

pathway to follow and skills to participate in the work force. In its first year, this program will provide opportunities for 24 people who are interested in working in the horticulture industry.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank a number of other people and organisations who have worked very hard to secure this funding. In particular, the Greater Brisbane Area Consultative Committee played an important role in securing funding, including obtaining the support of the Nursery and Gardening Institute of Queensland. In particular I mention David Peel, the chairman of the Greater Brisbane Area Consultative Committee, and Margaret Blade. Those two people provide invaluable service to our community, and I commend both of them to the House today as people with whom I have a very good working relationship. They have provided assistance to me in a number of other areas over the period that I have been member for Dickson. In particular, they recently supported a mail-out to local small businesses of a CD that provides a one-stop shop for government services. It was a great way of communicating with those small businesses about some of the programs that the federal government has to offer.

Also worthy of mention is the Australian National Training Authority—ANTA. ANTA has granted over half a million dollars to construct classrooms, nursery beds and education and training equipment. Grovely TAFE will also provide additional training facilities and technical expertise. Finally, I would like to mention the participants themselves, who deserve great credit for making the commitment to improve their vocational training and activity whilst they participate in the work force. I had the pleasure of visiting the centre last week and saw it as a work in progress. I want to end by congratulating not just the participants but the people who have worked so hard, including Don Nicol, to make this possible.

Australian Defence Force: Foreign Affairs

Mr ANDREN (Calare) (1.12 p.m.)—I want to place on record today some comments I had ready yesterday when the Leader of the House moved to suspend question time so as not to detract from the significance of the welcome home for the Iraq war troops. Indeed, yesterday's events in this place served only to detract yet again from the significance of this parliament. It was to the government's shame that it was not prepared to accommodate the opposition's sensible suggestion that question time be put back to 4.30 p.m. The Prime Minister was not prepared to be subjected to any questions about his increasing embarrassment over the lack of weapons of mass destruction or the puzzled response from Britain to the PM's apparent intelligence on a third mobile weapons laboratory in Iraq. As was the case on 18 March when question time was cancelled at the height of the parliamentary debate on the Iraq invasion, so too it was cancelled yesterday for political reasons.

As the *Sydney Morning Herald* said today, Australians yesterday recognised the distinction between those who issue the orders and those who dutifully follow them. It is great that the troops are home unscathed, and they deserve our support. But there is no doubt that the parade and its effect—if not intent—of isolating those who would dare oppose the illegal invasion was a continuation of the process of politicising our defence forces. This began with the infamous *Tampa* episode and the retrospective border protection legislation of 29 August 2001, which was designed to justify the use of our armed SAS troops to forcibly arrest a ship on the high seas that had just performed a heroic rescue operation. Then came the tragedy of SIEVX and the lies of the children overboard episode. In both cases, our defence personnel were seriously compromised.

The Prime Minister says he does not want to politicise the weapons of mass destruction issue. There are no surprises there—it would be too embarrassing—but he is quite happy to politicise our defence forces. Anyone who criticises our troops' engagement in Iraq should never be condemned for being disloyal to those troops. A generation ago there was an attempt by a coalition government to pillory those who would criticise our involvement in Vietnam. Conscientious objectors to conscription for this obscene support of American military adventurism were hunted down and jailed.

More than 30 years later, our current government wants to pillory those who dare say to our troops, 'We know you had to go, but we don't support your being part of an illegal invasion.' That is especially so now, as it appears the justification was likely built at best on totally manipulated information and at worst on outright lies. The opposition leader has been roundly criticised for telling the troops openly and honestly that he did not support them going to Iraq. Most Australians did not support it either. It is more than interesting to note that neither of our coalition of the willing partners has staged a military parade. Both Tony Blair's and George Bush's credibility surrounding their justification for the invasion is under fierce attack—from the usual suspects but from former top Bush aide Rand Beers and Blair's own party.

Have the Iraqis been truly liberated? Certainly from Saddam's regime, but will they be liberated enough to choose their own kind of government? Or will Amid Chalabi or some other Washington clone join Hamid Karzai, in Afghanistan, as with Pinochet and Noriega in earlier times, as wonderful examples of the democratisation of US puppet states with little or no popular backing?

No-one who stops to think for a moment can seriously doubt that we have been sucked into a US controlled military, economic and political agenda. If democracy has to be imposed then one has to question what kind of democracy that is. If anyone really believes the US can be the impartial broker of an Israeli-Palestine peace, they are seriously deluded, as events are showing. British Prime Minister Tony Blair is so blind to the lack of true balance in the peace process that he is seriously suggesting an expanded permanent membership of the Security Council to include Japan and India but no Islamic representation. Such are the signals we are sending to Islamic nations.

Some in this parliament have spoken of the need for Australia to have a truly independent foreign policy, so we can genuinely and with mutual trust engage both our nearest and far-flung neighbours. That policy would involve arms-length dealings with the US, not an intimate embrace. Is there any wonder that Tom Schieffer and Co. have been so anxious for Simon Crean and Mark Latham to be as far as possible from the prime ministership?

Parkes Electorate: Tourism

Mr JOHN COBB (Parkes) (1.17 p.m.)—When it comes to tourism, my electorate of Parkes has so much to offer. As the gateway to Australia's Red Centre, it offers some of the most amazingly diverse landscapes in New South Wales, from the world renowned Western Plains Zoo in the electorate's largest city, Dubbo, to the living desert near the famous pioneering silver city of Broken Hill, probably the most famous regional city in Australia—not to mention the amazing sites and destinations in between, and the outback communities that boast of a former glory during Australia's pioneering years.