

in taking us through that. I finish up each expressing my great optimism in the future not only of the mining sector in the Illawarra but also of its associated manufacturing base.

Vietnam: Montagnards

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (19:40): Today I speak of the oppression and the persecution of the Montagnard people who live in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Prior to the Vietnam War, the Montagnards lived in hill tribe societies existing primarily through agriculture, hunting and gathering. Today, however, the Montagnards have found themselves marginalised minorities and in the words of Human Rights Watch 'have been repressed for decades'. This is due to an increasing program of ethnic relocations, beginning in the mid-1950s after the withdrawal of the French with groups being moved from the north as the Communist government in North Vietnam began to assert control over the region. The current government of Vietnam continues with this land confiscation and forced relocations as well as targeting Christian Montagnards with religious persecution.

There is a long history of issues between the Vietnamese and the Montagnard people because, while the Vietnamese are racially diverse themselves, they do share language and culture but the Montagnard do not share that commonality. The Montagnards have for several decades sensed that their language and culture were under threat, including land ownership, education, resources and political domination. Formal opposition to the domination by the Vietnamese began in 1958 as the tribes united and even formed a military force, known as the United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races.

It was no surprise that, when the American forces began to build up in Vietnam, some 40,000 Montagnards fought on the side of the Americans. During the war it is estimated that some 100,000 served alongside the US as allies. It should be remembered that about half the Montagnards are Protestant and 20 per cent are Catholic.

We should remember that in 1973 peace accords were agreed to and the conflict entered a ceasefire. The United States in their compliance with the agreement began withdrawing forces. Eventually the North Vietnamese Army and the Vietcong began advancing south and, without the support of the Americans, Saigon and the south finally fell on 30 April 1975. Clearly, the North Vietnamese broke the peace treaty and they took advantage of the demise of President Nixon in 1974 and the reticence of the Democratic Party controlled congress to back the government of South Vietnam with bombing of the north.

With the fall of the south retribution followed. Thousands of Montagnards fled Vietnam to Cambodia while several thousand were resettled in the United

States. Many Montagnard political and religious leaders were executed by the communists. The Montagnard suffered greatly during the Vietnam War. I have been told that 200,000 died and 85 per cent of their traditional villages were destroyed. Since then their existence has been defined by persecution on the basis of post-war retribution and religious persecution.

I am fortunate to have as a constituent a leading Western human rights activist, the Australian lawyer and writer Scott Johnson. Scott has been to the Central Highlands and he has seen the terrible conditions of poverty under which the Montagnards live. Scott has told me that there is no evidence whatsoever of Montagnard resistance movements that advocate armed opposition and violence. Yet there is a paranoia from the Vietnamese government who choose to see the refusal of Montagnards to worship in the state controlled churches as a cover for an independence movement.

A report from Human Rights Watch released in March this year reported that since 2001 more than 350 Montagnards have been sentenced to long prison sentences, all based on vague national security charges, because of their involvement in public protests and in unregistered house churches, the only way to worship if you refuse to be in a state controlled church. I find it incredible that such nebulous charges as undermining national solidarity or disrupting security can result in a person being jailed, but that is the reality in Vietnam. I also note that Human Rights Watch report that some 25 Montagnard prisoners have died while in custody or shortly after release.

I really do wonder how the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam think on these matters. They confiscate land and give it to non-Montagnard people. They oppress those who wish to worship freely and then, when there is resentment and protest, the Communist officials actually wonder why. It seems that this is a case of delusional paranoia. If the Vietnamese government left the Montagnards alone, they would not have such problems.

I thank Scott Johnson for his assistance to me and of course I thank him for his great work toward achieving justice for the Montagnards. I conclude by calling upon the government of Vietnam to restore the ancestral lands they have taken from the Montagnards, to release the hundreds of Montagnard religious and political prisoners currently held in Vietnam and to allow religious freedom across Vietnam. At the moment, that does not exist.

Petition: Medical Workforce

Petition: Carbon Pricing and Murray-Darling River System

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (19:51): I rise this evening to present two petitions. The first petition of

13,828 citizens asks the House to ensure that medical research remains properly funded and is resourced into the future. The second petition of 345 citizens requests the House to legislate to put a price on pollution that reduces carbon emissions and to protect the Murray-Darling Basin for future generations. To assist proceedings, I can inform the House that both have been examined by the Petitions Committee and have been found to be in order.

The community response to speculation that the government was planning to cut somewhere in the order of \$300 million from medical research in the most recent budget was overwhelming, and the ultimate preservation of medical research funding in the budget is testament to the strength of that community response. The Discoveries Need Dollars campaign united community groups and sector workers from across the country. I congratulate that campaign and the scores of grassroots campaigners—some of whom I hope are watching now and are using the Twitter hashtag '#protectresearch'—who worked to achieve such an important outcome in the budget, particularly in protecting funding to the NHMRC. Had the budget been cut, the consequences would have been disastrous. The development of new treatments would have slowed and Australians suffering from chronic illnesses would have had their opportunities for recovery hindered.

During the course of the campaign, I was privileged to meet a number of people who are working on trials and new discoveries in my electorate, as well as the people who are benefiting from them. My memory of meeting Pat stands out. She was a diabetic and had been so for many years, but she had spent a year without having to have insulin injections because of a treatment being developed at St Vincent's using eyelets. That treatment has the potential to revolutionise the lives of those who are suffering from diabetes as well as the lives of their families. That is just one of the many forms of research that are being undertaken in my electorate of Melbourne.

Had the cuts gone ahead, researchers and clinicians careers would have been impeded. That consequence is a very important one because, as I have said, the electorate of Melbourne has more health and medical researchers than any other electorate in the country and, if we are serious about improving the quality of life of Australians and continuing to lead the world in medical discovery, as many of those people in Melbourne do, we should be steadily increasing funding, not potentially decreasing it. The quality and security of funding is just as important as the amount. One of the things that is increasingly clear is that, because funding is often only on a rolling three-year basis and is so insecure, many young researchers are choosing to go overseas not to broaden their knowledge but because it is one of the few places they

can be guaranteed tenure and a secure career. Researchers have obligations, mortgages and rent to pay just like everyone else and their funding, their salaries and their livelihoods should not depend on rolling three-year contracts if they are lucky.

Twelve thousand people attended the Rally for Research events held in Melbourne and elsewhere across the country and 15,000 letters and postcards were sent to the Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the health minister, the mental health and ageing minister, and other local members and senators. Close to 14,000 people signed the petition that I am proud to present today. I know that the government has commissioned a strategic review of Australian medical research funding, with the terms of reference announced today, to better plan the resourcing of the sector, to focus its work on community expectations and to improve accessibility and affordability of disease treatments and diagnosis methods that arise from a properly funded research sector. This is a tremendous outcome from the campaign and I congratulate the minister for taking this step. Parliament should stand reminded of the strength of the medical research community and the expectations of the wider community. Australians value public investment in medical research and will not support any further attempts to undermine the sector. Lastly, I would like to pay special tribute to the staff and directors at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute who coordinated within a very short period of time a fantastic campaign that really rammed home just how important those working in the sector and the broader community consider medical research to be.

The timing of the presentation of the second petition regarding a price on pollution could not be more timely. I very much look forward to Sunday and the announcement that we will take the country's first step towards putting a price on pollution.

The petitions read as follows—

Save Health and Medical Research

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of concerned citizens draws to the attention of the house of the need for funded medical research.

Cuts to medical research will halt vital research to diagnose, prevent and treat disease in areas such as; heart disease, obesity, diabetes and cancer as well as research on 'closing the gap' and improving the health and wellbeing of indigenous Australia. Cuts will also affect the economy and cause job losses around the country.

We therefore ask the house to not support any cuts made to Medical Research in the federal budget.

from 13, 828 citizens.

TO THE HONOURABLE THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

This petition of certain concerned citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House that