really have to engage in the action that goes with it, and supporting a savings bill is part of that action.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will directly relate her response to the question, with less debate.

Ms GILLARD—I was asked specifically about stimulus payments. I was asked specifically about stimulus payments that have gone to supporting jobs. This government is proud of having supported jobs during the global financial crisis. When the world moved into the global financial crisis and accompanying global recession, it was the right thing to do to provide economic stimulus to support jobs—absolutely the right thing to do. I am proud that as a government we chose, as one of the single biggest targets for that stimulus, Australian schools. That was the right thing to do as well.

Whilst the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government was answering his question, members of the opposition, particularly the shadow Treasurer, were saying, ‘What have school halls got to do with productivity?’ Well, I suggest he goes and visits a school that has a new classroom, new flexible learning areas that enable teaching in a different way—

Mr Hartsuyker—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The Prime Minister is directly defying your ruling to be relevant to the question.

The SPEAKER—The member for Cowper will resume his seat. The Prime Minister is responding.

Ms GILLARD—And of course the expenditure into Australian schools, the transformation of learning spaces which enables teaching to be done in a different way, is going to be part of tomorrow’s productivity because productivity is very largely defined by the skills and capacities of the Australian people, and there is nothing more important to those future skills and capacities than what is happening in Australian schools today. So it was the right thing to provide economic stimulus to support jobs. The member for Goldstein may have preferred to see more people unemployed. That was not our way. We believe in the benefits and dignity of work.

And now, of course, it is the right thing to engage in the biggest fiscal consolidation process since the 1960s to bring the budget to surplus in 2012-13 as promised. We promised it during the election campaign. We had our promises properly costed. We provided matching savings. What that showed is that we would keep the bottom line and bring the budget to surplus in 2012-13, and we will.

Vocational Education and Training

Ms LIVERMORE (3.02 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism. How is the government assisting to train workers around Biloela to take advantage of the job opportunities presented by the resources boom?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I thank the member for Capricornia for her question. She is a person who has had a long-term commitment to education and training. In that context, coming from a resource-rich region, she understands the importance of government investing in a practical way in apprenticeship training. She therefore has been a long-time supporter of the government’s apprenticeships in schools program related to the development of our trade in schools initiative. But the House is also well aware that we as a nation are under a lot of pressure at the moment because of a huge pipeline investment in our resources sector in Australia. Since May alone, $24 billion has been invested in new projects in Australia. One of those key projects is, for example, the British Gas coal seam methane project in Central Queensland, a single investment of $15 billion.

For us as a nation, the real priorities there are how we lift productivity. Central to lifting productivity is investment in key initiatives such as infrastructure—but also apprenticeships and education. I am therefore delighted to indicate to the House that the government, having opened in October this year stage 1 of the Biloela apprenticeships centre, at a cost of $1.5 million, is now in a position to work with the Gladstone Area Group Apprentices company to secure the completion of this very important local apprenticeships centre with the commitment of an additional million dollars.

In terms of this area, I indicate that, with respect to the British Gas project alone, we are talking about 5,000 jobs during construction and around 1,000 permanent jobs in the region with the operation of the LNG processing plant at Gladstone. But, from the point of view of local parents—and I spoke to some of these parents and the young apprentices when I visited Biloela not that long ago—this apprenticeship centre is so important to them. It means that they are keeping their children in the local region, in local high-skill apprenticeship training. It also overcomes some of the fears of those parents with respect to what has been a long-term issue of travelling long distances to areas such as Gladstone, Brisbane, Mackay or Rockhampton for apprenticeship training. Doing it locally is important to parents; it is also important to the young men and women whom I visited and discussed these issues with during my recent discussions at Biloela.

So I simply say that the Banana Engineering Skills Training Centre, which will now go forward at Biloela with the support of the Gladstone Area Group Apprentices Ltd company, is a very important local initiative. It shows the benefit of government investing in education and training. It shows how these investments can add to Australia’s productivity and, in doing so, ensure
that we maintain our competitiveness and attract more investment to Australia. It is good for industry and it is good for young men and women wanting to explore high-skilled apprenticeship and trade opportunities in Central Queensland.

Tourism

Mr OAKESHOTT (3.05 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, the small-business retail and domestic tourism sectors are under pressure right now from a combination of consumer online overseas retailing, international rather than domestic travel and challenges in accessing affordable credit post GFC. In the light of these pressures, what is the government doing to aggressively promote ‘Buy Australian’ and ‘Holiday Australian’ campaigns in the lead-up to Christmas, a key time for the Australian small-business retail and tourism communities?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member very much for his question. He raises the very important question of tourism. Of course, he would know that in his own electorate—because he comes from a very beautiful part of Australia—and right around the country tourism is a very major employer. In fact, almost one in every 12 working Australians is engaged in the tourism sector or connected to the sector, and it is our largest export services industry, worth $23 billion.

He is also right that this is an industry under some pressure at the moment. The strength of the Australian dollar is making it difficult for local tourism operators and we do want to make sure that we are getting the message to Australians that they can go and look at very beautiful parts of Australia on holidays and spend their tourism dollars here. That is why the government launched in March last year the campaign from Tourism Australia that is called No Leave, No Life. I suspect there would be a number of members of this parliament, and indeed of the parliamentary press gallery, that could understand the resonance of those words: no leave, no life. We do want to see Australians using their leave. The campaign is already delivering results. Since its launch the total accumulated annual leave balance has fallen from 123 million days to 117 million days, so people are starting to use their leave, which is a good thing.

Each morning and afternoon this month as people are starting to turn their mind to what we will do at Christmas—will we work through; will we take some leave?—they will hear on radio in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth about the No Leave, No Life campaign. They will have the opportunity to win a $2,000 voucher for an Aussie holiday as part of that promotion. On 4 December the second No Leave, No Life reality TV series will run on the Seven network, showing hardworking Australians taking a holiday, so that is another promotion venture to get people out and about.

I am advised that the last time there was such a reality TV program it attracted 1.1 million viewers.

Apart from getting Australians to holiday at home, we do want to get people from overseas coming here to our country, and that is why excitement is being generated around Oprah Winfrey coming to broadcast her very successful TV show from Australia, which is making a difference. The simple fact is that we made an investment of $1.5 million in this visit and it has already generated over $17 million worth of free advertising in Australia to talk to people about Australia.

These are the promotional endeavours we are engaged in, but of course every member of parliament can play their part by picking up on the No Leave, No Life campaign and talking to their constituents about the importance of a holiday and the wonderful ways of having a holiday here in Australia.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, I would ask that you ask the Prime Minister to table that three-page note in response to the question without notice.

The SPEAKER—Was the Prime Minister reading from a document?

Ms GILLARD—I was referring to a confidential document, Mr Speaker.

Skills Training

Mr LYONS (3.10 pm)—My question is to the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth. Will the minister explain the importance of skills to building a more productive economy?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the member for his question. The connection between skills and a more productive economy is a direct and clear one, unarguable, and it is one that this government understands very well. That is why we are investing in Australia’s schools and universities to ensure that all Australian students have the skills they need to build a successful career and for us to have a successful economy. It is a pretty challenging time for students around Australia at the moment. Senior students have been sitting their final exams in the last few weeks and I would like to congratulate those who have finished. They will be feeling a sense of relief. Best of luck to those who are still going. Of course, many students are still thinking about what they will do next year, and this government is about supporting schools to prepare young people for successful careers. That is why we are investing in the Trades Training Centres in Schools program, an investment of some $2.5 billion over 10 years to enable all secondary students across the nation to access vocational education through trade training centres.

On 4 November this year I was pleased to announce another 58 projects receiving funding under round 3 of the program with in-principle funding of some $219 million—58 projects benefiting 195 schools, boosting the skills of thousands of students. These centres are
being built all around the country. There has been great feedback from teachers, students and school communities. Amongst those I visited is the Southern Cross Catholic Vocational College in Sydney, where I went with my colleague the member for Reid and there are hairdressing and hospitality classes in action. I went to Broadford Secondary College with the member for McEwen to see the site for the new Central Ranges Trade Training Centre. Students there will be training for hospitality and tourism. These centres are making a real difference to students because they can get hands-on experience in the trade while they are still at school.

I notice they are pretty popular with the opposition as well. The member for Gilmore was commenting on how ‘delighted’ she was that Vincentia High in her electorate was funded in round 3. The member for Dunkley said he was ‘thrilled’ with the funding to establish a trades training centre. But the opposition were pledging to cut $230 million from trades training centres at the last election, and now the shadow minister for education has been kicked out of the parliament. So there you go.

As well as that, the government wants to support students to make sure that they have a tertiary education opportunity in their lives. We have committed $2.1 billion over five years from 2010 for the government to fund a place for all Australians accepted into eligible undergraduate degrees. This is a significant commitment by the Gillard government. What it means is that we are supporting high-quality teaching and learning, we are building new links between universities and disadvantaged schools, we are rewarding institutions that meet the quality outcomes and we are making absolutely sure that every student that comes through school gets the opportunity to either go to tertiary learning if it suits them or to take vocational skills training, which of course contributes significantly to our economy. This is something that those opposite do not understand. A trades training centre in a community brings together the whole of the community to encourage these students to build their capacities and skills so that they can actually contribute to our economy. This is something that we on this side of the House, the government of this country, take with absolute seriousness.

The SPEAKER—Order! Those at the far end seemed very excited, including the member for Dawson, who seemed to have been reminded of his youth.

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Mrs PRENTICE (3.14 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. In the gallery today there are three young women who are anxiously awaiting the government’s listing of the life-saving drug Soliris. One of those young women, Jenny, is forced to have three blood transfusions every month. Since the Prime Minister came to office, two young Australians have lost their lives as a result of an insidious disease. Given that the government has wasted billions of dollars on the home insulation and school building schemes—

   Government members interjecting—

   The SPEAKER—Order! The House will come to order.

Mrs PRENTICE—why, 20 months after the PBAC first recommended listing of the drug, does it remain unlisted on the PBS?

Ms GILLARD—Can I say to the young people in the gallery that the member refers to: of course I am concerned about their personal circumstances. Of course, as Prime Minister, I am concerned about their circumstances. I am concerned about the circumstances of any Australian, particularly any young Australian, who is battling illness and disease. I am very concerned about that. The government, through what it does—funding health—wants to be able to assist people in the best way possible. I also say to the young people in the gallery, and to the member, that there is a longstanding bipartisan process for dealing with the listing of pharmaceuticals. That longstanding process is that we do not have politicians pick which medicines should go on the list. We have medical experts work through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee. When they make a positive recommendation—

   Mr Dutton interjecting—

   The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dickson.

Ms GILLARD—Perhaps I could say the next sentence. When they make a positive recommendation—and this was true under the Howard government too, so settle back down—the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee deals with the medical issues and makes a recommendation. Then the question of price is worked through by a pricing authority. It happened every time under the Howard government as well—to those members who are so excited about the question. Then government makes decisions on the basis of that. The Leader of the Opposition well knows this. He would well recall that when he was minister for health there were some celebrated examples of long-term delay in funding medicines. I just want to point that out to members opposite, because I think that is something they should contemplate—that this has been an issue in the past. Obviously, for the three young people in the gallery, I am very happy to receive any material from them that they would like me to see—

   Mr Dutton interjecting—

   The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dickson. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—I am very, very happy to receive any material from them. I am very happy to hear from them personally. I say to them that the government does have a proper process here. It is a process that has been gone through by governments in the past. These