister for primary industries to tell us where he stands on the destruction of this local icon. Is he in favour of knocking down this bridge, where local grandfathers and grandmothers take their grandchildren fishing and where mums and dads take their family for a Sunday stroll?

I am also interested in knowing whether the Labor candidate for the upcoming Redcliffe by-election, Ms Lillian van Litsenburg, will support the state Labor government's irresponsible management of one of the great pieces of Sandgate-Redcliffe heritage. I am sure Ms van Litsenburg will be quite excited to express her views on this matter in the local media so that the voters of Redcliffe know where she stands.

I would also like to draw the attention of members to the Goodwill Bridge. It cost in excess of \$30 million. When that is amortised, it will be seen that in excess of \$2 million per year is required. On top of that is the standard ongoing maintenance and repairs that would also run into tens of thousands of dollars per year. Yet with dodgy figures the government can only come up with having to spend \$22 million over the next 30 years. The Hornibrook bridge is in excess of four times the length of the Goodwill Bridge and there is no capital outlay.

I encourage the minister for primary industries to use his clout in cabinet, if he has any, to make sure that the required maintenance is started immediately so that this government cannot use the future irreplaceable state of this bridge as a reason not to keep it in place. I urge this government to live up to its rhetoric about the heritage values of Queensland. Here is a chance for this government to put into practice what it likes to preach. It should save the Hornibrook bridge. History will acknowledge this government as the great pretender that is full of spin and rhetoric. It cannot get the basics right. It wants to destroy a heritage icon like the Hornibrook bridge.

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (6.18 pm): It is interesting to note that the member for Maroochydore and others in the National Party accuse the government of not listening in relation to this issue, but they have taken so little notice of the people of Redcliffe that they are not even bothering to stand a candidate. That is why they think in terms of the policies they want to put before the people of Redcliffe. They are not in coalition with the Liberal Party, but they want to ignore them.

Other speakers have indicated the level of maintenance expenditure needed for the bridge in the long term. They have indicated that it will cost approximately \$22 million over the next 30 years. But it is not just then, it is after that and after that and after that. This is not a structure that has an undefined life. It was a structure that was built 70 years ago to last 50 years. The replacement cost of an individual timber girder now is \$11,000 compared to \$7½ thousand in 2004.

We would need a tree about 100 to 150 years old with a two-metre base to make a single girder to replace it. That is the sort of tree those opposite are talking about. These trees are simply not

available in any quantity anymore. Insofar as they are, do those opposite think it is appropriate to use those trees to replace the 1,800 girders on that bridge? We have to take our environment and heritage seriously. A sensible solution to the Hornibrook Highway is about that.

We also need to take the environment of the people of Redcliffe seriously when it comes to the need to duplicate the Houghton Highway. We allocated \$149 million for this duplication on the basis of a good study which, I remind the member for Maroochydore, has been progressing for some considerable time. The money is there now for the project and the project will be delivered. Currently, the Houghton Highway carries 35,000 vehicles a day—3,000 vehicles an hour in both directions in peak times. It is expected to increase to 4,000 an hour when the new bridge is open in 2009. Motorists will save five minutes on an average trip. This new bridge will last 300 years. We get only one chance at this.

Members opposite might want to consider this: do they not want us to build a bikeway and a pedestrian way on the duplicated Houghton Highway? Do they want us to take the risk there or do they think we should build that as well? We get one go at it. We make long-term decisions. We put \$30 million into the Gateway duplication to ensure that it has a bicycle path, because that road will last 300 years as well. We get one go at it. If those opposite are suggesting that we should not put a bikeway and a pedestrian way on the duplicated bridge then they are mad. If they say that we should have two of them they are madder still.

A few weeks ago I met with representatives of Sunfish and had a good discussion with them about the importance of the facilities offered by the Hornibrook Highway bridge. I found Bill Turner to be very constructive during our discussions. He pointed out to me the need for fishing access from the Hornibrook Highway bridge, in particular to the channels. We listened to what they said. We have listened to Lillian van Litsenburg as well.

We will preserve 300 metres of the bridge from the Redcliffe end. That will take people up to the channel and the place where people mainly like to fish in all tides. On the southern end of the bridge we will have a fishing platform. It will not be a fishing platform designed as a bridge as the Hornibrook Highway bridge is. That bridge has gaps in the railing that are not suitable for children or for people with disabilities or other issues. It will be a fishing platform that is designed specifically for disability access and for everybody else to use.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lockyer, this is your final warning.

Mr LUCAS: I am very proud of our heritage in Queensland. I am proud of our steam trains. That does not mean that the appropriate decision is to run steam trains on every track in Queensland because we once had them there. This is about preserving a representative sample of our heritage that we can all use and enjoy.

How could it be responsible to maintain an entire 2.7 kilometres of the Hornibrook Highway bridge when that money could go into replacing timber bridges in electorates like that of the member for Lockyer where it will matter? They would then be able to increase higher mass limits for country drivers. That is a responsible use of money. At the same time we are protecting and preserving our heritage.

How many recreational jetties could we build? We do not need a 2.7 kilometre recreational jetty; we need a quality bikeway. We need a quality running and walking track—one that will last for 300 years on a duplicated bridge. We need and deserve the heritage of the 300 metres at the end and the portals to be preserved. We will upgrade it so that it is safe and appropriate for people to fish from. We will also provide a fishing platform on the southern end which is disability compliant and safe and secure.

I wish that I had unlimited funds in my budget and that I could get whatever money I want from the Premier and Treasurer. The practical people of Redcliffe, as the member for Murrumba said, want a practical solution. They want the Houghton Highway duplicated immediately and we are doing that. What they want in relation to the Hornibrook Highway is to have a bikeway, a pedestrian way and fishing access. We will do that as well. This is an important thing that we are delivering on. We will deliver on it in a sustainable way.

Question—That the Premier's amendment be agreed to—put; and the House divided—

AYES, 53—Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Boyle, Choi, E Clark, L Clark, Croft, Cummins, N Cunningham, English, Fenlon, Finn, Fouras, Fraser, Hayward, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Livingstone, Lucas, Male, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, O'Brien, Pearce, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, Reilly, Reynolds, N Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Stone, Struthers, C Sullivan, Wallace, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T Sullivan, Reeves

NOES, 22—Copeland, E Cunningham, Flegg, Foley, Hobbs, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Menkens, Messenger, Pratt, Quinn, Rickuss, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Hopper, Malone

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 6.31 pm to 7.30 pm.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (APPROVED PENSIONERS RATE SUBSIDY) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 23 March (see p. 696).

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women) (7.30 pm): I rise to respond to the Local Government (Approved Pensioners Rate Subsidy) Amendment Bill 2005 introduced by the member for Beaudesert on 23 March 2005. The Local Government (Approved Pensioners Rate Subsidy) Amendment Bill 2005 seeks to amend the Local Government Act 1993 to provide aged pensioners in leasehold residential arrangements with access to rate relief under the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme administered by the Department of Communities. The Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme is designed to alleviate the impact of local government rates and charges on approved pensioners by providing a state government subsidy off the cost of their gross rates and charges levied by local government. The subsidy is equivalent to 20 per cent of the gross rates and charges to a maximum of \$180 per annum.

Currently, only eligible pensioners who live in freehold situations—that is, either in their own home or a freehold retirement village—can claim a rates rebate under the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme. The explanatory notes accompanying this bill indicate that the amendment is aimed at redressing the perceived anomaly and inequity associated with pensioners in leasehold situations not being able to access rate relief currently available to other pensioners. Pensioners residing in leasehold situations are specifically excluded from eligibility under this scheme and, interestingly, have been since the scheme was established in 1980 by the then government.

However, my recommendation that the proposed bill be opposed has nothing to do with my views on whether the eligibility criteria for this scheme should be reviewed. Rather, I oppose the bill for the very simple reason that there is no need for a legislative amendment to extend eligibility criteria for this scheme. The Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme has no basis in legislation at all, including the Local Government Act 1993 that the proposed bill seeks to amend. The 122 participating councils that administer this scheme in their local government areas on behalf of the state government do so in accordance with Department of Communities' policy and procedure titled Queensland Government Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme. Amending the Local Government Act 1993 in the way proposed by this bill therefore would be inconsistent with the current administrative policy basis for this scheme.

Indeed, the proposed amendment would effectively create two different ways in which the objectives of the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme are achieved depending on whether a pensioner resides in a freehold or leasehold situation. I am sure that members will agree that this is a very compelling reason for not supporting the proposed bill. However, I am also opposed to the bill on the basis that the member for Beaudesert has offered very little information or support to the proposal to extend the scheme's eligibility criteria. The honourable member for Beaudesert states in the explanatory notes accompanying his bill that he anticipates 'only a relatively insignificant increase in expenditures by the Queensland government' as a result of extending the scheme's eligibility criteria. However, the honourable member has not offered any detailed financial analysis to support this claim.

My questions to the honourable member are: where is the evidence to support this statement? Does he know the number of retirement villages and pensioners that would be captured by this extension to the eligibility criteria? Does he know the quantum of funding required to subsidise these additional pensioners under the scheme? Does he know the potential growth in this area of retirement living and the impact this might have on subsidising rate relief to these pensioners? Does he know how much it would cost the state and participating local governments to administer this additional aspect of the scheme? And this does not even cover the unintentional consequences of the proposal. For example, while the proposed bill only anticipates aged pensioners residing in leasehold situations becoming eligible for subsidy under the scheme, the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme actually applies to all pensioners, including people on disability allowances and sole parents. Other types of pensioners residing in leasehold situations might reasonably expect to obtain rate relief through the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme if eligibility criteria start to be extended. What would the cost be to provide this additional rate relief?

The government can only make an informed decision about whether to extend the eligibility criteria for this scheme based on a thorough analysis of the costs, impacts and benefits associated with this proposal. It would be irresponsible to endorse an extension of the scheme's eligibility criteria without undertaking analysis to quantify financial and community costs and benefits. It is this sort of analysis that will provide answers to the questions I have asked the member for Beaudesert. I reiterate that the Local Government Act 1993 or any other local government legislation would not be amended in this case because this scheme is not established or recognised under this act.

Finally, I would also like to note that the proposed bill references the current provision in the Local Government Act 1993 for local governments to provide rate remissions or offer concessions to

pensioners. The Brisbane City Council also has this capacity under the City of Brisbane Act 1924. My understanding is that currently 98 councils have implemented schemes under these provisions of the Local Government Act 1993 and the City of Brisbane Act 1924. Seven councils, including Brisbane City Council, offer rate relief to pensioners in leasehold situations such as is anticipated in the bill we are debating today.

I want to make it clear that a decision to oppose the proposed bill will not in any way affect the operation of any of these schemes. These councils fund these concession schemes out of their own operational budgets. Their decision to provide rate concessions to particular residents in their local government areas is entirely their own business, though I pay my respects to those that have decided to do so. In summing up, let me repeat that there is no need for the legislative amendments proposed under the Local Government (Approved Pensioners Rate Subsidy) Amendment Bill 2005, and heaven knows we have enough legislation without bringing more legislation through this House that is unnecessary. There is absolutely no role for the Local Government Act 1993 in the administration of the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme. I am assured that legislation is neither anticipated nor required by the Department of Communities to administer this scheme. I therefore recommend to the House that the Local Government (Approved Pensioners Rate Subsidy) Amendment Bill 2005 be opposed.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (7.37 pm): I am very pleased to add my support to this bill which is under consideration before the House. The Local Government (Approved Pensioners Rate Subsidy) Amendment Bill 2005 is only a small bill—three clauses, two pages—but it is going to create a lot of happiness in the Burnett, particularly for the residents of Carlyle Gardens Retirement Village at Bargara who have thoroughly educated me about the unfairness, the discrimination and the inequities of Queensland's Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme. This bill is designed to end those inequities, the discrimination and the unfairness and to make sure that all aged pensioners who sell their homes and move into a retirement village are eligible to receive the state government's pensioner rate subsidy.

The maximum amount of this rebate is \$180 and works out to only about \$3.46 per day or \$24.22 per week, but unfortunately for many of our aged pensioners this is a significant amount of money. The first time I heard about the unfairness of the existing rate subsidy was when I was approached by Mr Barry Stick, who is a resident of Carlyle Gardens Retirement Village. Prior to moving to Carlyle in 1998, Mr Stick was a land-holder living in Hervey Bay and Brisbane and was a qualifying person under the state government rate rebate scheme. He received the state government rate rebate, which amounted to approximately \$180 per year. He bought a unit in Carlyle Gardens and expected that the same conditions would apply to him when moving into that retirement village. This was not to be so.

While Mr Stick is responsible for the payment of rates through the village trust account, his residency is subject to a lease registered under the Retirement Villages Act 1999. According to the state government rate rebate guidelines, he is not entitled to the payment of that state government rebate. I asked Mr Stick if he received any rate rebates at all and he replied 'none whatsoever'. However, if he was to live outside the village and own his own home, he would receive both the state government rate rebate and the Burnett Shire Council rate rebate. As well as the urban fire levy, that would equate to slightly in excess of \$300 per annum or \$6 per week, which is a considerable gap in the budget of qualifying pensioners.

Mr Stick pointed out to me that the pensioner rate rebate would be available if he lived in a unit in a freehold residence on the foreshores of Bargara with a value of \$2 million or \$3 million. To qualify for the rate rebate, a number of ownership conditions must be met. One is that the applicant must be the registered proprietor of the land and must occupy that dwelling as a permanent residence. The second condition is that a life tenant, which is defined in the rebate guidelines, must be the beneficiary under a will, and they have life tenancy and also an obligation to pay the rates. These conditions are not all that dissimilar to those for a resident in a leaseholder retirement village who does not qualify for the pensioner rate rebate.

Tonight, if the government chooses not to support this bill members opposite will have to disprove the rumour in Carlyle and other retirement villages that the government just does not care, because the other argument that there are inadequate funds will not wash, especially when we have a record budget surplus. According to some of the figures supplied to me by Mr Stick, his calculations show that approximately 260 villages in Queensland will be affected by this. Once again I emphasise that these figures are based on the best available detail that Mr Stick has. Overall we are talking of approximately 58,500 residents who would be affected by changes to this legislation.

It is fair to say that in a number of shires throughout the state the local government is carrying the can for the state government. I would particularly like to mention the Burnett Shire Council, which is providing residents of Carlyle with a concession of about \$90 that the council believes is a discount to compensate residents for what the state government is not doing. I applaud the Burnett Shire Council for its generosity.

Retired people who live at Carlyle Gardens in the Burnett electorate believe that residents of leasehold retirement villages in South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria receive the pensioner rate rebate. They want to know why in Queensland they are not treated so kindly. Tonight members

opposite have a chance to answer my constituents in a proactive and positive manner. They have a chance to fix a system that unfairly discriminates against many thousands of aged pensioners and support the legislation before the House.

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (7.43 pm): I rise to speak to the Local Government (Approved Pensioners Rate Subsidy) Amendment Bill 2005. From the outset I have to say that this particular bill's intent, as put forward by the member for Beaudesert, is one that the majority in this House will support, if not tonight then in principle. I would be very surprised if the logic and commonsense of the bill is defeated. It would only be left for me and everybody else within these walls and outside them to conclude that that happened because it is an opposition bill and the government is reluctant to allow any crossbench bill to pass or to see the light of day.

Often it is the silly little inconsistencies in legislation that impact unfairly on parts of our community, and that is exactly what has occurred under the Queensland government pensioner rebate scheme. Currently under the pensioner rebate scheme, aged pensioners have a bit of an incentive to remain residing in their own homes by means of a 20 per cent subsidy of the gross rates and charges levied by local government. That is not a lot of money and none of us could say that it is. However, the maximum amount is \$180 a year and for a pensioner an extra \$180 a year in one's own pocket is very valuable. The subsidy is paid by the state government to local government to be passed on to approved pensioner ratepayers.

As a I grew up I probably caused my parents a lot of headaches, as most kids do. I never envisaged that as a baby boomer I would be causing the government even bigger headaches. The prospect of the baby boomers hitting retirement age has highlighted a whole new set of issues for governments to deal with, and it will take a lot of ingenuity on their part to resolve those issues.

Many members of the ageing population would much prefer to remain in their own homes and will endeavour to do so for as long as they possibly can. We must remember how important their independence is to them. We can see that by the increasing numbers of older people who each year hit the roads dragging their homes behind them. More and more pensioners are actually cutting their ties altogether, selling their fixed abodes and travelling the country on a full-time basis. Constantly we read about them in the papers, which tell their stories in regular features. They no longer consider leaving an inheritance for their children but enjoy their latter years using up their life savings. Perhaps some will say that that is a fairly selfish attitude, while others will say, 'Good on you. Go out and have a great time because you've worked for it.' Whatever they are called—selfish, the grey nomads, the geriatric jaunters—eventually the time will come when they have to pull over and leave their highway-travelling freedoms behind them. The vast majority of them will opt for a structured community retirement village rather than purchase another home.

Those retirees who opt to stay in their own homes are finding it increasingly difficult to keep on top of rapidly increasing property valuations. The accompanying rates hikes are making the option of moving into community retirement villages extremely attractive. Therefore, whichever way we look at it, in the future the impact on the government coffers caused by the retirement of those geriatric jaunters will indeed be very significant. There is no doubt that it will have a huge impost on government.

Unfortunately, the situation changes when one no longer owns one's own home. As an owner of a property with one's name on the certificate of title one is eligible for the 20 per cent rebate. However, as stated in the second reading speech, this is not necessarily the case when one moves into a retirement village. If a pensioner buys a unit in a freehold retirement village and moves in, he or she receives a title making them eligible to receive that rebate. But, if that same pensioner moves to a leasehold retirement village, they will not get the rebate because their name does not appear on the lease. It is stated in the second reading speech that the pensioner in the leasehold retirement village will contribute exactly the same amount to the payment of the rates imposed by the local authority for the area of land that their unit occupies, exactly as if they owned the property directly in their own name and were the title holder.

The question was asked why those who choose the leasehold retirement village had to lose the rates rebate when their expenses for the unit are exactly the same as for the other pensioners who choose a freehold retirement village. This can only be classed as a form of discrimination and the Local Government (Approved Pensioners Rate Subsidy) Amendment Bill 2005 is designed to rectify that current inequity.

The extension to the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme applies only if the pensioner is the holder of a leasehold interest in an accommodation unit that he or she occupies in a retirement village; if under the retirement village scheme for the retirement village the pensioner is required to contribute a relevant share payable to the local government for the retirement village where the pensioner is living; if the relevant share relates to the person's leasehold interest in the accommodation unit; or if the pensioner were the holder of a freehold interest in the accommodation unit the pensioner would be entitled to a rate remission from the local government. Unfortunately, where any inequities occur in bills it takes a long time to recognise them and often people are penalised unfairly because of them. Unfortunately, it also takes time to amend them. The member for Beaudesert should be commended for acknowledging that and putting forward this bill in the interest of fairness to all pensioners.

If the bill is defeated tonight, it would be my hope that members on the government's side of the House would use any little power that they have in caucus to pressure for the reintroduction of the bill by the government. Nothing distresses people outside of parliament more than the pettiness of politics and the failure of the passage of a bill merely because of petty-minded partyism. This bill is a good bill. It addresses the inequity of the current legislation and deserves support. But if, as the minister says, it is not necessary to pass it, then I look forward to any appropriate changes being made by government at the appropriate level. In any case, I support the intent of this bill and I commend it to the House.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (7.49 pm): I rise also to support the intent of this bill, although I listened with some concern to the contribution of the minister for local government in relation to its appropriateness. I want to speak to the aims and goals of the bill. What did the previous speaker call it?

Mrs Pratt: Geriatric jaundice.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I am not too sure about the geriatric jaundice because I am fast rushing up to being one of those. They are certainly the wise and retired elder statespeople of our state, and we get a lot of them through my electorate. We just had a blue with some locals about the Calliope River where a lot of them stay overnight. They have a wonderful time. They sit around the fires and talk and fish and do all sorts of things.

The population is ageing, and that has been acknowledged. I know that local authorities are concerned about the increasing impost on them in terms of the pensioner component of rates income. In fact, in my electorate Calliope council has passed an initiative to phase out the council's component of the pensioner rebate. I have already discussed with the councillors some of my concerns. The phase-in scheme that they are introducing will allow for pensioners to either pay the full rate with the phased-out council component or add that component as a cost to their property. The rationale was that often when an older person passes away that property is sold and the proceeds divided up amongst the family. There may be some grounds for that proposal to proceed, because the aggregated debt will be paid by all of the beneficiaries to the estate. When any new policy or decision is made, whether by the local, state or federal government, a component of the community falls through the gap—falls through the logic. In this case it would be those in the community who have a son or daughter, irrespective of whether or not they are on a pension, who will not sell the property but will actually live in it. On the death of the parent they will have a new debt allocated to them which could place them in an invidious position. They could be forced to sell the family home to clear the debt with the council or it could make the rate burden on that property very difficult for them to meet.

In many instances properties not only attract the state government pensioners' rebate but also many local authorities add to the rate rebate for our retired people; they have a component which is council initiated. I commend the councils that have that process. The data that I have, which is current until January this year, says that the Queensland government provides a maximum \$180 concession on local government rates to eligible seniors. Under the New South Wales Local Government Act eligible pensioners in that state receive a maximum \$250 reduction on their rates. This is financed jointly between the New South Wales state government and individual councils. They split it fifty-fifty. In Victoria the Department of Human Services provides the pensioner rate concession scheme under which shareholders are entitled to a 50 per cent concession on their rates. The maximum pensioner concession rate is \$160. South Australia's eligible pensioners receive \$190 off rates which are paid by the local council, and Revenue South Australia—that is the Treasury—provides another \$100 refund off the rates.

In Western Australia pensioners receive a 50 per cent rebate on rates and there is no dollar limit on this. Honourable members would have to admit that Western Australia's scheme is a very generous one. In addition, seniors receive a 25 per cent rebate on rates and it is capped at an amount of \$204.75. That is seniors as opposed to pensioners, who receive the full 50 per cent rebate. Both of those rebates are funded by the state government Office of State Revenue.

In Tasmania the pensioner rates remission concession provides a 30 per cent remission of local government rates up to a maximum of \$325 per annum—and that is in 2004-05 dollars—indexed by the consumer price index. The concession includes a discount on the Fire Service contribution of 20 per cent and it is run by the Department of Treasury and Finance. That acknowledges that every state in Australia recognises that rates are an impost on pensioners, who have a limited and fixed ability to pay.

This legislation extends the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme to those who are in retirement villages. Every member in this House would have received groups and individuals coming to talk to them about the future of aged care in their area. More and more people are looking and planning—which is a healthy thing—for their retirement and their subsequent diminution in independence. There was a government campaign—I think it was run by this government in a previous parliament—that actively encouraged people to look at their future, not to be afraid of it, not to pretend that ageing did not occur. I am sure the federal government has run programs to say to people, 'Plan for your future.' In many instances that planning requires a recognition that for many of us at one point or another our ability to remain in our home independently will be challenged.

A mix of structures and accommodation types has developed over the last decade to give choice to all of us as we age. There are those seniors units where people can buy a duplex or a one- or two-bedroom unit. When their situation changes due to a higher needs rating or their death, the unit is bought back by the management group and is resold to somebody else. A proportion of the purchase price is remitted to either the purchaser or the purchaser's family.

Then there are those who pay what is almost a perpetual lease—they move into the unit and pay a lease on that property. A component of the lease would be recognition for council rates. Therefore, on a pro rata basis those residents are paying rates. A number of management styles have been introduced to recognise people's different disposable income levels, the flexibility of their income and whether or not they are independently funded retirees. All of those situations are recognised in the various opportunities to purchase aged care services.

The extension of this bill to cover retirement villages, particularly residents in leasehold retirement villages, and in other tenures is important. When we consider legislation we are often told by ministers—and rightly so—that we are moving amendments to update the legislation. Often we are recognising developments and changes in our community as well as in our technology and other facilities, and this results in a need for the legislation to be updated. This piece of legislation recognises that principle yet again.

Like I said, I am concerned about the minister's contribution in which he alluded to the fact that this bill amends the wrong piece of legislation. However, I must support the principle that it is espousing. I believe we need to recognise the increased ageing of our population. It is often discussed and it is an age group of which the member for Nanango said she will soon be a part. I certainly support the intent of this legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (7.58 pm): I rise to respond to this bill proposed by the member for Beaudesert and, in common with other government members, will be opposing this legislation. Whilst looking over this bill I could not help thinking of those prophetic words first uttered by the member for Logan and Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy when he castigated the National Party for being the best resourced but laziest opposition in our state's history. That telling comment by my august colleague sums up succinctly just what thought processes have gone into formulating this legislation.

It is a lazy and ill thought out piece of cheap politicking. As the minister for local government has already alluded to, the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme, which is designed to alleviate the impact of local government rates on eligible pensioners by providing a state government subsidy of their gross rates, has no basis at all in legislation. That includes, I note, the Local Government Act 1993, which this bill seeks to amend. The 120-odd councils that administer this scheme on behalf of the state government do so in accordance with policies of the Department of Communities, not in accordance with legislation.

This sloppy amendment would help create two different ways in which pensioner rate subsidies are paid. As legislators, it is incumbent upon all of us to guard against such carelessness. I note that the Beattie government is taking a more well thought out approach to assisting aged pensioners in leasehold situations. The Department of Communities initiated a project in March this year which was aimed at investigating the costs and impacts of extending the current scheme to include pensioners holding 90- and 99-year leaseholds in retirement villages. That department has already started discussions with the local governments that administer the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme. Through these discussions, the Department of Communities will be able to assess the potential costs and impacts associated with extending the scheme.

Members should compare this well thought out course of action to the childish attempt we are debating tonight. Unlike the best resourced but laziest opposition, the government has taken it upon itself to talk about any changes not only with the local governments that administer the scheme but also with resident groups and industry representatives. Therefore, I urge fellow members to join me in opposing this ill thought out bill.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Jarratt): Order! I call the honourable member for Beaudesert. Have we run out of speakers on this bill? I call the member for Nicklin.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (8.01 pm): Before the dinner break many members were listed to speak in this debate but, after discussions with the Leader of the House, various speakers were taken off the speaking list to ensure that two bills could be debated tonight. Members have certainly assisted with that, and I appreciate their willingness to try to ensure that two bills from the non-government side are debated tonight, before it gets too late in the evening.

I certainly support the intent of this bill. I listened to the minister outline the government's position. At the moment there appears to be a very clear discrimination between one class of retired people and another class of retired people. For all intents and purposes, when many of these people choose where they intend to reside in the future they may not think about the issue of reductions in rates and additional charges.

I put on record the one reason so many non-government members took their names off the speaking list: to ensure that tonight we are able to debate the two bills. I indicate that I will be supporting the bill in its current form before the House.

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (8.03 pm), in reply: I noted the minister's comments about this legislation; however, this legislation was introduced as a result of a letter from people involved with retirement villages who were concerned. Their letter was directed to the Minister for Communities, Mr Pitt. In Mr Pitt's reply was an answer to the concerns that the government expressed.

No doubt many people are entitled to this subsidy under the pensioner scheme, as long as their name is on the title of the building. If they are in a freehold situation in a retirement village, quite obviously their name is on the title and they are entitled to the subsidy. Of course, there is an anomaly in that those who are in a leasehold arrangement—even though the corporate body itself pays the rates to the council and it in turn levies the people who are leasing the property and these people are paying exactly the same rates as those who are in a freehold situation—are not entitled to a subsidy.

The Minister for Communities admitted and agreed that his department administered this particular set-up. The minister himself said that they were not prepared to extend the subsidy to those on a leasehold because of the cost of the program. We admit that the legislation that we have presented does not cover all people who could be under a lease arrangement. There are many others in very different situations, depending upon the agreements that the corporate body comes to with the council. However, this was the first move. The Minister for Communities stated in his letter that the legislation which had to be changed to allow this change to be implemented was the Local Government Act.

I have heard the minister's comments and I have heard the subsequent criticisms. Let me say this: retirement villages are extremely complicated. They are mainly run by the Department of Fair Trading—they also come under the Department of Communities—but the legislation that has to be changed is the Local Government Act. That position has come from the government's own minister and departments.

As many members have said, there is no doubt that we all agree that one of the major issues facing Australia is our changing and rapidly ageing population. This was recognised in 1980. We have heard of the HACC programs and programs which encourage people to stay in their homes rather than move too quickly into nursing homes and retirement villages. In order to encourage that the pensioner rate subsidy was granted. It was a grant from the state government to be administered by the local government, but it was state government money. All governments are still trying to come to an agreement on how to handle the ageing population—not only the ageing population but also the differences in lifestyles.

Many of us, especially people aged around 40 and 50, would agree that as young people we would not have lived in the urban development programs that are going on now. We all wanted a tennis court, a cricket pitch and a big block of land. Now there is the Subiaco development in Perth, developments in Adelaide, the dockside development in Melbourne and the Rocks development in Sydney. Then in Brisbane development is occurring around Newstead and all of those areas. We all have to agree that our lifestyles are changing. Our young people, especially those who have undertaken university studies, can afford to live in units at Newstead which are priced at \$800,000 or \$900,000. That is nothing for them.

Similarly with our ageing population, who would ever have thought in the olden days that we would place older parents in a retirement village situation? Up to probably a decade ago it was seen as a very poor thing to encourage. In the extended family situation we encouraged our families to stay together and look after children, and that is what everybody wanted. Now, everyone would have to admit that our lifestyles have changed. Older people are quite prepared to go into a retirement village with the thought of going later to a nursing home as their condition deteriorates. We have to accept that. In fact, when we look at the lifestyle of some of this urban development we realise that it is quite desirable, because some retirement villages are absolutely magnificent. People move into those villages and gain better facilities than they had.

The Queensland government rate subsidy scheme certainly provides an incentive to aged pensioners who reside in their own home, by means of the subsidy equivalent to 20 per cent to a maximum of \$180 per annum of the gross rates and charges levied by the local government. This is administered by the local government through money paid by the state government. It is only that it is paid by the state government that it is given so generously by the local government.

We also admit that if it is to be extended to the lease arrangement, it is not a clear and easy system. There are many different arrangements that the corporate bodies come to in their arrangements with local councils. Unfortunately, under the Queensland government policy, the payment of this subsidy can be paid only where the pensioner is the owner or life tenant either solely or jointly of the property which is their principal place of residence and has either solely or jointly with a co-owner the legal responsibility for the payment of rates and charges levied in respect of the property. It does not extend to a lease arrangement. It does not extend to where a person does not have their name on the title; where the name on the title is the body corporate.

Already, as I heard mentioned by the member for Gladstone, we see New South Wales, South Australia and certainly Western Australia moving to extend the subsidy to those who are on a lease arrangement. To be an owner or co-owner who receives the subsidy, the policy requires that the name of the pensioner must appear on the certificate of title of the property. This cannot always happen and will not always happen under the developments that we have, but everyone would have to admit that the intent of the legislation is to extend it to those who are in a similar situation to those who buy freehold property within a retirement village and in buying the freehold property end up with their name on the title.

We could clearly ask: what is the difference between those people and those who find a retirement village with a 99-year lease where they similarly move in and pay their rates as a levy to the corporate body which owns the property and has paid its rates to the local council? We agree that certainly the figures have to be done. Our figures are \$2 million, but that is the initial group of people—those who clearly are in a situation where they pay exactly the same amount for rates, even if it is to the body corporate, as those who are in a freehold situation, and that therefore is the intent of the legislation. That is similar to what was said by the minister for communities when he answered a question from the real estate people. He said that it was his organisation that handled it. But they did not have enough money. They were not prepared to go into a leasehold arrangement and, if they were, it was not his legislation; it was that of the minister for local government. Therefore, I would say to everyone in the House that this is the first move. If it is that the government is going to say no to this, then quite obviously it is saying to the pensioners of Queensland, 'We are not interested in extending the pensioner scheme to allow those people who are paying rates through a leasehold arrangement the same as that which applies to those who are in a freehold situation.' I certainly believe most people should support the intent of the legislation, and then we can discuss the rest when debating the clauses.

Question—That the bill be read a second time—put; and the House divided—

AYES, 23—Copeland, E Cunningham, Flegg, Foley, Hobbs, Horan, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Menkens, Pratt, Quinn, Rickuss, E Roberts, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Hopper, Malone

NOES, 50—Barry, Boyle, Briskey, Choi, E Clark, L Clark, Croft, Cummins, N Cunningham, English, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Hayward, Hoolihan, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Livingstone, Lucas, Male, McNamara, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, Reynolds, N Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Struthers, C Sullivan, Wallace, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T Sullivan, Reeves

Resolved in the **negative**.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (8.20 pm): I move—

That general business orders of the day No. 2 be postponed.

Motion agreed to.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION (APPOINTMENT ACCOUNTABILITY) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 20 April (see p. 981).

Hon. LD LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (Minister for Justice and Attorney-General) (8.21 pm): At the outset I advise that the government does not support this bill. As the member for Caloundra and, I am sure, all other members of this House are aware, the appointment procedures for the Ombudsman, the Information Commissioner, the Auditor-General and the chair of the Crime and Misconduct Commission are currently being reviewed as part of a review of legislation governing these independent statutory office holders. This legislative review was recommended by the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee—LCARC—in its report No. 36 titled *The Queensland Constitution: specific content issues*. The review covers provisions relating to appointment, termination, suspension, tenure, salary and budget.

The Premier informed the House of this review on 2 September 2004. Even though the Premier informed the House of the review in response to the LCARC report, in April this year the honourable member for Caloundra introduced this bill, the Freedom of Information and Other Legislation (Appointment Accountability) Amendment Bill 2005. In so doing he is seeking to pre-empt the outcome of this review and undermine the consultation process that is currently under way. Notwithstanding that the honourable member has decided to take this pre-emptive action, I will turn briefly to what exactly is being proposed by the bill before the House.

The private member's bill amends the Ombudsman Act 2001, the Freedom of Information Act 1992, and the Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977 in relation to the selection processes for the Ombudsman, the Queensland Information Commissioner and the Auditor-General respectively. In his second reading speech the member for Caloundra said that the private member's bill would standardise the procedure for appointment for these three statutory positions by creating a uniform appointment process identical to that used for the appointment of the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Commissioner. The process for appointment of the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Commissioner—or, as I will refer to it, the PCM Commissioner—involves national advertisement by the Speaker for suitably qualified persons and the appointment of the successful applicant only if there is bipartisan support by this parliament's Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee. It is worth noting that the proposed selection process in the private member's bill is not strictly identical to the current selection procedure for the PCM Commissioner.

The member for Caloundra's bill also requires the chairperson and 'a prescribed member of the parliamentary committee' to be members of the selection panel and it expressly requires that the basis for selection is on merit alone. The prescribed member is described in the bill as—

- (a) if there is a deputy chairperson of the parliamentary committee who is not a member of the political party or parties in government in the Legislative Assembly—the deputy chairperson of the parliamentary committee; or
- (b) otherwise—a member of the parliamentary committee nominated by the member who is recognised in the Legislative Assembly as the Leader of the Opposition.

However, there is no requirement in the appointment procedure for the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Commissioner. It does not include any requirements regarding the composition of the selection panel. Regardless of the detail of the bill, the fact is that the government's review of legislation governing independent statutory office holders must be allowed to run its course. When the Premier announced this review he also foreshadowed an independent strategic review of the Information Commissioner and Ombudsman's office. These independent, strategic reviews are required by the legislation specific to each office.

The general review of the legislation being conducted by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet will not be finalised until the independent reports have been delivered. These review processes will play a valuable role in informing government decision making and the government does not intend to pre-empt their recommendations. The government will not commit to a final position in relation to the standardisation of appointments procedures until all these reviews are completed.

The current process for appointment of the Ombudsman, the Auditor-General and the Information Commissioner require national advertisement for suitably qualified persons and consultation by the responsible minister with the relevant parliamentary committee about the process of selection for appointment and the appointment of the person as the relevant statutory office holder. Any question about whether we go further than this is a matter for further consideration in light of the outcome of the general review of the legislation. For these reasons the government will not be supporting this bill.

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (8.26 pm): Surprise! Surprise! I rise to support the private member's bill introduced into parliament by the member for Caloundra and I commend him for introducing this bill into the parliament. Fundamentally, this bill has at its very core the issue of ensuring accountability, openness and transparency in the selection of very important statutory office holders in Queensland. Those office holders are the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner. If it was not for this government's cavalier disregard for the process of independence and proper selection with regard to the current Information Commissioner, Cathi Taylor, I doubt that the honourable member would have had the motivation to bring this bill before the parliament for debate. It just goes to show that we are again suffering from a government that quite proudly proclaims standing order 63-15—that is 63 of them, 15 of us and whoever sits on the crossbenches. At the end of the day they will do what they want to do. Frankly, the selection of Cathi Taylor was just another example of that.

For the benefit of members of this parliament, I will explain the situation again. Some years ago when the previous Ombudsman/Information Commissioner in this state was appointed, there was a selection process that involved not only a government member on the selection panel but also a member of the non-government party, principally being from the official opposition. That ensured an element of transparency. But when those positions were separated—that is, we had a separate Information Commissioner and not an Information Commissioner attached to the position of Ombudsman—then the government departed from what is, in effect, convention.

This government has absolutely no appreciation whatsoever for the process of convention or accountability. That convention ensured that the bipartisanship that needed to be seen to be there was also implied and was very much alive so that we could have confidence in the position of Information Commissioner and the person who was holding that role. The absence of an opposition member from that selection panel would have been bad enough. But we could have lived with it if it was not for the other corruption of that particular process which involved referees who were senior people within the bureaucracy in Queensland. The director-general of the department of Premier was a referee and on

the selection panel. But then he decided that he was not going to be the referee but, as the CMC said later, he did things similar to what a referee would do, anyway, and what other former senior people in the Premier's department would do anyway.

This is a process which was corrupted by this government's interference. It is interesting to note that the non-departmentally attached people who were on the selection panel actually supported the other shortlisted nominee, not Ms Taylor. If government members are not concerned about this then they should be.

I acknowledge the new Attorney-General's ascendancy to the position of Attorney-General in Queensland. I think that she has the capacity to really do some good. I have said publicly—and I will say again tonight—that she is a person of intellect, understanding and balance when it comes to matters to be dealt with by the Attorney. I am very disappointed with the stance she has taken tonight in relation to this private member's bill. It is a genuine attempt from the honourable member for Caloundra to enunciate the concerns of non-government members when it comes to ensuring accountability in the process of selecting independent statutory officers in Queensland.

This must be prescribed in legislation. The legislation must be there to protect these important positions from interference and political corruption at some future time. What is wrong with having a process which ensures that press advertisements calling for suitably qualified persons are placed in the national arena? I cannot think of any reason that would not be accepted and endorsed by not only members of this place but also members in the community at large.

I cannot see anything wrong with a selection panel process where there is a chairperson and prescribed member. Obviously the chairperson will be somebody from the government side. The prescribed member could be the deputy chair of a particular committee as long as that person is not a government member and it cannot be the Leader of the Opposition. I am not sure what they have particularly got against me. I suppose a lot of people have things against me.

Mr Quinn: You can nominate yourself.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I think the member is going to automatically preclude me from being a part of that process because I am the Leader of the Opposition. I infer from this that the honourable Leader of the Liberal Party would be seen to be more impartial than me. He would not be excluded from this process.

Mr Terry Sullivan interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I could say numerous things on that, but I will not. If we drill down and look at the logic behind the honourable member's private member's bill I think it is as clear as we can get it. It is about making sure that there is appropriate and proper representation from the government and also from non-government parties in the parliament. What is wrong with that?

I was in New Zealand a couple of months ago. I went over there with the express purpose of meeting with their equivalent officers—their information commissioner and their ombudsman. They were absolutely flummoxed. They could not understand and could not believe that we had a process where we could appoint a person such as the Information Commissioner and there was no representative on the selection panel from the non-government parties. They could not believe it.

They have one of the most robust processes of parliamentary committees that we could come across. This is the case with not only the committees that look after specific areas such as members' privileges, public accounts and so on but also the committees that look at bills. In actual fact, the selection of their ombudsman and their deputy ombudsman is carried out before the appropriate parliamentary committee. All members of that committee are actually involved in the process of interviewing, asking questions and making the recommendation for appointment of the ombudsman and the deputy ombudsman who go on to become the information commissioners in New Zealand.

They were absolutely amazed by what is happening here. They were made aware of this by press reports. Knowledge of events in Australia filters across the Tasman to New Zealand. We seem to be somewhat less aware of what happens at a legislative level in their country than they are of what happens in ours. I suppose it is a bit like the situation with us and the United States. We are a slightly bigger country. The controversy surrounding the appointment of Ms Taylor had filtered across the Tasman. They were absolutely flummoxed by the process that had been followed by the government here.

I was concerned about the excuses offered by the Attorney-General in putting forward the reason the government was going to vote against this. I do not think they were legitimate concerns whatsoever. They were time wasting excuses. There is always some sort of review going on in Queensland. The CMC did a review seven years ago and recommended that we needed telephone tapping powers in Queensland—as did the Police Service. We still have not got them. But if something else comes out which fits within the broad policy ideals or philosophies of the government they literally break a leg implementing it.

Surely those opposite believe in the principle of accountability, openness and transparency when it comes to the appointment of these statutory office holders or they do not. I cannot see anything worth while that would come from these reviews into the appointment of these people which we should waste time on. If that review comes back and says that there should not be a bipartisan approach to the selection and the appointment of these important statutory officers, then frankly that particular process is flawed and does not deserve the support of any member of parliament and does not deserve any credibility whatsoever in the electorate at large.

I say in conclusion that these are important statutory officers who maintain and ensure accountability in very basic areas such as the rights of people in Queensland. Whether it be what the Ombudsman looks after, the Auditor-General looks after or the Information Commissioner looks after they are, in many instances, the guardians of the public interest. Being the guardians of the public interest, we need to be assured that they are the best people for the job and that there is bipartisan support.

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (8.36 pm): I am very pleased to rise to speak in the debate on the Freedom of Information and Other Legislation (Appointment Accountability) Amendment Bill and, in doing so, support my colleague the member for Caloundra. I congratulate him for bringing this important bill to the House. We are all well aware of the concerns that surrounded the appointment of the latest Information Commissioner and I do not plan to go into those in depth here as those arguments have been well canvassed in this House prior to today. The important thing that I will say is that what was taken from that whole scandal was the difference between the way the Information Commissioner is appointed and the way other statutory positions are appointed.

When one considers the nature of these positions it is important to outline that, above any other positions, the Information Commissioner, Auditor-General and Ombudsman should be appointed using the highest level of accountability and the highest level of transparency. This should be done in a bid to provide these positions with the high opinion and respect that they deserve. To adapt the well-used legal axiom: the correct appointment must not only be done but the correct appointment must be seen to be done.

This is the whole point. This is not a go at the current people holding these positions. This bill befits the importance of the role and positions being discussed. This bill provides a level of transparency for the positions of Information Commissioner, Auditor-General and Ombudsman that lets the people of Queensland see that the correct appointments are being made. When I refer to correct appointments I am referring to appointments that are based on merit. This will ensure that the most suitably qualified people are found for these positions. The test is: what would an objective observer, who has knowledge of the roles and functions of these positions, think of prospective candidates for the positions? In other words: who would an informed, objective, non-aligned observer pick?

We all know that these positions are deeply rooted in the political make-up of this parliament. The appointment of these positions is very much in the hands of people in this House, this political crucible, and those political scientists or advisors who stand within close proximity. To be able to find someone so far removed to apply the above ideal test is fanciful and gullible. So, working within the confines of what we have, this bill comes up with a mechanism for providing bipartisan support for a particular candidate. That is, both sides of the political landscape, free from bias and favour, choose the person who is most suited to the job.

It is very easy to knock this system, and that is because it is much easier to choose not to do something than it is to adopt something new. It may be easy to pick holes and say, 'What about this and what about that?' However, this bill provides a level of transparency that has many rungs on the ladder above the current situation. I again commend the member for Caloundra for bringing this forward.

The government is always very intent on telling Queenslanders that it is open and accountable, that it is completely transparent. Unfortunately, it is not always keen on showing it. With all of the documents being pumped through cabinet, the administrative difficulties in getting FOIs and getting a straight answer out of ministers in this House, it can be like extracting teeth. Here is the perfect opportunity to show the people of Queensland that it is serious about transparency. How much time have we spent in this House arguing and bringing up the fact that the government's processes are incorrect, that it is appointing jobs for the boys, that there are underhanded deals going on and that more time is spent by those ministers opposite telling us why that is not the case and why these appointments are justified?

Here is the government's chance to do two things. First, it has the opportunity to show the people of Queensland that it is serious about transparency and that it is serious about doing what is required to ensure that the integrity of these positions is not only upheld but also seen to be upheld. If that is not a valid enough reason, it has the opportunity to stop parliamentary debate about these appointments because both sides of the House will have had input into the choice.

I am privileged to serve on the Public Accounts Committee. I remember last year being ushered into the room just off the chamber here where the committee, chaired by the member for Greenslopes, was advised of the new choice of Auditor-General. Despite the fact that he is a very fine choice and is

doing a great job, it did make me think later that there had literally been no input from the non-government side. If there had been I am sure that the same decision would have been reached, but it just would have given the non-government side a sense of completeness as to the process. Surely in the interests of devoting parliamentary time to tasks that require parliamentary time, this process would ensure that both sides are happy and one less thing needs to take up important question time. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (8.41 pm): I rise to support the Freedom of Information and Other Legislation (Appointment Accountability) Amendment Bill 2005. I can remember the debate that we had relating to the proposed appointment of the Information Commissioner and the concerns that were expressed at that time about independence and transparency, and I still hold that view. The Information Commissioner, the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman and the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Commissioner are positions that need community confidence. They need the confidence of this parliament, and the people in the community need to know that those appointees are fiercely independent in terms of their deliberations, decisions and indeed their criticisms. They need to be people with appropriate ability and need to be free of a perception of bias. That is a higher test than an actual bias, but particularly in terms of those positions like the Information Commissioner it is imperative that their decision making, the processes that they use, their personality and their past experience clearly indicate an independence from the government of the day and potentially from influence by members of the government of the day or others. It was those sorts of concerns that were expressed in the recent past that have added to the community's perception that appointments of a senior nature are being made as appointments of friends of the government rather than appointments of people who are fiercely independent and able to offer an objective and informed comment on issues that are brought before them.

This legislation proposes to implement the same appointment process for the Information Commissioner as for the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Commissioner in that the advertising has to be national and has to call for suitably qualified persons to be considered for the appointment. The selection panel, which is proposed to include the chairperson and a prescribed member of the relevant parliamentary committee, should ensure bipartisanship as the prescribed person has been designated as either the deputy chair of the committee if the deputy chair is a non-government member or a person nominated by the Leader of the Opposition. That would reinforce, particularly if the decisions are made on a bipartisan basis, the suitability of that person and add to their ease to deliver the service and obligation and responsibilities for which they have been appointed. I do not think it would detract in any way from the appointment process. It would in fact enhance the community's view of the government of the day in being willing to adopt this fair, transparent and bipartisan process. Therefore, I have no difficulty in supporting the legislation.

Again, the relevant positions that are to be addressed by these changes are positions that desire and require independence and transparency and provide to the community a clear indication that the person has no allegiances and has no responsibilities to or reliance on the bodies over which they will pass judgment. On the basis of what I believe is a clear community requirement and a clear community expectation of the independence, objectivity and suitability of these appointments, I have no hesitation whatsoever in supporting the proposed legislation.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (8.45 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to oppose the bill of the Liberal Party's spokesman with respect to these matters. The learned Attorney-General has set out the basis of that objection, with which I concur. She indicated that there has indeed been a review of recent years by LCARC and that the Premier set up an examination of that review on 2 September 2004. She referred to the fact that LCARC had referred to the appointment, termination, suspension, tenure, salary and budget in relation to people like the Information Commissioner.

The completion of this review will depend on the findings of the independent strategic reviews of the Information Commissioner and Ombudsman's office, which the Premier also foreshadowed on 2 September last year. These independent strategic reviews are required by the legislation specific to each office. These reviews play a valuable role in informing government decision making, and the government does not intend to pre-empt their recommendations. This is entirely a sensible approach. The government will not commit to a final position in relation to standardisation of appointment procedures until all of these reviews are completed. I fail to see why anyone would take any objection to that. The Office of the Information Commissioner was dealt with in an earlier bill this year, as members would be aware, which ensured the independence of the commissioner and his or her staff from outside direction as to the way the commissioner's powers of investigation are carried out. That was the subject, as I said, of a bill which went through this place in May of this year.

It is interesting to examine what might happen in other places in Australia and indeed overseas. According to the Queensland Parliamentary Library, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory are the only Australian jurisdictions that in fact have an Information Commissioner to review decisions under the freedom of information legislation. Other states have other bodies but not the same as an information commissioner. Who does appoint those information commissioners in Western Australia and the Northern Territory? The answer is that in Western Australia the Freedom of

Information Act provides that the information commissioner is appointed by the Governor—that is, by the government of the day advising the Governor. In the Northern Territory, the Information Act states that the administrator may appoint a person to be information commissioner by a notice in the *Gazette*. Obviously the administrator, like a state governor, has to act on the advice of his ministers, that is, the government of the day.

What is the case overseas? The mother of our parliamentary system is that of the United Kingdom where the legislation provides that the Information Commissioner is appointed by the Queen, that is, by the government of the day, with the Queen acting on the advice of her Prime Minister and ministers. The Scottish legislation states that the Scottish Information Commissioner is appointed by the Queen on the nomination of the parliament, which I take to mean on the advice of the government of the day.

We can see that not only in Australia but also overseas from whence we have derived our system and our traditions the Information Commissioner is indeed appointed by the government of the day. In a sense, of course, that is far more restrictive than the current legislation which provides for consultation with the relevant parliamentary committee.

Subject to the review that I referred to earlier and which the Premier instituted less than a year ago, and in the light of what happens elsewhere, in my view there is little or no pressing need to effect any change tonight. Of course, as Mr Speaker well knows, this government has a very proud record when it comes to accountability and a proud record when contrasted with the record of the Liberal Party and the National Party, be they in coalition or be they not. Labor believes that, in a healthy democracy, one needs to have proper accountability mechanisms. One needs to have the checks and balances on bureaucracy, on the agencies of government and, indeed, on the parliament itself. Almost all of those checks and balances, which today we take for granted—even members of the Liberal Party take them for granted today—have come about over the past decade or so under a Labor government. It is churlish of the Liberal and National parties not to acknowledge that tonight.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr SHINE: We will wait and see. They might come forward. They have interjected to me that they are not churlish, but we shall see.

The Liberal and National party members claim to be the pursuers of accountability, but what is the evidence of that? Tonight, during this debate, let them tell us what they have done over the past few decades to further the cause of accountability. I think they will struggle to come up with any evidence to support that proposition.

In this country we have had FOI since about 1982 when the Commonwealth brought it in. For seven long years up to 1989 nothing was done under the Liberal/Country Party coalition government and then the National Party government by itself. Then the Labor Party came into power. Since that time we have brought in a committee system with a range of committees. I will not go through them as members know what they are. We introduced the estimates committee procedure that we have just been through and we are currently debating the committee reports. We have changed the rules governing question time. If comparatively recent members like me read the back editions of *Hansard* they will find that question time today bears no relationship to question time of a few years ago. Answers to questions literally went on for the best part of 20 to 30 minutes. Now we have a pecuniary interest register and, very importantly, we have watchdogs such as the former CJC and the CMC which, of course, the National and Liberal parties under Borbidge tried to ringbark through the Connolly/Ryan tribunal. Those are just some of the accountability measures that the Labor Party not only believes in but also has brought in.

Tonight I look forward to and will listen intently to what members of the Liberal and National parties have to say to provide evidence of what they have done. Words are cheap and actions are important. I look forward to hearing what they have to say about what they did whilst they had the opportunity when in government. I strongly oppose this legislation for the reasons given.

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (8.54 pm): I rise to support the bill before the House. I take up the challenge of the member for Toowoomba North to outline how the Liberal Party has tried to bring accountability to this parliament.

Mr Wilson interjected.

Mr QUINN: I heard members opposite in silence and it is now time for them to hear me in silence. I am sick and tired of people issuing that sort of challenge to the Liberal Party. In the past six months I have stood in this place and delivered four condolence motions, each one of which described members of the Liberal Party who put principle before politics. They were members of the Ginger Group and they walked across the chamber and voted against their own government to bring accountability into this House. For any Labor member to challenge us on that basis shows a complete lack of understanding of anything that has gone on in this House over the past 30 years.

If members opposite want to see some accountability and courage, they should look at what those Liberal Party members did. In the past 16 years I have not seen one Labor member vote against their own government in this chamber. Not once has that happened. If members opposite want to issue that sort of challenge, they should come in here with a bit more evidence than they have here tonight. Those flimsy words count for nothing in the lives of good, hardworking decent Liberal Party members who have put principle before politics for the best part of a generation. Members opposite should show some courage.

My challenge to the member for Toowoomba North is to stand up for his principles and, at least once in his lifetime, walk across the chamber and vote against his own government. When he can do that, he will have the courage to stand in here and make those sorts of accusations against us. Unless he does that my advice to him is not to issue those sorts of flimsy and weak challenges which have no basis in fact. I return to the legislation.

Government members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Members will direct their questions through the chair.

Mr Lawlor: How many times have you crossed the floor?

Mr QUINN: That is a matter of record. The member can go and have a look. The member for Southport should remember Peter White. He holds his seat. He was a member of the Ginger Group. When the member starts to walk in his footsteps, he will have something to say.

This legislation deserves to be supported because it brings some measure of consistency to all of the appointment processes for statutory officers of this parliament. As officers of this parliament, those people have a duty to act and discharge their duties in an impartial manner. The appointment process should support that very important requirement.

I foreshadowed this legislation as a result of the furore over the appointment of the Information Commissioner some months ago. The legislation brings the appointment process into line with the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee. It deserves to be supported because it puts in place an open and transparent process that requires the bipartisan support of government and non-government members to make an appointment. We have set out an appointment process that can be supported. It is already in legislation to make one statutory appointment and bringing the others into line will be an added bonus.

No person deserves to be appointed to a statutory office of this parliament in the way in which the Information Commissioner was appointed. Whether or not that person is biased, they will always have the taint of bias associated with their appointment. In the future no-one should be put under that sort of stress. We should ensure that, from now on, any appointments to these statutory office positions are done with a bipartisan approach so that all members of parliament can support the process and the public can be confident that when we make a decision we have done it in a bipartisan and impartial manner that benefits everyone.

I have said enough tonight. I have made my points. I reiterate my opening remarks that people ought to be very careful about the challenges that they level at the Liberal Party in terms of matters of principle and supporting these sorts of things.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (8.59 pm): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise to speak to and support the Freedom of Information and Other Legislation (Appointment Accountability) Amendment Bill 2005 moved by the member for Caloundra. As other speakers have said—and I certainly want to put it on the record—there is no doubt that the recent appointment of the person to the position of Information Commissioner was not without controversy. That experience certainly indicated the need for the government to ensure that it does have the confidence of ordinary Queenslanders in relation to the people it appoints to these very important positions of Information Commissioner, Ombudsman and Auditor-General.

One of the government speakers made comparisons between the system in Queensland and that which applies in other states in Australia and other countries overseas. One thing that we have in Queensland—it is totally different from every other state in Australia—is only one house of parliament. We only have a house of representatives; we do not have a senate. We do not have a house of review. Every government relies very heavily on the independence of the people appointed to these statutory positions. There needs to be bipartisan support for the appointment of these people because we do not have that second check. We do not have the checks and balances that other governments in Australia have in their upper house. They have senates with wide-ranging powers of investigation—to call people to answer questions and to look into matters. Queensland does not have that capacity. The best we have is an effective committee system. The best we have, I believe, is the maintenance of integrity and the bipartisan appointment of people to these very important statutory positions.

I certainly believe that the proposal that has been put forward by the member for Caloundra is fair and reasonable. I see no reason we cannot have public advertising and the requirement for bipartisan support. I certainly would hate to see the replacement of people in these very important positions of Auditor-General, Information Commissioner and Ombudsman with a change in government.

I know that other speakers want to speak to this bill tonight. I simply reiterate that I believe that the bill we are debating tonight is a reasonable and sensible amendment. I certainly do support the intent to improve the accountability of the appointment of people to these three very important positions.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (9.02 pm): I rise to support this legislation. I strongly support this principle. I need to awaken some government members to recent history. The protocol outlined in this bill used to be the protocol for selecting the Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner in Queensland. It has only been in recent history that the Premier of this state backtracked on that protocol and made it a process in which only the government chair of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee was invited to sit in on the selection process for the new Information Commissioner—not the deputy chair, a non-government member, to provide the opportunity to ensure bipartisan support and to overcome what we have seen in recent times in the turmoil related to the appointment process of the Information Commissioner, Cathi Taylor. As we have said, this Information Commissioner may undertake her role in a fair and honourable way, but the process has been tainted because the Beattie government—this Labor government—walked away from the principles of accountability and the principles of bipartisan selection of this officer.

I say to all those members on the other side of the House who pontificate about how accountable they are, who say that they are going to have a review process and that we should trust them as everything is lovely that they are the ones who have walked away from bipartisan selection of the Information Commissioner of Queensland.

Freedom of information legislation is extremely important. As other members on this side of the House have pointed out, we are a unicameral parliament. It is important that we have a process whereby the public can access information that needs to be put into the public arena. There is an accountability mechanism to make sure that that legislation is not just on the books but is, in fact, enforced and has some independent scrutiny; that is, the statutory office-bearer of the Information Commissioner. That person must be above reproach. Their appointment process must be a bipartisan one where there is no doubt about their background and they must have support from across the political spectrum.

Unfortunately, that was not the case in this instance. It has been well documented in this House—we have tabled backgrounds about the Information Commissioner—that there were strong ties to the Labor Party in this state. There were strong ties to some of the people on the selection panel. As we know, the people on the selection panel were close acquaintances and also referees of the person who was bumped up the list and eventually given the top job.

In relation to the investigation undertaken by the CMC, further information has come to light that strong concerns were expressed about this person and that this person was not the top choice of all those who were on the committee. What has been lost from this process is the opportunity for bipartisan support. It is an important aspect because under this Beattie government freedom of information has been wound back. It has been restricted, with costs being put against people who have made applications. It has been made a very expensive process for those in the opposition or the media who seek information of this government.

I know full well that this government also breaks the law with regard to freedom of information. It has deliberately withheld information which it is legally required to release. It has not even bothered to use the cabinet exemptions or other exemptions which can apply if it wants to stop information being leaked. I personally sought information from the previous state development minister and he deliberately did not bring it to this House. I have raised that issue and I will continue to pursue that issue through the independent umpire. There must be a process so that we know that the laws are upheld. There must be an independent monitor in place to ensure that the government of the day does not break its own laws with regard to this important legislation.

I remind the House that freedom of information laws have been wound back by this government. One of the most concerning aspects is the new exemption that applies to information that has gone before the Crime and Misconduct Commission. This is a damnable exemption when one considers that it does not just apply to current investigations; it also applies to information that has been sent to the CMC that is no longer part of a current investigation. As we in the National Party have raised in this House before, we have grave concerns about information concerning the former Attorney-General who put those amendments to this House. The former Attorney-General is now the education minister, Rod Welford. Matters that were investigated by the Crime and Misconduct Commission that should have been made available are now forever locked away—they will never see the light of day—because of the amendment over which he presided in this parliament which wound back the FOI laws. If that is not corrupt, what is? That exemption process is even more extensive than the cabinet exemption process, because cabinet documents are available after 30 years. Now, thanks to the Beattie government, documents that have been before the CMC are locked up forever. I think that tells a lot about the nature of this government and its true colours with regard to accountability.

The Information Commissioner is there to uphold the letter of the law and to preside over appeals against rulings that may have been made at the departmental level to hold back information. That is a very important statutory position. I believe that the principle that previously applied with regard to putting

this person in place needs to be reinstated. This legislation seeks to do that. Interestingly, I actually sat on the selection panel for the combined Ombudsman-Information Commissioner role before it was split. There was no problem with its being a bipartisan process.

The chair and the deputy chair of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee sat on that selection panel and selected that person. However, the Beattie government decided to change the process. When I heard that they were moving away from that process, I raised issue with the Premier. He had a chat with me and explained why he did not want to do what is now proposed in this legislation. I disagreed with him. These matters are a matter of public record and he has to wear the cost and the odium of the fact that it has blown up.

What is unfortunate is that the Information Commissioner, who may in fact be a very fine person, is tainted by the process that was put in place by this Beattie government. The government could have avoided it but it did not. It brought these laws into further disrepute and that was unnecessary. We need these laws to work and we need some of the exceptions wound back because they are being abused. We need a process for the appointment of the Information Commissioner that is above reproach and does not bring the office or the process of this law into disrepute.

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (9.10 pm): I oppose the Freedom of Information and Other Legislation (Appointment Accountability) Amendment Bill. It is a great shame to hear the way in which the standard of debate in this place has declined over the course of the day. This morning a motion of condolence was moved for a great member of this place, Mr Chinchin. He was quite correctly praised this morning as a member of that Liberal Ginger Group. He did so much to put beyond the interests of particular parties the greater interests of the public good of accountability, honesty and integrity. It really saddens me that, on the same day that Mr Chinchin was justly remembered and praised, his name is bandied around in a debate such as this. That is cheap. In the day-to-day hurly-burly of politics, I guess we all push boundaries. But I think on this occasion the boundaries have been pushed far too far. Mr Chinchin's name really should be left out of this debate tonight. The Liberal Party, or what is left of it from his days, has no claim to any mantle of honour that he may have once garnered for that party. It is a tragedy that Mr Chinchin did not go further in politics. However, those were times when someone who was decorated on the field of valour and recognised by commerce and industry as being a leader could not cut it in the Liberal Party because he was a leader of a Ginger Group committed to accountability.

For Mr McArdle, the member for Caloundra, to come in here tonight and seek to tear apart the accountability gains that we have made over the past decade in the name of accountability is disgraceful—quite disgraceful. This bill seeks to unwind the bipartisanship that has been developing in this place over the past ten years. The Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee has been working powerfully to bring together the disparate political views that make up this place to work together to come up with unanimous recommendations. The process of accountability through committees that we have developed in recent years—years after the decline and then the end of National Party governments—is about giving all members of this place an opportunity, in a bipartisan way, to come up with a system that develops laws that allows for the review of laws such that we wind up with better, dispassionate and effective accountability mechanisms.

But tonight the member for Caloundra wants to intervene. The member for Caloundra is saying, 'No, no, no, the accountability mechanisms that are embodied by the existence of LCARC should be put to one side.' It does not matter that LCARC wanted this system. It does not matter that LCARC said unanimously, 'We endorse this review. We want these review processes to go forward.' There was bipartisan, unanimous support for a review process to oversee these very important roles. Yet the member for Caloundra comes in here and says, 'No, no, I know better. We can have bipartisan, better processes if my party alone overrides the systems that have been put in place with committees.' That is what this bill seeks to do.

This bill seeks to extract those review systems that have been built into the legislation as a check and a balance. The legislation provides that there will be a review. Again, it is one of the great accountability mechanisms. We do not expect that we have a lifetime mortgage on what is right. When we pass legislation, we do not say, 'This legislation is right for all time, never to be changed—that the system laid down by this legislation is the only system that can possibly be the right one.' The situation is quite the reverse. This legislation provides automatically for periodic review.

What does the member for Caloundra want to do? In the name of accountability he wants to reject completely a system that provides for automatic review of the legislation no matter who is in power. Again, this legislation does not care whether it is a Labor Party government, a Liberal Party government or a National Party government. It simply says, 'There will be a review in the interests of good government and in the interests of accountability.'

But no, the member for Caloundra cannot wait. The member for Caloundra cannot accept that this is a review system that is designed to produce bipartisan outcomes. In a partisan way, he comes in here and says that he knows better—'The Liberal Party, of which I am a part knows better.'

Mrs Lavarch interjected.

Mr McNAMARA: That is right. I take that interjection from the learned Attorney-General. That attitude of 'We are the font of all wisdom' is the wellspring of corruption. It is that font that says, 'We know better. The legislation should be changed because I want it so,' that leads us to corruption. It is a tragedy that, on the day of Mr Chinchin's condolence motion, we have this argument put up by the remnants of the once great Liberal Party that this bill is an accountability review or reform. It is not. It is an attack on accountability, it is an attack on bipartisanship and it is an attack on the committee system. It should be rejected. I urge all honourable members to vote against this legislation.

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (9.17 pm): It gives me great pleasure to speak in support of this bill proposed by the member for Caloundra, who feels—like all of us in the Liberal Party—very, very strongly about matters of accountability. The Auditor-General, the Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner are not arms of government. These are functions that protect the balance and the impartiality of our system.

A government member: They are all Labor initiatives.

Dr FLEGG: They are all Labor initiatives and all Labor appointments. People who have to deal with people appointed to these positions are frequently those who have had problems with the government. Yet those people have to take the problem that they have had with the government to somebody appointed by the government to try to get assistance.

I have news for the members opposite, because I am not quite sure where some of them have been. The people of this state are cynical. They are cynical about politicians and, almost without exception, they are cynical about the appointments that politicians make. They have seen political cronies put on everything from the Energex board to any other place where politicians and the government have the power to appoint their mates or tame people. Why would the people of Queensland not be cynical when they are forced to go to supposedly independent umpires who are appointed in the same way—by the government with no regard for impartiality or bipartisanship?

We have a unicameral system in Queensland. Most people in this House would understand the significance of that. Most people in the community understand that Queensland has a history, virtually for everybody's lifetime, of powerful governments that can almost do as they please. There are very limited checks and balances in the state of Queensland. That is very obvious to anyone who reads any period of Queensland history. We have fought very hard to put some of these checks and balances in place. It is important that we defend impartiality, independence and bipartisanship.

Members should think for a minute about what happens when there is a transition in government. It happens from time to time in Queensland. We have to deal with a number of appointments about which we probably did not agree and which we had no right, really, to have any input into. It puts the holders of these offices in a difficult position, and in the mind of the incoming government it raises considerable suspicion as to whether the holder of the office—who is, after all, reliant on the government that appointed them—is a truly impartial person.

Let us have a look at the position of the Ombudsman. He deals with people who are aggrieved by government decisions, actions of government and instrumentalities of the government. What do we make the people who are aggrieved in this way do? We make them go along and take their grievances to somebody who is also appointed by the government—someone who is seen as another arm of government. In the minds of the people who have to deal with the office—and it is not any reflection on the present or even previous holders of the office—there is a doubt when the decisions are unfavourable as to whether people have been fairly treated. These doubts are very pervasive through our community.

Let us have a look at the position of Auditor-General. I am not sure if anyone here reads the financial pages, but perhaps they have heard of companies like Enron or Bond Corp or WorldCom. These are all companies which appointed their own auditors. Who did they appoint? They appointed someone tame—someone who would give them the decisions that they wanted. The auditors duly obliged, and billions of dollars of wealth of investors, creditors and other people evaporated because the system of auditing was not independent. Do we want that sort of perception hanging over the state of Queensland and its various Attorneys-General?

Let us have a look at the Information Commissioner. Most of us on this side of the House have had more dealings with the current Information Commissioner than the previous two appointments. Why do people go to the Information Commissioner? Because they are seeking documents that the government refuses to release publicly. In the case of this government, 'secrecy' is its middle name. Everything is kept secret. In the case of the Mara report, we have a mother who has lost her son and to whom this government would not release the report—the report was into the circumstances of his death—without forcing her to fight for three or four months with the Information Commissioner's office before she could force the government to release it.

The government has already repeatedly watered down freedom of information, making many requests prohibitively expensive, making so many loopholes such as the CMC loophole that you could drive a tank through them. The people of Queensland want that accountability. They want to know that

these agencies that they go to are truly independent. The only way that can happen in this state with our set-up is for there to be a bipartisan appointment. It is very surprising that those opposite should be frightened of that.

I was very pleased to see the passion and feeling of our leader, the member for Robina, because accountability has been central to the Liberal Party in this place for decades. The Liberal Party has not just walked across the floor at different times; the Liberal Party has even walked out of a government over accountability arising from a Public Accounts Committee. I have watched members here sit and vote against introducing a child labour law in Queensland—something that would be basic to the establishment of the Labor Party to protect children in the workplace, and not one of them had the temerity to walk across and say that Queensland should have a child labour law. I was the branch chairman of the Liberal leader when the Liberal Party left government over accountability in a Public Accounts Committee, and the members of the Liberal Party supported him. Many of them lost their seats over it. Many of them lost ministerial positions, but they did it because of their belief in accountability.

I could not finish speaking tonight without making some reference to the shameful contribution by the member for Hervey Bay, who named a member who had a condolence motion here today and accused members on this side of bandying his name around when in fact his name was never mentioned in debate. The only person to mention that particular respected gentleman's name in this political debate was the member for Hervey Bay, who found it convenient for his political purposes to stoop to that level. That was a particularly disgraceful performance by somebody who was so bereft of arguments that he had to stoop to that level in order to find some sort of an argument. He went on to have a go at the member for Caloundra. He attacked the member for Caloundra for being 'partial', I think his word was.

Time expired.

Mr WILSON (Ferry Grove—ALP) (9.27 pm): It is my great pleasure to stand and speak—

Ms Struthers: It is our pleasure to listen.

Mr WILSON: Well, I am delighted at that statement of confidence from my dear colleague. It is my great pleasure to stand and speak against the bill that is before the House this evening. The difficulty with this bill essentially hinges on this point: it sets out in the explanatory notes and in the second reading speech what is alleged to be the grounds for this proposal. I will remind members of what was said. Firstly, I will go to the explanatory notes, which members are entitled to have recourse to in an endeavour to understand the grounds upon which this proposal has been put forward.

Point 7 of the explanatory notes states that the reason for this proposal is to standardise the appointment process in relation to the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman and Information Commissioner with that process used for the appointment of the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Commissioner. Then in his second reading speech Mr McArdle stated that this bill would create 'a uniform appointment process identical with that used for the appointment of the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Commissioner' and later that part of this appointment process is the establishment of a selection panel which includes the chairperson and the deputy chairperson or the Leader of the Opposition on the selection panel. Nothing could be further from the truth because that is not the appointment process for the parliamentary commissioner.

The pivotal basis upon which this proposition is put before the House is, in fact, misconstrued and misunderstood. It does not reproduce the appointment process for the parliamentary commissioner. The appointment process for the parliamentary commissioner involves all seven members of the parliamentary committee which oversees the Crime and Misconduct Commission in that appointment process from start to finish. It does not involve any reference to anyone else whatsoever—not to the Premier, not to anyone. The parliamentary committee, with the authority of the Speaker of the House, undertakes the appointment process, and they are all involved in the appointment process. That is not what is being sought to be replicated in this bill for the Information Commissioner, the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General.

However, there is an attempt in this bill to draw some sense of legitimacy from part of the appointment process of the parliamentary commissioner to the proposal that is being put forward. The problem is that whilst the parliamentary commissioner, which the Liberal Party bases its whole proposal on, is an officer of the parliament, the parliamentary commissioner is an agent or servant of the parliamentary committee. The parliamentary committee is established under the Crime and Misconduct Act to oversight the Crime and Misconduct Commission. Section 10 of the act provides that the parliamentary commissioner is an officer of the parliament who helps the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee in the performance of its functions. Section 303(2)—it is confirmation of the point I made earlier—states that the parliamentary commissioner is an officer of the parliament. Then, if people want to understand how the parliamentary commissioner is intended to help the parliamentary committee, they go to section 314(2), which states that the parliamentary commissioner has the functions, as required by the parliamentary committee, to do the following: audit reports, independently investigate and the section goes on.

If the members opposite actually understood the history of the creation of the parliamentary commissioner, they would understand how it now functions and how it is fundamentally different from what they are proposing in this bill. In 1996, when the Queensland Crime Commission was created by an amendment to the then CJC act, also amending that act were provisions creating the parliamentary commissioner to assist the then Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee in similar ways as set out in the act as it now is. However, a key difference is that in the new act there has been a clear intention to clarify that the role of the parliamentary commissioner is to assist and be the servant and agent of the parliamentary committee. That is to avoid the parliamentary commissioner and the Crime and Misconduct Commission suing each other before the Supreme Court, which is what was happening under the previous arrangement.

The opposition has misled itself because, whilst it is true that the parliamentary commissioner is a statutory officer but more particularly an officer of the parliament, such as the Auditor-General and the Information Commissioner, the opposition is confusing the status of the parliamentary commissioner, on the one hand, with the relationship that exists between the commissioner and his or her committee. If members have a look at the relationship between the Information Commissioner and the Auditor-General, they have no relationship with their respective parliamentary committees anywhere like the relationship with the parliamentary commissioner to the committee which I am privileged to chair.

The opposition has taken one point of similarity—that is, the status of an officer of the parliament—and then upon that one point of similarity erected the whole edifice of its proposal to say that there should be a chairperson and a deputy chairperson or the Leader of the Opposition involved in the selection process. This is when in all other respects the relationship of the parliamentary commissioner with his or her committee is entirely different from the relationship with the Ombudsman, the Auditor-General and the Information Commissioner with the parliament. Those three positions that the members of the opposition seek to standardise are not the agents and servants of their respective committees. They are independent statutory office holders who report directly to parliament. The parliamentary commissioner does not do so. The parliamentary commissioner reports to the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee.

If, in fact, there was an attempt by the opposition to standardise its proposal in relation to all the statutory office holders, it would be proposing that the chairperson of the Crime and Misconduct Commission was appointed in a like fashion to what they are proposing now, yet the chairperson of the CMC is appointed by the Governor in Council. Nonetheless, they are a statutory office holder, but I do not know why the opposition has left that person out. Even in the opposition's attempt to standardise, having wrongly based its view on the parliamentary commissioner model, it has omitted and thereby arguably created an anomaly in not addressing the position of the chairperson of the crime and misconduct committee.

The opposition make the error that the only mechanism for transparency and accountability is that being proposed by it, yet the key means by which this accountability of those office holders, which is so necessary, is delivered to this parliament—and certainly in the CMC's case—is the existence of the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee. I oppose the bill.

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (9.37 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Freedom of Information and Other Legislation (Appointment Accountability) Amendment Bill 2005, a private member's bill introduced into this House by the honourable member for Caloundra.

The member is to be commended for bringing such important decisions forward in the name of honesty and integrity. This bill seeks to amend several acts and to improve the accountability in relation to the appointment of the Information Commissioner, the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General. I cannot believe that the government would not support this bill, and I have no doubt that the majority of Queenslanders would also feel this way. Not a day goes by without the Premier repeating the mantra that his government is open, accountable and transparent. Here we have a legitimate opportunity to do just that and the new Attorney-General has cast the chance aside. Disappointment with this decision aside, I would like to congratulate the honourable member for Kurwongbah on her appointment as Attorney-General.

These amendments are necessary in order to ensure that the basis for selection is on merit alone and that the appointment to these positions is made with the bipartisan support of the relevant parliamentary committee. We hear much about the need for checks and balances, yet we have a government that puts in place legislation that hides information from the people of Queensland, a government that makes it difficult for individuals to find out the truth, and a government that give jobs to mates over those people with more experience and better credentials. These amendments are an attempt to bring some consistency to the appointment of various statutory officers, which will give the general public more confidence in the parliamentary process.

The honourable member for Toowoomba North challenged the members of the Liberal Party to say what they have done to show accountability. The honourable member for Robina certainly proved the point with historical events and threw the challenge straight back to those opposite who simply lack the intestinal fortitude to vote for this bill even though they know it is the correct and principled thing to do.

An important fact was highlighted by the honourable member for Nicklin when he pointed out that we do not have an upper house in Queensland to determine a final review. This makes these amendments all the more valid. We have heard lame excuses from the members opposite. If the government has nothing to hide, then it has no reason not to support these amendments. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (9.40 pm): In his second reading speech the member for Caloundra suggested that this bill would standardise the procedure for appointment for these statutory positions. It proposes to amend the Ombudsman Act, the Freedom of Information Act 1997 and the Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977 insofar as they relate to the selection process for the Ombudsman, the Queensland Information Commissioner and the Auditor-General respectively and would, he claims, standardise the procedure for appointment and make it identical with that used for the appointment of the PCM Commissioner. It would simply not achieve that objective. The position of the PCM Commissioner involves national advertising for suitably qualified persons by the Speaker and the appointment of the successful applicant only if there is the bipartisan support of the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee.

The proposal contained in this private member's bill is not identical to the legislative procedure for the selection process of the PCM Commissioner. The bill also requires the chairperson and a prescribed member of the parliamentary committee to be members of the selection panel. A prescribed member of the parliamentary committee is defined to be the deputy chairperson, if that person is not a member of the party in government, or otherwise a member of the committee who is nominated by the Leader of the Opposition. The selection procedure for the PCM Commissioner does not include any requirement regarding the composition of the selection panel. The basis of the bill is, therefore, completely flawed.

As has been mentioned by several other government members, the appointment procedures for the Ombudsman, the Information Commissioner and the Auditor-General are currently being reviewed. That review was announced by the Premier in this House on 2 September 2004—almost 12 months ago. The Liberal Party is simply whipping up apathy and, as usual, is almost 12 months late.

The member for Maroochydore referred to the alleged winding back of the Freedom of Information Act by this government. How absolutely hypocritical! Winding back the FOI Act from what? Not the National Party FOI situation. We would all recall that the National Party did not believe in FOI at all. It did not have any FOI legislation. The member for Maroochydore claims that there has been a winding back of FOI legislation. That is completely hypocritical on the part of the National Party, but not much of a surprise really.

The member for Robina referred in an emotional way to one of my predecessors in the seat of Southport, Peter White, who died fairly recently. He said that, if I could walk in his shoes, I would be doing very well. I agree with him. I greatly admired Peter. I believe that Peter had a lot of time for Bob Quinn, but he had little time for the Liberal Party of today. After the dirty deal that was done by the opportunistic and hastily cobbled together coalition for purely electoral purposes before the last election, Peter White was not able to vote for a Liberal candidate in the seat of Southport.

I mentioned this in a condolence motion for Peter just after his death. I was actually letterboxing in Wildash Street, Southport at 6 am one morning. Peter was collecting his paper. We talked for 10 or 15 minutes. I gave him a pamphlet and commented as I went that I am probably wasting my time. He replied, 'With a choice between the Nationals and Labor you might be pleasantly surprised,' and I was.

Politically I do not agree with Bob Quinn very often, but I do agree that Peter White was a man of principle and a great example for me—and other members of parliament, I believe. He was not an uncritical fan of today's Liberal Party. So they should not kid themselves about that.

The member for Moggill referred to the member for Hervey Bay in derogatory terms for referring to a previously deceased Liberal Party member for Mount Gravatt whose condolence motion we had today. His own leader referred and resorted to the undoubted fortitude, character and courage of Peter White, but did he take exception to that? Of course not! In typical current Liberal Party fashion he resorts to the old backstop, the selective memory. He condemns one situation but condones the same situation because it involved his leader. What hypocrisy! I oppose this bill.

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (9.45 pm), in reply: Let me start by firstly thanking all those who joined in the debate tonight by making a contribution. I would like to thank in particular those members of my party, the National Party and the Independents who spoke. Mr Speaker, as you said on the first day you were sworn in, 'Debate in this House must be robust and passionate.' I want to take the opportunity now to pay homage to Bob Quinn for the debate being both robust and passionate.

If we cannot be passionate about what we believe in in this House then there is no sense in being here at all. I ask members opposite to talk to their senior party members and cabinet members and they will tell them that Bob Quinn is both an honourable man and a man whom they respect. It is with great pride that I claim Bob Quinn as my leader.

Let us turn to the bill before us tonight. What does the bill actually stand for? It turns on three concepts, on three beliefs—transparency, merit and accountability. These are three words that for some reason the government members cannot get their minds around and comprehend as being important to the people of Queensland and this particular parliament as it goes into the future.

Transparency of process is all the bill asks for. It asks that the process of the selection of these three officers be transparent not just to the parliament but to the people of Queensland. The selection of the person appointed to the position should be on merit and the process should take into account the appointment of a person on merit alone. Again, it has to be seen by the people of Queensland to be on the basis of merit. They are the people whom we serve in this House.

The third concept is accountability. The accountability of parliament in the execution of the process is important—again not for the sake of this House but for the sake of the people whom we represent here in Queensland, for the sake of the people who put us in this House to pass legislation to ensure that their lives are more effective and that they live in a better society.

Transparency, merit and accountability sum up the bill, yet those opposite missed the simplicity of it. They missed the real intent of this bill. This parliament spent many hours and many days debating the appointment of the Information Commissioner. Those opposite should ask why that time was spent. The current process lent itself to mistrust, to the public being sceptical and to this House spending an inordinate amount of time reviewing what should have been transparent and accountable and based on merit. We have missed that. What should we do about it? We should change the process. It is not a complicated theory and not a difficult concept to understand but one that government members surely, based on what they have said here tonight, cannot grasp.

This parliament has evolved throughout time and has used other parliaments and other processes to arrive where it is today. What is the worry with the Labor Party and this government accepting change? People are in fact demanding change. They are demanding that parliaments are more transparent, that they are more accountable and that the process of parliament be undertaken on a bipartisan basis. The bill will apply, if it is passed, to both sides of the House and when the government changes—and as sure as God made apples it will—we will also be bound by the terms of this legislation.

If we move to an appointment of these three officers based on merit, what is the problem with that—open merit? What is the concern that the government members have with that process? Why not enhance the role of the parliament? Why not make the parliament more attractive to the people of Queensland? Why not open up the doors and make the parliament answerable in greater measure than it is now to the people of this great state? What are members opposite afraid of?

A government member interjected.

Mr McARDLE: Nothing? Then vote in favour of the bill and put the three words of accountability, transparency and merit into effect immediately. So many times this parliament has been accused of being anything but professional. As one member said here tonight, it is no wonder that the public is sceptical and cynical about the role of the members and this House. It has every right to question this House if we are not prepared to be open and frank with the public. The community is requiring change. We are living in an evolving society. Wake up to yourselves! Wake up to yourselves and understand that if the community wants change the government has to take into account the community's wishes.

The Queensland parliament does not have a house of review. It has no check, as has been pointed out on a number of occasions. On any occasion that the government changes hands, this bill will impact upon both sides. The debate from government members has simply been to dodge the issue. They have never once attacked or questioned the fact that this is a bill to open up the House to the people of this great state. They have hidden behind words and innuendoes but never really addressed the concerns raised by the debacle that this House went through with regard to the Information Commissioner's appointment and the waste of the time of this House and the CMC in that ludicrous process that could be rectified by simply supporting the legislation.

One needs courage to make a difference. One needs courage to make change. One needs courage to do the right thing. There is not one member on the government side who is prepared to put themselves on the line to cross the floor to support this bill. For all of the high words, for all of the marvellous speeches and for all of the wonderful statements, no-one is going to cross the floor, I can guarantee that. Strength in words never followed by actions; that is what we are getting used to on this side of the House.

The member for Hervey Bay made a number of comments, and I really do not want to respond in kind to that sort of rubbish.

An opposition member: You don't want to sink to that level.

Mr McARDLE: I take the interjection. I do not intend to lower myself and lower this House to respond to ridiculous comments. He did make the comment that the member for Caloundra cannot wait. I think he said that I cannot wait to tear up the process. You bet we cannot wait on this side of the House! We cannot wait to get in place processes—processes that are effective for the people of this state. We cannot wait to ensure that the people of this state view this parliament in a much better light, and this is one method of doing so. If the member cannot comprehend that, I feel sorry for him. Tear up accountability? We are not going to tear up accountability. We want to make this place accountable as much as we possibly can. I guarantee members this: the review to be undertaken by this government

will end up with almost identical suggestions as contained in this bill, because we cannot get away from it. We cannot get away from bipartisanship. People are going to demand it, and we are going to give it to them. We all know that. We absolutely all know that that is in fact the case, but those opposite simply do not have the strength, do not have the will and do not have the guts to take the step here tonight. I support this bill.

Question—That the bill be now read a second time—put; and the House divided—

AYES, 24—Copeland, E Cunningham, Flegg, Foley, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Knuth, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Pratt, Quinn, Rickuss, E Roberts, Seeneey, Simpson, Springborg, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Langbroek, McArdle

NOES, 51—Barry, Boyle, Briskey, Choi, E Clark, Croft, Cummins, N Cunningham, English, Fenlon, Finn, Fouras, Fraser, Hayward, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Lucas, Male, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, Reeves, Reynolds, N Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Struthers, C Sullivan, Wallace, Welford, Wilson. Tellers: T Sullivan, Nolan

Resolved in the **negative**.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.03 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Begnall, Mr R

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (10.03 pm): I rise to bring the attention of the House to an extremely distressing problem for a mother trying to provide care for her now disabled son. On 10 June 2004, Russell Begnall was admitted to the Townsville Hospital suffering severe brain damage post severe pneumococcal meningoencephalitis. He was in the intensive care unit for a number of weeks and was transferred to the rehabilitation unit on 29 July 2004 to see if he would benefit from rehabilitation.

Because of the long-term ramifications of Russell's condition, his mother, Diane, is now faced with trying to find alternative arrangements for his care. Detailed accounts from Russell's doctor and the nursing staff of the rehabilitation unit at the Townsville Hospital attest to the severity of Russell's condition and to his need for 24-hour supervision and care.

Russell is a 35-year-old strong and otherwise healthy man, but he can be very difficult to handle if he gets frustrated. Long-term hospitalisation is not considered appropriate by staff. His condition is such that it is extremely difficult for the nursing staff to handle him and it would be impossible for his mother, Diane, to do so. Alternative arrangements are being examined. I understand that the hospital is threatening to discharge Russell soon because it is not the appropriate place for him to be and beds are at a premium.

Diane Begnall is faced with either giving up work entirely to look after her son or finding other means of ensuring his long-term care and welfare. While she would love to have Russell at home, eventually she would be totally unable to care for him and, as detailed by his doctor and nursing staff, that is not recommended.

I will table papers from Russell's doctor and also from the nursing staff currently looking after him outlining his treatment and providing suggestions. I take this opportunity to respectfully request the minister for disability services to consider the situation and the matter of Russell's long-term care. I further request that he consider Diane Begnall's request that Russell be admitted to a facility where he will not be under the heavy sedation that he currently is but where he would be able to receive therapy and respite care and have some quality of life.

This is a situation that any member of this House could find themselves in and we can imagine the distress that Diane must feel. We can also imagine the distress that Russell must feel, locked inside his disabled body. It is incumbent on us to do all we can to ease Diane's pain and uncertainty over Russell's future care.

National Tree Day

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (10.06 pm): I rise to inform the House about how recently I have been out on a limb for my electorate. Yes, it was National Tree Day on 31 July, which marked the 10th anniversary of Planet Ark's National Tree Day. As we all become more environmentally conscious, organised days such as National Tree Day and Clean Up Australia Day are marked in the average Australian's calendar as a volunteering duty to our community and our environment. This rang true in the Greenslopes electorate recently when various branches of local organisations and community members got down and dirty to embark on a great project—the planting of almost 2,000 drought resistant trees at Stephens Mount, Greenslopes.

The N4C and the B4C are community based environmental groups recently involved in National Tree Day. Whilst the N4C was busy in Greenslopes, B4C worked in the Chatsworth area, creating a water-wise garden at Tingalpa State School for environmental education purposes. I know that our candidate, Mr Forrester, will be a great representative for the area and will be involved in similar projects in the future. He is very committed to such projects. It is wonderful to know that those groups not only look after the areas but also teach the next generation the importance of environmental sustainability and water conservation and management.

As a member of parliament my aim is always to scale greater heights. On this occasion that statement became a reality. With the CEO of Greenslopes Private Hospital, Alan Kinkade, Catherine Bermingham and Damien Madden, the coordinator of N4C, I was forced to face my fear of heights, leave no stone unturned and go out on a limb in the name of environmental management. While the conventional form of planting with a dirt and shovel was adopted by all of us on the day, a different concept was also trialled at our planting site, and it took some balance and a lot of courage on the part of some.

To fill members in on the background of our concept, the site at Stephens Mount runs along Norman Creek in one of the most urbanised catchments in Queensland. Ninety per cent of the site was overgrown with weeds. The concept that we have adopted is basically to use native fig species on the exotic trees that now grow on the site so that they will grow around their hosts and eventually subsume them by strangulation, as occurs naturally in the rainforest. This is done by placing a fig into a fig box and nailing it high up in the tree. Eventually the fig will create a new canopy. Basically, we cannot remove those trees too readily because we would lose the canopy and the weed growth would start again. It is a great concept. The trial is a first for a metropolitan area and it is a first for Greenslopes.

I thank all of those people who were involved on the day, including the volunteers and particularly the Rotary Club of Stones Corner. My good friend Bill Hewitt, a former member of this House, was there, cooking sausages with other Rotary Club members. It was a great day and it was great for the environment and the Greenslopes area.

Currumbin Hill, Mud Slides

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (10.09 pm): During 29 and 30 June, torrential rains caused severe mud slides and flooding to many properties in the Currumbin electorate. Whilst damage occurred across a large area, properties in Currumbin were particularly hard hit. Soil washed away from under several homes on Currumbin Hill and decks and spas were swept down the hillside, leaving homes hanging precariously off the cliff, their 20-year-old footings exposed.

A 500-metre mud slip ended up in the main crocodile enclosure in the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, which could face rectification costs of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Emotionally shaken and clearly upset residents called me to say how distraught they were about the way they had been handled over such a sensitive matter and the lack of assistance being offered to them in their hours of need. There may well have been hotlines set up, but these people who were told that they had to evacuate their homes were, in essence, homeless and had to seek this information out for themselves.

The area was declared a disaster situation on Saturday, 8 July by the state government. Nine hundred homes were letterbox dropped and a public meeting held the next evening. Confusion prevailed as no-one understood what this meant. The Premier made much of the \$100,000 the state government will pay geotechnical engineers, which will match the amount from council, and is calling on insurance companies to fix the rest. This is cold comfort to those who have been displaced. Residents need to feel settled in their minds as to whether they will lose their homes. If so, who will pay for the demolition? Will ongoing accommodation be taken care of? Who will help them? I have spent many hours with these residents and they must be applauded for their resilience under very upsetting circumstances.

At a public meeting of Currumbin Hill residents last month the extent of the drainage, sewerage and stormwater problems were revealed. Over 900 homes, as I have mentioned, were doorknocked and, of them, 1,200 residents were informed of the disaster situation. A council initiated task force, of which I am a member, has been set up to urgently investigate stability issues on the hill. Over 200 residents signed individual petitions calling on councils to put a halt to any further development in the area, whether approved or not. A geotechnical report dated 9 August states—

The situation is critical in that we could lose three and possibly five houses if the landslip scarp breaks back. I am extremely concerned the spring rains could bring on this situation.

Residents are asking the state government, Gold Coast City Council and insurance companies to come to the party and get this fixed now by setting up a fund for remedial work on the homes most severely affected. If their homes go, then many others will be placed at risk and may also go. I have written to the local government minister asking her to do all in her power to ensure the task force process is open and fair.

Multiculturalism

Ms CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (10.12 pm): Recent events in London have again highlighted the fact that we live in a changed world. The attacks on the freedoms of people all around the world are indeed barbaric. I reflect often on how lucky I am to live on the Gold Coast, and I am happy to share this opportunity with people from many countries and origins.

We all have an interest in seeing multiculturalism work. After all, multiculturalism is really about accepting and respecting people, especially people from different cultures and with traditions different from our own. It is on that foundation that we build a society in which we can all make a contribution and recognise our common human dignity in the values we share. To do this, communities and government need to work together.

Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting the Islamic Centre Mosque at Arundel to meet this year's newly appointed Imam, Imran Husain. The experience of visiting the mosque was a new one for me. Following the Imam's address I toured the mosque and enjoyed a delicious morning tea. It was during this time that I chatted with the ladies in the kitchen about their culture and clothing. I found the ladies to be open, welcoming and most hospitable.

From my visit I now know that the Muslim community on the Gold Coast comprises 27 different nationalities with approximately 700 families enjoying the Gold Coast lifestyle and making it their home. The first Islam, Golam Goss from India, arrived on the Gold Coast in 1920. In 1984 the Islamic Society of the Gold Coast was founded with its first president being Dr Aboobaker Chothia.

The Islamic Centre Mosque complex now services the religious needs of Muslims stretching from Beenleigh to Coffs Harbour. The complex is used mainly for five daily prayers.

I now know that Muslims do not feel comfortable eating in establishments that serve pork or that serve alcohol. I also now know that many Gold Coast restaurants on the Gold Coast display Halal signs in their premises. I also know that in common with me, Muslim women love to shop.

I have seen from this visit that Gold Coast Muslims strive to maintain a good relationship with people of other faiths. They are enthusiastic to welcome non-Muslims to their centre to create a harmonious relationship and a better understanding between the various different religious groups. The centre regularly hosts high school students to teach them about the basic teachings and Lions club and Rotary members often visit the centre.

In Queensland we have embraced cultural diversity and we encourage everyone, regardless of their birthplace, to make a comfortable home here and also maintain ties to the country in which they were born. Recently while I was at my shopping centre mobile office I was pleasantly surprised to receive a visit from a Muslim lady I had met previously and her two little girls. They had been to swimming lessons and were about to be treated to McDonald's fries and nuggets. I welcome the friendship and, indeed, citizenship of people from all nations. Visiting the Islamic mosque not only gave me a greater understanding of Muslim people but also strengthened my commitment to multiculturalism.

Bundaberg Base Hospital, Chapel

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (10.15 pm): I would like to share with this parliament a letter I wrote to the Premier on 15 July this year. It states—

Dear Premier,

It has been brought to my attention by concerned members of the community that management at the Bundaberg Base Hospital are intent on removing all Christian symbols at the hospital chapel. I have been informed by these reliable services that management wish to change Bundaberg Base Hospital chapel into a non-denominational place of worship by removing Christian crosses as these symbols allegedly offend some foreign doctors. Premier, can you please guarantee that Queensland Health hospital management will not issue orders for any Christian religious symbols to be removed from the Bundaberg Base Hospital or any other Queensland hospital in order to create a non-denominational place of worship? Surely non-denominational prayer rooms in Christian chapels can coexist within Queensland hospitals? Thank you for taking this matter into consideration. I look forward to your favourable response.

Yours faithfully,

Rob Messenger, MP.

I will table a couple of letters which back up my story. The first is a Queensland Health document received on 3 November. It is addressed to Ms Jeanette Davey, who is President of the Australian Red Cross in Bundaberg. It is from Peter Heath, the Director of Corporate Services at the Bundaberg Base Hospital. That is the letter that asks for the removal of those Christian symbols from the Bundaberg Base Hospital chapel.

Once again, I am calling on the Premier, who has not replied to that letter, to guarantee that Christian hospital chapels and Christian religious symbols are not being torn down and converted into non-denominational places of worship. I have also discovered that the doctor who complained about those Christian symbols was a Dr Qureshi, who was mentioned in the Morris royal commission and who faced allegedly five charges of sexual assault. He is out of town now. He took off out of the country. I think he was also on a shoplifting charge.

If non-Christian overseas trained doctors or anyone from any religion wants a room in which to pray they should have one. Queensland Health should not have any problem whatsoever finding appropriate space at Bundaberg Base Hospital. I know they closed down a lot of beds and put in a lot of desks. All they need to do is take a few desks out and then they would have a non-denominational place of worship. The message that Peter Beattie—

Time expired.

Walkervale State School

Hon. NI CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (10.18 pm): Last Saturday I had the privilege of representing our new minister for education, Rod Welford, at the jubilee celebrations for Walkervale State School in Bundaberg and of officially opening almost \$1.3 million of renovations and extensions plus a new special education unit. I grew up in that area and lived close by the site that Walkervale was built on 50 years ago. In the early days there was a huge clay pit where the school now stands. Without a doubt it was the best lobby hole in Bundaberg.

Mr Palaszczuk: You were pretty good at it, too, I am told.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: That is where I learnt to lobby. While the parents in that area were very excited about getting a new school 50 years ago, the children were sadly mourning the loss of that lobby hole.

The jubilee celebrations were a huge success, with thousands of locals and visitors from across Queensland enjoying the celebrations and sharing happy memories. A highlight was the attendance of the inaugural principal, Mr Hutchison. The school has just gained nine newly rejuvenated rooms, four new outdoor shaded learning areas and a new special education unit—a wonderful jubilee gift for that school. The state government contributed almost \$1.3 million and the school community, led by principal Michael Fay, planned exactly what they needed and they gained the maximum possible results from the available funds.

When Walkervale State School opened in 1955, it was considered to be one of the most modern primary schools in Queensland. The new extensions and renovations that were opened on Saturday will allow Walkervale to maintain that image, and present and future students and teachers can share the pride in their school that was evident in those early classes of 1955.

This evening I also pay tribute to our lifesavers. On Saturday night in Bundaberg I attended the annual zone presentations and heard of many amazing achievements in regional, state and national competitions. However, the biggest and best achievement of the night, I believe, was the announcement that their beaches—stretching from Yeppoon right down to Hervey Bay—had recorded no lives lost during the year. This is indeed a great achievement. It highlights the dedication of these men and women, young and not so young, who give their time, mostly on a voluntary basis, to keep our beaches safe. They all deserve to be congratulated and encouraged to keep up the good work.

Sunshine Coast Grammar School Debate

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (10.21 pm): Recently, I was fortunate enough to attend the great house debate staged by year 6 students from the Sunshine Coast Grammar School. This visit presented to me a whole new perspective on debating and showed me how the student debaters were able to engage all the students who witnessed their debate.

Two months ago, I also visited the year 6 students at the grammar school to talk with them about the parliamentary process in Queensland as part of their government studies. Since my earlier visit, the students had been participating in their inaugural great house debate. It featured debating teams of three members, plus a reserve on each team. Last week, when I attended this very special debate, I witnessed the grand final of their debating challenge. I was impressed with the skills these students demonstrated, especially considering their average age of only 11 years.

The students debated the very controversial subject of television and its positive and negative effects on young people. All of the participants displayed an ability to research their subject and presented their arguments in a logical and convincing manner. While these young leaders and potential politicians showed their great debating skills, one of the highlights for me was the manner in which the entire group of 90 students were included in the excitement of this debate. After the students divided into their school house teams, they used the talents of their team cheerleaders to encourage and support their debating teams as they progressed through the first round debates, the semifinals and the final.

I offer my congratulations to the teachers and the year 6 students at the Sunshine Coast Grammar School. They have shown what great public speakers, analytical thinkers and debaters they are. I also congratulate their cheer squads, who remained attentive and encouraged a high level of involvement from all the students during the process. Perhaps members in this chamber will learn some new debating techniques from these young enthusiasts. I certainly did. I commend the students on their great debate.

Hot Water Burns Like Fire Campaign

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (10.23 pm): I recently attended the launch of the Hot Water Burns Like Fire campaign at the Mackay City Library. It has been well received by the Mackay community and by key stakeholders who are concerned with child injury prevention.

The campaign is an important government initiative which is funded by Queensland Health and the Department of Emergency Services. It is designed to develop, implement and evaluate strategies to prevent burns and scalds in children aged four years and under. It is an educational project that aims to provide appropriate resources to enhance the child injury prevention skills and knowledge of primary health care workers and raise the awareness of parents and carers about measures to prevent burns and scalds.

As a father of three young boys I am very aware of the dangers in the home associated with burns and scalds. I am astounded by the number of children who are reported to be seen in emergency departments annually for scalds caused by hot liquids. Approximately 1,617 children present at emergency departments annually. Even at 50 degrees Celsius, it is possible for a child to receive a nasty scald. It takes only one second. It is heartbreaking to see a child have to endure agonising pain, skin grafts and the possibility of scarring for life due to a burn or a scald, especially when it could have been prevented. Simple things, such as cooking on the backburners of the stove and using placemats instead of tablecloths on a table, can mean the difference between safety and a horrible burn from an inquisitive toddler.

Under Queensland law, tempering valves must be installed in all new homes and bathrooms undergoing renovations to keep water temperatures at or below 50 degrees Celsius. Houses built before 1996 can also have tempering valves fitted to hot water systems. A number of products are available that can be fitted to taps and showers to automatically switch off the water when the temperature rises above a safe level. Perhaps the electricity retailers, Ergon and Energex, could offer their support to the Hot Water Burns Like Fire campaign by sending out the project's brochure along with customer account notices.

Vigilance plays a key role in the prevention of childhood injury and is the result of awareness, which is what the Hot Water Burns Like Fire campaign is all about. I commend Queensland Health, the Department of Emergency Services and Dr Dale Hanson of the childhood injury prevention group on the Hot Water Burns Like Fire campaign. It will assist with the promotion of the safety and wellbeing of children in the Mackay region and also in Mount Isa. The campaign was launched in these two centres and is a first for Queensland.

Duck and Quail Hunting

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (10.26 pm): Duck and quail hunting has long been a recreational tradition in Queensland that has been passed down through the generations. For years, it has been a way of life for bush families who are brought up in this country. It is as traditional as enjoying a beer or boiling the billy. The annual recreational duck and quail hunting season has been managed, is sustainable and does not impact on the long-term survival of those species which are harvested. One must take into consideration the large number of man-made waterways and dams that have increased the number of habitats for wild ducks. In fact, no expert is concerned with a decline in native duck numbers.

This is purely a chance for Mr Beattie to get on his pedestal and try to convince the metropolitan majority what a great bloke he is and, at the same time, pander to the left-wingers. I have grave concerns that the people who have convinced the Premier that duck and quail hunting is cruel and barbaric and should not be practised in the 21st century are the same people who are targeting recreational fishers on the same basis. I have grave concerns that the Premier will target recreational fishing and pig hunting, because the people the Premier has pandered to by banning duck shooting are the same bunch who wanted pig hunting using dogs banned.

Mr Beattie and his south-east corner based government do not understand rural Queensland and they do not understand bush culture. Rural Queenslanders have been brought up with duck shooting. It is an experience that our grandfathers and great-grandfathers have been handing down from generation to generation. It is a way of life. It continues to put food on tables.

There is no reason to ban duck and quail hunting in Queensland. It is already managed under the Nature Conservation (Duck and Quail Conservation) Plan 1995, which outlines the strategies that protect duck and quail species and sets hunting conditions. Hunting ducks and quail in Queensland is strictly regulated to ensure that hunting is ecologically sustainable. Hunting has been confined to defined seasons, and hunting seasons are closely monitored.

A hunter needs to obtain a recreational wildlife harvesting licence. Someone applying for a licence for the first time needs to pass the water fowl identification test. Duck and quail shooters are aware of their responsibilities to observe the laws and regulations that relate to hunting. It is a fact that hunting is not the greatest threat to birds. Rather, it is the loss and degradation of their habitats.

Since I have been a member of this parliament, this government has kicked horse riders and beekeepers out of state forests, cut our race meetings, introduced licences for bow hunters and continued to close down our rural services. What does the Premier want the people of rural Queensland to do? They do not have the sports stadiums, the big car races, the footbridges and the multimillion-dollar parklands that the city people enjoy. Many rural Queenslanders rely on recreational activities, such as fishing, shooting and camping, but this government is slowly destroying the heritage that built this state.

Time expired.

Inaugural Whitsunday Disability Challenge

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (10.29 pm): It was with enormous pleasure last week that I represented the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, the Hon. Warren Pitt, at the inaugural Whitsunday Disability Challenge. This was, as the title would suggest, the first of these challenges to take place in the Whitsundays, and it was organised very well by Whitsunday Community Services Inc. It had a little help along the way and it has acknowledged—and I acknowledge tonight—the assistance received both from the Disability Action and Awareness Group in the Whitsundays and the Whitsunday Flexible Respite Care.

The Queensland government, I am proud to say, also came to the party with some financial assistance for the Whitsunday Disability Challenge, with a grant of \$5,000 through the Building Inclusive Communities Grants Program. I was very delighted to be asked to launch this inaugural program last week in Airlie Beach, because it was indeed a really good program that included some fairly serious events and some fun things as well including a range of excellent guest speakers. There was a wheelchair grand prix, power lifting, lawn bowls demonstrations and entertainment provided by Steady Eddie, that wonderful entertainer who spends a lot of his time these days in Airlie Beach. He is quite a local there.

There was a twofold purpose to this challenge. It set out to give local people and community leaders a better understanding of some of the challenges that people with a disability face on a daily basis, and that message came home really loud and clear. But at the same time the event was a celebration of the amazing ability, tenacity and spirit of people with a disability in our communities—and not just people with disabilities but their carers as well, and that was a very clear message.

It was quite a feather in the cap of the organisers that among the guest speakers was the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Susan Booth. I was delighted to share the honour of judging the primary school art competition with Susan and other members of the community. It was a tough job. It was almost as scary as the wheelchair challenge when the journos took on the pollies in the Whitsunday area. I confess that I came last, but what I did realise from that event was that it is not an easy thing to be in a wheelchair and we were negotiating a paved car park. How much more difficult it is in everyday reality for people to try to get up even the smallest inclines, steps and other obstacles that we just take for granted as able-bodied people. It was a credit to the organisers and I certainly hope—and I encourage them—that this will be an annual event. It is something which they should be proud of and which I learnt and the community learnt a lot from.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned at 10.32 pm.