

MICHAEL McCORMACK MP

Putting the Riverina first



TWILIGHT: The Sun is finally setting on WWBH, opened in 1963, which will at long last be replaced.



WWBH CAMPAIGN: Headline from the May 7-8 Weekend Advertiser.

If it had not been for a chance meeting a few weeks ago by our federal MP, Michael McCormack, in Brisbane Airport with Federal Health Minister, Nicola Roxon, we might have been in the \$7 million bracket.

She was, until McCormack put her straight, of the view the state government had promised funds for a complete rebuild.

TELLING IT AS IT IS: From Graham Gorrel's opinion piece in The Daily Advertiser of 13 May.

Lobbying gets our hospital

June 2011

RIVERINA'S regional referral hospital received \$55.1 million from the Federal Budget and, in the words of physician-cardiologist and long-time Wagga Wagga Base Hospital campaigner Dr Gerard Carroll, "we now have a hospital."

The money for a complete rebuild of Wagga Wagga Base Hospital (WWBH) in the 10 May Budget will hasten the project, with a construction firm already announced and work to begin shortly.

The building cannot start soon enough.

Riverina residents have waited since 1980 for this day.

Local people are good people ... patient people ... but they should not have been forced to endure the decrepit conditions of WWBH in recent years.

It is significant that the \$55.1 million allocated was the second most of any non-Labor or non-Government-aligned Independent electorates of the 63 projects funded across Australia.

The money allocated – the full amount State Health Infrastructure asked for when it made its submission by 3 December last year – comes from the \$1.8 billion Health and Hospitals Fund (HHF) Regional Priority Round.

It was a timely boost for the project and

came in a Budget which was always going to be tough.

I lobbied hard from the Opposition benches to extract as much Federal funding as possible; writing letters, having one-on-one meetings with Health Minister Nicola Roxon and making representations because I know, as much as anyone, how important this is and how deserving the region is to get a new hospital.

It is a momentum builder – the community deserves congratulations for its unity in maintaining the pressure for this.

The complete redevelopment will increase the bed capacity at the hospital from 218 to 284. It will include an increase in acute care and mental health acute care beds and space for new mental health non-acute beds and incorporate a new emergency procedures centre, new operating theatre complex, expansion of the renal dialysis unit and expansion of imaging and diagnostic services.

Wagga Wagga received more than \$58.5 million in the Budget – the biggest Federal health boost this region has ever gained

– with the Calvary Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation and Detoxification Facility being granted \$3.412 million to go with Calvary Health Care Riverina's \$1.467 million contribution.

The State Coalition promised on 8 March to build a new hospital and vowed to continue until the job was finished, with current New South Wales Health Minister Jillian Skinner declaring she would quit her position if it did not happen.

The WWBH project still requires additional funding – somewhere in the order of \$130 million – for a complete rebuild. I am hopeful that this or part thereof might be forthcoming in the next HHF regional round, with applications to open later this year.

At any rate, the NSW Government has promised it will deliver and all that is needed now, thanks to the Federal injection, is for the State Coalition to commit to a timeline.

I wrote to Minister Roxon on 26 May acknowledging her Government's funding and expressing the hope of all in the Riverina that WWBH could again be looked upon favourably in the next HHF round as well as the City of Griffith which is seeking \$11 million for its exciting hospital project in partnership with St Vincent's.



OFFICIAL OPENING: At the unveiling ceremony with (from left) Dean of School of Medicine UNDA Dr Christine Bennett, first-year students Chris Diehm, Joel Cooper, David Yong and Grant Moore as well as Calvary Health Care Riverina Chief Executive Officer Joanne Williams and Dr Joe McGirr who will run the school.

NEW RURAL MEDICAL SCHOOL OPENED

AN EXCITING addition to Riverina's health services has been added with the establishment of the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) School of Medicine Rural Clinical School.

The school has been developed in conjunction with Calvary Health Care Riverina, the services of which include a 100-bed private hospital providing acute surgical, medical and obstetric services in a fully-renovated modern facility.

Foundation students will not be placed in Calvary Hospital for the full year but will be placed in four-week community rotations in Wagga Wagga and surrounding towns.

This school, in conjunction with the University of New South Wales Rural Clinical School, Docker Street, enhances the region as a centre of medical learning and teaching excellence and in the long term will hopefully secure more qualified doctors locally.



TRAINING EXCELLENCE: Some of Wagga Wagga's places of learning (from left) Kapooka Army base, Forest Hill Air Force base, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga TAFE campus, REX Pilot Academy, Riverina Community College and Vianney College.

Welcome to Wagga Wagga ...

'AUSTRALIA'S LEARNING CAPITAL'

THERE has been much debate recently about how Wagga Wagga should sell itself to outsiders and what the city could do to attract more visitors.

On 13 December last year the City Council unveiled a logo simply (and effectively) using the originality of the name Wagga Wagga, which in the Wiradjuri Aboriginal language means "Place of many Crows".

It is true, the name is famous. Everywhere you go, just about everyone you meet has a Wagga Wagga connection or story.

A museum commemorating the city as the "birthplace" of Barry Humphries' alter ego Dame Edna Everage has support in some quarters.

Another, shall we say novel idea, that of making Wagga Wagga the "City of Big Balls" was put forward by local ophthalmologist and sports follower Dr Clayton Barnes.

For mine, the name Wagga Wagga says it all for branding purposes but as a slogan the city could do well to promote itself as the "Australia's Learning Capital".

It is a place unparalleled for learning, training and teaching excellence (and these three words could be used interchangeably before the word capital).

Where else in this nation can you find

a city with the scope of nationally significant training Wagga Wagga boasts? Nowhere.

No place can rival Wagga Wagga or even go close when it comes to learning.

Just consider what Wagga Wagga has to offer as far as training/learning goes. The following is a mere snapshot and by no means an exhaustive list.

The Riverina is blessed in that its two cities are such important regional hubs and leaders in their own fields of expertise - Griffith being the irrigation capital and centre of the nation's food basket and Wagga Wagga "Australia's Learning Capital".

It is the home of the soldier - with every Army recruit being trained at Blamey Barracks, Kapooka.

Every Royal Australian Air Force person trains at Wagga Wagga at some stage during their career.

The Forest Hill base supports four major training units, delivering technical and non-technical initial employment and post-graduate training which is fundamental to the delivery of military air and space power in support of national objectives.

Wagga Wagga's Navy base is also an important training and strategic facility.

Charles Sturt University continues to produce the best and brightest Australian and overseas students, breaking new ground in so many of its courses. If its recent Wagga Wagga awards function is anything to go by, Riverina Institute of Technical and Further Education is also turning out some wonderful graduates with remarkable potential.

The Regional Express Australian Airline Pilot Academy at the airport is a truly outstanding facility, run by people who demand the best and who are inspiring an exciting new generation of pilots. It is appropriate the centre is located in a street named after one of the region's pioneering aviators, the late Don Kendell. He would be so proud.

The city now has two rural clinical schools of medicine for the training of doctors.

You can also add Kurrajong Waratah (the work of which in early intervention and other educational services for

people with disabilities is unsurpassed), Riverina Community College, Riverina Conservatorium of Music, Wagga Wagga Agricultural Institute (the origins of which go back to 1892), Southern Sports Academy and, for that matter, Vianney College - the seminary of the Catholic Diocese of Wagga Wagga, opened in 1992 by Bishop William Brennan, which prepares students for the priesthood locally and elsewhere.

Of course, Wagga Wagga also has a host of government and independent primary and secondary schools staffed by some of the best teachers you could find preparing young people for further studies and vocations.

Every regional city has schools and good ones too but no other centre can match Wagga Wagga for its amazing and unique variety of training activities.

It is for this reason Wagga Wagga, once dubbed the "Garden City of the South" and in recent times known as the "City of Good Sports", should better promote the attribute which drives much (most?) of its economy - training - by declaring itself "Australia's Learning Capital".

Michael McCormack

MEDICARE CLOSURE A MISERABLE MOVE

MEDICARE Australia Access Points, which are of critical importance particularly for the aged, have been stripped from regional areas in a miserable move by the Gillard Labor Government.

At least 19 Medicare services have already been removed from the Riverina Electorate and another six will be "decommissioned and removed" by the Labor Government as part of a total of 840 to be closed across the country over the next three years.

It will save just \$10 million and is a shameful decision by a Government which has wasted billions of dollars and continues to plunge the nation into further debt, borrowing \$135 million a day.

The cost of the service is just \$385 per booth per year. The penny-pinching of Federal Labor knows no bounds.

The only consultation made was a telephone call and letter to the providers of the service.

Medicare Australia justified the closures by saying people can access services online or through a telephone system.

Not everyone, however, uses the Internet and staff members in host agencies often helped customers navigate the Medicare system, which now will not be possible.

People in remote towns will also be disadvantaged as their nearest Medicare facility in many cases will be several hundred kilometres away.

I have written to Minister for Human Services and Social Inclusion Tanya Plibersek requesting a review of this short-sighted cut.

RIVERINA ACCESS POINTS TO CLOSE	
Adelong	Leeton (x2 outlets)#
Ardlethan*	Nangus*
Ariah Park	Narrandera#
Barellan	Rosewood
Batlow	Talbingo
Coleambally*	Temora#
Coolamon	Tumbarumba
Ganmain	Tumut#
Goolgowi*	Weethalle*
Hillston	West Wyalong#
Juneec	Whitton
Khancoban	Ungarie

* No alternative option available in same locality.

Scheduled to be closed over next 2 years.



DELIGHTFUL DEBS: I had the pleasure of receiving the debutantes at the 11 June Weethalle Ball. It was a memorable evening with a wonderful turn-out from the district in the fabulously decorated Memorial Hall.

(Back, from left) partners Zac Lawrence, Atif Ghaffari, Hayden Irvine, Bart McIntyre; debutantes Jaimee-Lee Nugent, Reanna Wood, Haidee Studholme, Lauren Caldwell; official party Ross and Margaret Loudon (dance teachers), Stephanie Healy (matron of honour, hall committee secretary), Barbara and Peter Luelf (who is hall committee president); flower girls and page boys Lana Bishop, Harrison McKinnon, Bridie Quigg, Nate Quigg, Jemma Luelf, Tye Studholme, Leah Caldwell and Will Studholme.

I also attended the 52nd Scottish Debutante Ball at Leeton on 20 May which was also a lovely night.

Report may SAVE WATER SITUATION

HAD it not been for the passion and pride shown by those who live and work in the Coleambally and Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas at the fiery 14 October Murray-Darling Basin Authority public rally, the water debate would certainly be heading in a different direction.

More than 7000 locals told the MDBA they were not going to watch their communities be destroyed by an ill-conceived plan which returned too much water to the environment without proper scientific validation.

Within hours of the meeting ending, the Government had tasked the new Parliamentary Committee for Regional Australia with conducting an inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

That committee, of which I am a member, met in 12 regional centres with the largest attendance apart from the 25 January Griffith hearing being 70 at Deniliquin the previous day.

More than 1000 concerned residents, of all ages and backgrounds, packed into the Yoogali Club to listen to as well as to address, in a calm and reasoned manner, the committee headed by Independent Tony Windsor.

That so many people again turned up, surely shows just what water means to our region in particular, the Riverina truly being the food bowl of the nation.

Only 18 people were present when proceedings began at Bendigo on 21 January and surprisingly just 21 at Swan Hill, a renowned agricultural and horticultural region, eight days later.

Perhaps the most compelling of all the statements made to the committee came from Coleambally Irrigation Co-operative Chief Executive Officer John Culleton.

He quoted a local farmer who said:

“I’m not here to survive; I came here 30 years ago to thrive.”

Mr Culleton continued: “So all this talk about survival is to essentially say to us that the best we can look forward to is to struggle to survive, and that is an unacceptable prospect for the people of this region.”

Indeed it is.

Riverina’s future, facing considerable uncertainty in recent months, may be saved by this Parliamentary inquiry which has urged the Federal Government to put regional communities first in any decisions about water management.

The committee’s 253-page report *Of drought and flooding rains*, was tabled in Parliament on 2 June and makes 21 recommendations to ensure the economic viability of the Murray-Darling Basin ... the much-needed triple bottom line approach Riverina family farmers and businesspeople have been asking for all along.

The report, which has received widespread support, ensures a win-win situation for both irrigation communities as well as sustaining a healthy river system, which everyone needs.

The difference between what the committee has produced and the MDBA’s original guide is the engagement with people at a local level. We visited and listened to what they were saying needed to be done ... farmers and environmentalists too.



FULL HOUSE: More than 1000 locals attended the Regional Australia Committee’s Griffith hearing, evidence from which helped in the compilation of the Parliamentary report (left).

Committee members heard what was needed and responded

with a series of recommendations to the Government which now needs to act in the best interests of the regional communities which grow the nation’s food and fibre.

Chief among the recommendations is the immediate halt to the Government’s non-strategic, haphazard buybacks and the necessity to take a more targeted approach to water buybacks which prioritises the lowest possible impact.

The Government has generated so much uncertainty by continuing to buy water from desperate sellers rather than willing sellers.

Another important recommendation focuses on greater investment in on- and off-farm water saving projects.

There was \$5.8 billion set aside by the former Coalition Government in the Water Act in 2007 for infrastructure projects but up to now only \$70 million of this has been spent on initiatives which have actually delivered water into the basin whereas Federal Labor has spent \$1.5 billion on water buybacks.

This is unacceptable from a Government which purports to be having a real focus on the needs of regional Australia in this hung Parliament.

Now is the true test.

The Government needs to heed the advice of the committee which was chaired by Mr Windsor whose vote is crucial to Labor retaining power.

If Federal Labor ignores the recommendations of Mr Windsor’s committee then how could he continue to support the Gillard Government?

The report – which can be found online at <http://www.aph.gov.au/mdi> – noted that the Senate is presently undertaking an inquiry into the Water Act and that inquiry would have greater capacity to determine if the legislation needed amending.

The MDBA’s draft to the basin plan will be announced in coming weeks with the final plan to be unveiled early next year.

DIGITAL TV CHANGE-OVER CAUSING CONCERNS

AUSTRALIA is in the process of switching to digital television.

This will happen progressively across Australia through to 2013, with TV signals changing from analog to digital.

Currently, Australia’s free-to-air TV signals are broadcast in both analog and digital formats. During the digital switchover, all free-to-air analog TV signals will be progressively turned off and replaced with digital-only TV signals.

A number of Riverina residents have called my offices, e-mailed and written letters of concern about the reception and channels they will receive when the switch-over occurs.

I have written numerous letters to Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, asking him to address these issues.

The Minister has advised that if you have a new TV then you are probably digital ready. But if your TV is a few years old then there are a few things you can do to prepare for the switch-over:

- Buy a new TV with an integrated digital TV tuner.
- Keep the TV you have and attach a digital set-top box, or a digital video recorder.
- If you have subscription TV, you may already be digital TV ready.

Households in regional and remote areas currently receiving the analog signal from a self-help tower may be eligible for the Satellite Subsidy Scheme (SSS) if this signal is not going to be converted to digital. To find out if you qualify ring 1800 201 013.

Digital TV will provide DVD-quality pictures, CD-quality sound as well as widescreen format. It will also bring new digital TV channels and interactive features such as a digital TV guide and weather updates. The ABC, SBS, Seven, Nine and Ten have all introduced high definition digital channels. Gradually, all free-to-air channels will be introducing new digital channels and content.

DIGITAL TV AT A GLANCE:

- In the Riverina the switch-over will take place in the first half of 2012.
- Most analog TVs will be able to receive digital TV by connecting a digital set-top box or digital TV recorder. So, unless your analog TV is too old to be connected to a set-top box or digital TV recorder, it will not need replacing.
- Standard definition set-top boxes typically cost between \$30 and \$80, while high definition set-top boxes are about \$100.
- Choosing not to do anything means you will lose access to free-to-air TV when the switchover is complete in your area.
- The recent Budget included a measure whereby pensioners will be given free digital TV set-top boxes, with the Government to spend \$309 million on systems and installation.
- To find out channels available in the Riverina on Freeview visit: www.freeview.com.au
- To talk to a digital switch-over liaison office call 1800 20 10 13.
- For more information visit: www.digitalready.gov.au

Report on fairer youth allowance due

... BUT TOO LATE FOR MANY

A REPORT outlining the impact of the unfair independent youth allowance criteria is due on 1 July.

Federal Labor placed former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Professor Kwong Lee Dow AM, in charge of a review of what it labelled its "student income support reforms".

"The review will have a particular focus on the capacity of rural and regional students to access higher education,"

according to Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, Senator Chris Evans.

Senator Evans needed only to listen to what Senator Fiona Nash, I and every other Nationals' Member of Parliament have been saying for many months.

There is something un-Australian with a Government which has refused to even consider allowing regional students in some areas to have access to independent youth allowance.

This Government even moved to declare that important amendments which would have made the criteria fairer were not allowed to be debated in the House of Representatives, claiming they were "un-Constitutional".

Students affected by Labor's discriminatory criteria include those from Wagga Wagga, as well as Adelong, Batlow, Coolamon, Gundagai, Junee, Mangoplah and Tumut.

In early 2010 Labor, when now Prime Minister Julia Gillard was Education Minister, altered the eligibility criteria for independent youth allowance, requiring students from areas identified as inner regional to work more hours for longer before being considered as independent.

Students living in inner regional zones cannot access independent youth allowance if they do not qualify under Labor's criteria. The regional zones in which students live are unfairly determined by arbitrary lines drawn on a map.

Prof. Lee Dow's review took submissions from local families affected at a 12 May Wagga Wagga hearing after the Government originally overlooked Riverina and backed down only after howls of understandable protest.

Senator Evans said the review would "recommend options for removing regional eligibility distinctions for youth

allowance". Yet he recently told ABC Radio that while the Government was committed to removing the inner and outer regional distinctions, "people need to be aware that does not mean that everyone will move to the outer regional rules." Either way, it will still be too late for those who took a gap year in 2009 and most likely 2010 as well.

Once the review reports on 1 July, the Government has stated that any changes will not be introduced until at least six months later, from 1 January 2012.

Regional students face significantly increased costs associated with relocating for study. Many regional students have no choice but to relocate to study.

The Nationals have lobbied tirelessly on behalf of the many thousands of students and their families left out in the cold by Labor.

All this from a Government which says, but is yet to ever prove, it has a focus on regional Australia, led by a Prime Minister who seems to have conveniently overlooked that in her inaugural speech to Parliament in 1998 said: "... ordinary people understand that the future of Australia and the future of themselves and their children is tied to educational success".

Around the Riverina ...



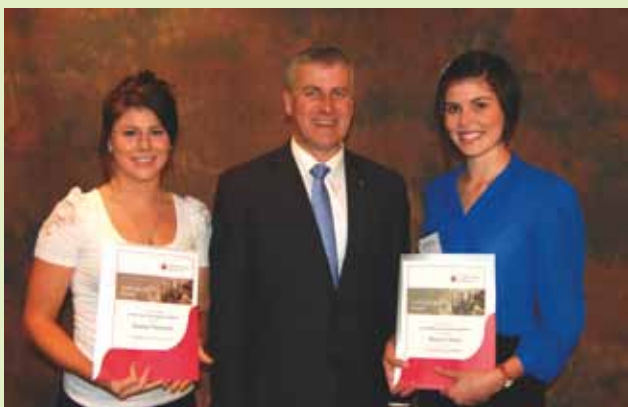
HALL OPENING: Wagga Wagga Christian College showed the advantages of self-managing its Building the Education Revolution funds with the 6 June opening of its superb multi-purpose centre. It was good to meet Year 12 students (from left) Gemma Mollenhauer, Lucy McGlynn, captain Chloe Clason, Emily Bell, Zach Poulos and Ben Faust after what was a spectacular opening.



EXCURSION: Years 5 and 6 from Ashmont Public School had an interesting time at Parliament House and asked lots of good questions about the actual building (which always impresses youngsters) and the role of an MP. They were accompanied by teachers Sandra Elliott and Amanda Smith and Charles Sturt University practicum students Brianna Biggar and Danell Moore. The boys and girls were interested to learn the flag which flies over Parliament House measures 12.8 metres by 6.4 metres, about the same size as the side of a double-decker bus!



SCHOOL VISIT: Enjoying their Parliament House excursion is the Year 6 class from Saint Mary's Primary, Yoogali. (Back, from left) teacher Lauren Irvin, Aiden Snaidero, Zander Fattore, George Pavese, Daniel Arcifa, Matthew Zalunardo, Caleb Biondo, Thompson Helwig, Steven Rovere, Pawanjeet Kaur, Lauren Zanesco, Isabella Quarisa, Melissa Bortolin, Sara Casella, Brendan Andrezza, teacher Annette Reginato; (front) Joel Dal Broi, Damien Catanzariti, Peter Barbaro, Jacob Barbaro, Olivia Vitucci, Jasinta Seukeni and Georgette De Paoli.



CSU WINNERS: Scholarship recipients at Charles Sturt University awards presentation at Joyes Hall are Amelia Thomson whose mother Trina is Tumut's Mayor and Raynor Hicks, granddaughter of former Member for Riverina Noel Hicks. I am sure we will hear a lot more about these young women in the years ahead as both have bright futures. Congratulations to all students who received scholarships.



GREEN THUMBS: Showing how to properly water a garden are brothers Edison Zang 7, who is in Year 2 and his brother and Kindergarten pupil Alex, 5, taking part in Batlow Technology School's launch of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden National Program. The school has upgraded its kitchen and built and grown an extensive herb and vegetable patch, which is now used regularly for classes.



2011 LEADERS: It was a privilege to present badges to members of Tumbarumba High School's Student Representative Council (back, from left) Mistral Kendall-Hawke, Amelia Martin, Brigid Rhynehart, Brin Hussell, Caitlyn Kelso, Keith Horseman, Courtney Powell, Dale Christie, Jack Vogan, Sam Hibbard; (front) Monique McPherson, Brandon Eggelton, Jake Mills, India Masters and Walker Holm.

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