Last week Sir Eric Harrison resigned from the House of Representatives to take up his appointment as Australian High Commissioner in the United Kingdom. He had been in the Commonwealth Parliament, with a short break a few years ago, for about 25 years and in the last few years of his career had acted as an able and loyal lieutenant to the Prime Minister. On his last night in Canberra the Joint Government Parties (the Liberal Party and the Country Party) gave Sir Eric and Lady Harrison a farewell dinner and on behalf of the Parties, Sir Arthur Fadden made a presentation to Sir Eric.

During the last week we were concerned with several small but in their own sphere important bills.

The modern and up-to-date Mt. Strom Observatory was passed out of the direct control of the Government into the hands of the National University. In recent years the work of the University has come to be more and more of a research character and therefore it is fitting that it should be in the hands of the National University which unlike the other Australian Universities is essentially a place for research.

A bill was passed which ratifies the new Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. Under this Bill £30,000,000 are granted the States for Housing purposes. In the past all this money could be used by the States to build their own State owned houses for rental purposes, but the Government believes there are a large proportion of people who instead of renting a home would prefer to buy one if they can borrow the money on just and fair terms. Therefore in the first year of this Bill, 20% of the total sum must be made over to Co-operative Housing Societies and in the last three years 30% must be made over to these Societies. Hence home ownership can be encouraged. At the same time this money is loaned to the States on a slightly lower rate of interest than prevails for general loan funds.
There was then the War Service Land Settlement Loan Bill for 1956. This Bill provides for the raising of money totalling £28M for capital expenditure. Out of this sum will come the extra grant to New South Wales and Victoria of £1 for every £2 that those States spend on Soldier Settlement. This grant was originally made about two years ago and was outside the original Commonwealth-State agreement concerning Soldier Settlement. It was begun in an effort to get general Soldier Settlement completed before many returned servicemen became too old to start life anew on the land.

In 1955/56 £1,610,000 was made available to Victoria and £1,570,000 to New South Wales. The arrangement for these special loans with a maximum of £2M per annum for each State is operative for this financial year and the succeeding one.

There was another small Bill which may well have large effects in a few years time. Since the war it has been very difficult for hospital construction to be maintained at a rate demanded by the growth of our population. Because of this cases are being discharged from hospitals at the earliest possible time but many of these cases, among which are many elderly people, require nursing attention in their own homes and very often they are happier to receive this attention in their own homes than go into a hospital.

At the present time there are about 150 District nurses employed by Home Nursing organisations and it is estimated that these 150 nurses save about 900 hospital beds a year. In a modern hospital 27,000 must be allowed for each bed and the cost of maintenance of that bed is not less than £3 a day. The present 150 nurses, that has been reliably estimated, save £1M a year. Because of these considerations the Government has decided to subsidise home nursing.
Broadly speaking the Commonwealth's policy will be to pay a subsidy to nursing organisations that extend their staff. In the number of nurses working and the subsidy will roughly be equal to the additional salary required to employ new nurses. If a staff is increased from 10 to 15, then the subsidy will roughly equal the salary of the 5 additional nurses. New organisations employing home nurses will also be entitled to a subsidy worked on a slightly different basis. These organisations at the present time receive a State subsidy and the Commonwealth Bill also provides that the Commonwealth subsidy shall not in any case be greater than the State Government subsidy, and it is proposed to consult with the State Government about the effective working of this new Bill.

This Bill has been a small measure and has not received a great deal of publicity but it could effect great savings in the future. At the same time it will help to bring better nursing into the homes of a great many people who require it.

I believe it may well be as important as the Federal Government's previous legislation which subsidises the homes built for elderly people which has made it possible for many organisations to establish homes for the aged which would otherwise not have been built.