

COST OF LIVING — GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE — INQUIRY

Motion

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house —

- (1) condemns the Cook Labor government for its poor economic management, failure to deliver projects on time and on budget, and failure to deliver essential services when Western Australians are grappling with a cost-of-living crisis; and
- (2) calls for a special inquiry into Labor's near-eight-year track record of mismanagement and wrong priorities.

In moving this motion, I note that we had a discussion in this place yesterday about one such problem program, the Metronet program, and its impact on the state's finances. Throughout this boom period that Western Australia is supposedly in with surpluses running all the time, the state's net debt continues to climb. Under this government, debt will climb. We see debt climbing in the forward estimates. This government is blowing the boom. It is blowing opportunities to make Western Australia a stronger, more diversified and resilient economy following the inflow of money. Time after time, we see industry crying out, not for handouts, but for assistance to make sure that approvals are timely, and that the government is not just paying lip-service towards making sure that we have an opportunity to capture new industries that want to establish themselves in this state. I have knowledge of many projects that are seeking to invest billions of dollars in our state, but they cannot get off the ground because of the Western Australian approvals system. They cannot get help from organisations such as the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, because it is one of those failed departments that was created through the machinery-of-government changes when Labor first came to office—changes that have led to dysfunction and chaos in the public sector. We have an isolated group of directors general with vast super departments who have lost touch with their departments, and ministers who are unable to exert the necessary control and ensure that the necessary direction from government is given and carried out by the departments in their task. How can public servants know which minister to answer to when four or five ministers have a role in a department, with none of them being preeminent?

In yesterday's discussions, the Treasurer, who is also the Minister for Transport, got quite upset about imputations that she was singled out because of her gender. That was simply not the case. The transport minister is also in charge of Treasury. We know that the transport departments under her control, such as Main Roads, the Department of Transport, the ports and the Public Transport Authority, have embarked on some of the government's largest projects in Western Australia. The risk is that the person who holds the purse strings is also pushing to develop these projects, and that is a conflict of interest. It is not a personal thing at all. It would not matter whether the former Treasurer or the Treasurer before that were in that position. If they were the proponents of these vast projects and, at the same time, were responsible for trying to keep the costs of the state under control, I would see the embodiment of those two roles as a conflict of interest, no matter what. I wanted to put that on the record.

When the Metronet project was first announced at a cost of \$3 billion, there was the lofty view that nearly \$1 billion would be funded from the uplift in land values via developer contributions or the from the sale of land et cetera. None of that happened because nobody wanted to invest in the areas in which the Metronet stations are located. Maybe one day down the track that will happen, but it certainly is not the funding mechanism to pay for the program. From the very beginning, there was a serious miscalculation in the business cases and planning of those projects, because one-third of the expected income never arrived and funding had to be sourced elsewhere. Yes, the Western Australian government was fortunate to have the support of a coalition government in Canberra, which was very generous in funding the cost blowouts and the further programs that were added to the Metronet system. But that largesse has evaporated and Canberra, under Labor, is not as friendly towards Western Australian projects. After the King review of major projects and the investment pipeline across the nation, money for Western Australian projects is being wound back. Furthermore, in the old system, 80 per cent of major road projects were funded federally, but that contribution in the future will reduce to 50 per cent, which will have a significant impact on transport infrastructure projects from here on end.

We know that there are problems with Metronet and that what was originally a \$3 billion project has now blown out to \$5.5 billion. The government has not given an explanation for that, other than to say that costs have gone up. Costs have gone up for everybody. Other organisations have had to control costs by making some changes and keep their spending in check.

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Another good project is the Bunbury Outer Ring Road, which is valued by the members of the South West Region and the population in that area. It, too, has suffered huge cost overruns. In fact, if it had been developed in scope, the costs that were first promised would have doubled, and doubled in a very short time. We do not see pushback from the government or any control being exerted over those extraordinary changes. It has been said in this place—we have heard the claims—that somehow this government is driving up patronage on our public transport network. During 2014–15, 149 million journeys took place on Western Australia's network. In 2023, the number of journeys was 123 million, which is a 17 per cent decrease in patronage on the network. I do not know the reasons behind that, but that is not a positive move in making use of the network into the future. We know that the number of people using Metronet is not what the government would like; if it is, the government has a very low bar of what is acceptable use for the very large investments that have been made.

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We hope the situation will change because the cost of those projects to the Western Australian community is actually mind blowing; it is huge. It is taking up a very large portion of the construction effort in Western Australia at the moment and is very much competing with private businesses that are also trying to develop and go forward with their projects. Traditionally, we would want some sort of countercyclical investment by government at a time when investment in the private sector is lower as that would even out the boom-bust cycle. Instead of that, the government is amplifying the boom-bust cycle, with the most recent example being the closure of the Armadale line and the expenditure that is taking place there. That project has basically sucked up pretty well all the concrete in Perth to make the precast panels et cetera. That is placing a lot of stress on construction at a time when that was not necessary. The Byford rail extension could easily have taken place without the closure of the Armadale line—the two are separate and different. In the meantime, we would not have seen the chaos on the roads that seems to be occurring more and more. The government has lost control of that project. The Treasurer has no incentive to keep that matter under control because she would like to see the project developed.

I would also like to talk a little about what the business community is feeling at the moment. The main thrust of a report in *The West Australian* earlier this month, headed “Trust in WA Government down, boards grapple with cyber threats: Australian Institute of Company Directors poll”, can be summed up with this quote —

Confidence in the WA Government among local company directors has slipped to its lowest level since pre-pandemic, with more disagreeing it —

The government —

understands business than agreeing for the first time in years.

We are seeing an increasing disconnect between the Labor government, both here and in Canberra, and the business community and its needs. I hear that all the time. When I have gone to meetings with some of the key players in the minerals industry, for instance, they have told me that there is no support to get their projects off the ground. We live in a competitive environment. Western Australia is not the only place people can spend money. Once upon a time, Western Australia was the pre-eminent destination for mining investment. It has now slipped from that lofty place and will continue to slip. The hundreds and hundreds of projects—mining leases—waiting in the approvals network were highlighted in question time yesterday. The government has made announcements around streamlining approvals. It has been talking about streamlining for as long as I can remember—a long time—yet we have seen no real change. The government is committed to making announcements, but it is not committed to following them through into programs and practices that make sense and will work. I believe that is why businesses are reporting a quite gloomy view of the government and what the government will do. A recent report on business confidence from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia stated that almost one in five businesses are at risk of closing or significantly scaling back their operations this year. Rising operating costs remain the most prevalent barrier to business growth over the next 12 months, as reported by 71 per cent of businesses, which are struggling with labour and costs, as we know.

Household confidence has obviously gone down and we are seeing the cost of accommodation going through the roof, but there have been no real answers from the government about fixing that situation. We have a housing crisis but no acceptance that there needs to be some action to actually fix it. We also know that this is flowing through to younger people who want to enter business. Young entrepreneurs are not confident that their businesses will go forward. That was from another report on small business and the uncertain future for young people and their businesses.

Regionally, we saw the situation in Kalgoorlie when businesses lost, in some cases, hundreds of thousands of dollars as a result of the power outages out there. This government promised support and delivered none—a \$250 payment, I think. That is nothing. There was no support, despite the promises.

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In regional development terms, strategic industrial areas sit idle across the state. Oakajee in my electorate has been talked about right the way through this government, yet nothing has been developed out there and no progress has been made. We do not see any sort of coherent strategy from this government to drive regional development. The current Minister for Regional Development dropped the ball on the Bunbury Dolphin Discovery Centre in his home town. That had to close and be bailed out by the government, despite the millions of dollars of royalties for regions investment that the government had put into that project. The minister had not been looking closely at that project in his own home town to make sure that the money was well used and that this very important tourism asset would continue into the future.

In tourism, there are some really worrying trends in terms of Western Australians, other Australians and international travellers being able to enjoy the natural environment in our state. The mooted closure of Horizontal Falls is one example. We know that has happened. I know that the Gloucester tree in Pemberton is closed; nobody can climb it, despite it being a key attraction in that area. We have the skywalk in Kalbarri, yet there is talk that Nature's Window will be closed to people. That is very worrying for people in that area. There is talk about the future use of Wave Rock as a tourist attraction. I have also had people come to me with their concerns about the way in which the Pinnacles are being used at the moment. There are all those issues. Tourism, which again comes under the remit of the Minister for Transport; Treasurer, is suffering in regional areas because of the mooted closure of those attractions going forward. The government does not seem to understand how important tourism is to many of our regional communities.

In terms of regional development, again, energy is one of the huge opportunities that presents itself to our state, but it is also one of the great barriers. The member for Central Wheatbelt has talked about the effect of poor power supply on communities in her electorate. I acknowledge that there have been some very bad incidents and a lack of service in those areas. I will examine what it means when that happens in a community. It means that everything shuts down. The communications shut down because the Telstra towers usually last only an hour or two. Sometimes they have been upgraded and might last seven or eight hours, and in one or two cases in the state they have a generator, but for the most part towns will lose communications. There will probably be a cessation of trading and spoilage of products in shops. It becomes quite debilitating for those communities. The community of Mullewa, which I represent, has virtually not had one week for the entire summer period when the power has not been out. The power supply out there is so tenuous that Western Power has had generators parked permanently at Mullewa over the last few years that are designed to come into operation when the power goes out. However, oftentimes they do not kick in, for whatever reason, and the power does not arrive. I have seen a staggering accumulation of incidents in which power has not been supplied to regional communities over the last few years. We had the Shepherd inquiry into the power situation after the 2021 blackouts. The opposition called for a more far-reaching inquiry, but that was rejected. What have we seen since then? We have seen the events in Kalgoorlie and the wheatbelt.

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We know that this situation is not being addressed in a satisfactory way to ensure that our communities have reliable power. Without reliable power, how can we have industrial and economic development and how can we develop a community?

Another matter that is of huge concern to people right across the state is the rising crime problem, especially violent crime. Today we passed a bill that addressed part of that problem as it relates to retail workers. The government has acknowledged that change is needed in some circumstances. I and everybody who lives in regional WA knows that crime is getting out of control in regional WA especially. I might have already given some statistics during debate on the retail workers legislation. In 2017–18, in regional Australia—that is when Labor came in—14 537 offences were committed against people, which includes everything from homicide to assault and threatening behaviour. In 2022–23, that figure blew out to 24 672, which is nearly a 70 per cent increase in violent crime in regional Western Australia. The number of offences committed in the Perth metropolitan area has also increased, going up roughly 30 per cent over the same time.

We know that incidents of violent crime have increased across our state. We know that police resources are important in battling those incidents, but it is not the only thing that will help. We need a whole-of-community approach to battling some of these crime issues.

Police presence is undoubtedly important. When offenders in towns get out of control, Operation Regional Shield sends in officers who have no understanding of the area; they are sent in for a short period to quell the problem and keep it under control. A blitz approach has been taken in places such as Bentley. There was an incident in Cannington in 2022 and quite a bit of antisocial behaviour occurred in Scarborough in 2021. Even in the metropolitan area, we have seen these emergency responses from the police. All credit to the police who attend. I am not criticising the police, but they have a lack of resources and this government has a lack of commitment when

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it comes to getting crime under control. The government talks about protecting the communities. It manufactures fear in the community, like it tried to do with the gun debate, but it does not do anything to protect the community in a meaningful way.

We have been calling for diversionary services for youth who have been offending in regional areas for years. When this government came in, calls and promises were made that on country solutions would be provided in the Kimberley, for instance. We are nearly eight years in and it still has not been provided; there is nothing in place.

We do not have to be rocket scientists to know what will happen if we take young people from all over regional WA and put them in one building in Perth. When they come back, will they be rehabilitated or better criminals? I do not know the answer. For some people, maybe they are rehabilitated but many people in regional Australia call that the university of crime. It probably has its issues and it would be far better if we could deal with people in their own area.

In that regard, I was recently contacted by people who are concerned about the ongoing situation in the midwest. In Geraldton, community work orders imposed by the courts cannot be carried out because no staff are available to supervise the work orders. Therefore, if there are no staff, the work orders cannot be carried out. It would be quite unreasonable for a magistrate to use that as a setting procedure knowing that there are no staff to undertake those work orders. We are told that the position has been advertised. Again, we are seeing this lack of foresight, planning and commitment from the government that leads to these situations. We then have to bring in things like Operation Regional Shield because there are not enough local police and youth need to be sent to other places because they cannot be dealt with locally. Even community in a centre with well over 50 000 people does not have a solution and appropriate work orders cannot be supervised because there are no staff.

These are the types of things that are going on in various areas of the state. There are not just issues with capital projects. The member for Vasse has been very vocal on the health system. Regional health is especially problematic. We know of this government's miserable approach to the patient assisted travel scheme. It simply will not fund it adequately. We know that similar schemes are funded much more appropriately in other states. The amount paid to people for their mileage is 16¢ a kilometre. Come on! If we were to increase that fivefold, I imagine that would still be less than a public servant would be paid if they had to use their car to go somewhere. It is absolutely reprehensible for a government that is sitting on such a massive surplus and generating massive surpluses due to the price of iron ore and other minerals, and also the huge revenue from payroll tax and stamp duty that are flowing into the coffers in Western Australia, and of course the GST fix that was put in place by the coalition government. In those days of the coalition, we had a government in Canberra that cared about Western Australia rather than one whose sole preoccupation seems to be bringing about damage to our industries. I am thinking of the Nature Positive Plan, parts of which have been withdrawn. Professor Samuel, who wrote the report that led to that plan, is very confident that it will still be implemented. I am sure that after the next election, the new government will come back and have another go.

People need to be wary that federal Labor has industry in Western Australia in its sights big time. It is not there to help Western Australian industry. Its industrial relations policies, environmental policies and policies around the banning of live export directly affect Western Australian industry and Western Australian jobs. People need to be very careful when they make their choice at the next federal election because we know that the government in Canberra cannot be trusted. In fact, we know that this government secretly knows that. That is why it set up the embassy in Canberra in the first place—to try to keep in touch with what is going on.

We know that when this government first came in, it introduced its machinery-of-government changes. I have spoken about that. There have been plenty of reviews, discussions and admissions because of the continual need to implement these task forces, which never seem to achieve anything. The day-to-day business of those departments has broken down; they are not working. I believe that a change in government would see a change in attitude and a return to a system with a responsible minister in an area with a clearly defined service, expectation and budget where, as is required under the Westminster system, that minister can take some responsibility. No responsibility is being taken by this current government. We have seen the way this government has mistreated the processes of Parliament. We have the Standing Committee on Legislation in the other place, which has examined only one bill in this Parliament.

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It was sent there only as a bit of a smokescreen so the government could say that it had used the committee. We know there was a bit of heat about it soon after the Premier assumed office from the former Premier. It all blew up that this committee was sitting there and these politicians were being paid but were not doing anything. The government found the smallest piece of legislation and threw it the committee's way, and what happened, member for Roe? What was that legislation called?

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Mr P.J. Rundle: The Sports and Entertainment Trust Bill 2023 was introduced into the wrong chamber.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is right. It backfired. It was such an own goal. It just goes to show how important it is to scrutinise the government's legislation. Imagine if the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill 2021 had gone to that committee for consideration. Would the government have had the backlash and the embarrassing backdown that it has had? Probably not. It might have realised that there were some unworkable elements in the legislation long before it got to that situation. When it does not use the processes of Parliament properly, that is what comes of it. We know that this Parliament does not have the ability to properly scrutinise what the government has been doing because the government controls the Parliament with its numbers. Committees are unable to do the jobs that they should do because the government controls what they can look at. We know that answers need to be given about what has been going on, which is why in the second part of this motion, we are calling for a special inquiry into Labor's near-eight-year track record of mismanagement and wrong priorities.

We know that the Labor government was very keen on bringing in the now Agent General in London. When Labor first came to office, it launched a special inquiry into the projects of the former government. We know that when this government was first elected, it had its own little slush fund that it prosecuted—Local Projects, Local Jobs. We had a Premier who went outside the normal ways of doing business, if you like, in terms of the government raising funds through royalties and taxation and in other ways. The government had a very powerful political position, with dominance in both houses of Parliament, and the former Premier had a 90 per cent approval rating in the polling at one stage. At the peak of that, he knocked on the door of industry and said that he wanted it to cough up some money for a fund. Despite the state surplus, the captains of industry were called upon and \$750 million was put into a community investment fund. Businesses have a right to spend their money how they wish, but I wonder how much of that was due to fear of what would happen if they did not put the money in. What was the implication for them from the need to do that? That is one of the most worrying matters that I have seen during this term of Parliament. There does not seem to be much output from that investment fund at the moment, but there might be some down the track, potentially.

Why a special inquiry? As I say, a special inquiry is the vehicle that was used by Labor in 2017. The definition of a special inquiry and its purpose and arrangement is in the Public Sector Management Act. Section 24I, "Powers of person conducting special inquiry", provides that they have the power to enter the premises of a public sector body, by written notice require a person to produce to him or her any document that is in the possession or under the control of the person, and inspect any document. Section 24J states that a special inquirer is not bound by the rules or evidence and may be informed as the special inquirer thinks fit. Basically, they are powers akin to those of a royal commission and provide the ability to look beyond the veil and peer into the murky undertakings that we see by government.

There are all these contracts with head contractors that are delivering major projects, but there does not seem to be any transparent accounting of the costs, certainly not in Parliament. Yes, some total amounts are given, but there is no detail of what went wrong. We need to know the answers. We need to know how the government let a project that was originally worth \$3 billion blow out to \$5.5 billion. It still has not delivered the project in full.

In the end, that is just one example of the mismanagement of this government and its inability to run those projects correctly at a time when the state is already under stress to provide the construction workforce for our housing and our economic output from our mines and future industries. In the middle of all that, it has closed the Armadale line and embarked on the billion-dollar plus investment in concrete that is the elevated rail project. It could have waited for another 10 years until there was not much activity in the private sector and the economy needed a boost. That would be a far more responsible way for the government to act, not go into an already inflated and difficult construction environment and make it worse by chucking in more money when it needs to be directed to far more meaningful purposes.

I will conclude my discussion, but I believe that there is every ground for there to be a special inquiry. If this government does not accept that there is such a need, I can assure it that when there is a change of government, there will be the immediate launch of a special inquiry into WA Labor's mismanagement of the boom and the potential economic growth that we could have seen. Instead, we have a government that is unable to manage projects, cannot deliver services and continually does not meet its budgets.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.36 pm]: I rise to contribute to the debate on the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition that this house condemns the Cook Labor government for its poor economic management, blowing the boom and failing to deliver key services, compounding the stress on Western Australian households. I will focus on the shadow portfolios of health, mental health and the prevention of family and domestic violence.

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With \$20 billion in surpluses over the past five years, thanks to booming iron ore royalties and a GST fix put in place by the former federal coalition government, it is fair to ask why so many Western Australians are struggling to make ends meet and what this state and Western Australians have to show for it. Although we are a wealthy state, the riches are not being used to help address a number of significant issues, including the increased number of working families who are being forced to choose between paying bills and putting food on the table. Seemingly, Labor is too busy spending and is obsessed with budget blowouts on Metronet totalling over \$12.5 billion—up by more than 300 per cent from the original assessment.

Our state has enjoyed \$44 billion in royalties since Labor came to office, yet Western Australians are not seeing this prosperity in practice. It is appalling that in a state as prosperous as WA, with a government that is recording multibillion-dollar surpluses on the back of a mining boom, we have to fight for investment in our health system. Our health system is the backbone that carries us from infancy into childhood to adolescence and on to adulthood. Whether someone uses the health system routinely, sporadically or unexpectedly, access to timely and attentive medical care is a primary responsibility of any government. There is no hyperbole in that. To quote from the Australian Medical Association —

... we have increasingly heard stories of people dying waiting to be seen in public hospitals that are operating at breaking point, patients waiting years for essential surgery, and ambulances ramping outside hospitals because there are not enough beds and staff to cope with demand.

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It is as simple as that. Western Australians such as Aishwarya Aswath and Ashleigh Hunter, with bright futures ahead of them, deserve better than a mismanaged health system. Western Australians deserve better than out-of-control ramping rates or being left in corridors until beds become available. They deserve better than red squaring and significant medical wait times. Medical professionals, who do their very best with what our health system provides them, deserve to work in a sector that sees real investment and positive outcomes and support, because we also know our health workers feel that they cannot speak up when they want to.

Our state has the highest recurrent expenditure per person of all states. The Premier and the Minister for Health are seemingly proud about investment in our health system per capita. However, it is one thing to spend an extra \$500 above the national average, but another about what those outcomes actually deliver. Although the government spends an extra \$500 above the national average, we have some of the worst-performing emergency departments in the country. It is not enough to boast that we are spending more than every other state if it is not leading to better health outcomes, bed capacity and more support for our frontline health workers. It means that the system is inefficient and that this government's policies are not working. It begs the question of what the money is being spent on if it is not on the resources essential to retaining staff and driving down long wait times and ambulance ramping. It is clear that despite record surpluses and promises of record investment, the health system remains in crisis, and those who experience it firsthand are left wondering where our state's money is actually being allocated.

Our state's hardworking health professionals right across our health system are constantly being asked to do more with less. Our frontline health workers regularly go above and beyond by working longer shifts to maintain patient care. They face abuse from a system that they cannot fix. Even Labor's own union mates at the Australian Council of Trade Unions have reported that over half of frontline workers say they are overworked and skip entitled breaks, leading to increased stress. Everyone will remember in 2022 when nurses and midwives gathered outside this building chanting, "We're not going to take it anymore!" The response to their ask from the government was that the surplus will go down and it was a one-time thing—yet here we are some two years later and the surplus is still going strong. The government either does not understand the economics of its budget or it opposes spending money on our necessary health sector and health professionals—or both. This government has a long way to go in providing support for our dedicated health workers. Hospital staff, who are the key to caring for the sick and vulnerable in our health system, are admired so much by the broader community, yet this government undervalues them.

In January of this year, 50 clinicians from St John of God Hospital, the public hospital in Midland, wrote a letter stating —

We as the clinicians are desperate and are exhausted ... we are working in a ticking time bomb, another Aishwarya incident will happen.

The Australian Nursing Federation's state secretary, Janet Reah, has outright stated that "it is primarily about respect and investment in our nurses and midwives". Our health professionals know what they need. They have consistently been looking for a government to listen, and these pleas continue to fall on the government's deaf ears. It is up to the government to provide the necessary support so that our health staff and patients' lives are not put at risk.

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All around the country we see record investment to support the retention of healthcare workers. Here, our health system is clearly not the employer of choice. However, we should not be surprised that our health workers care. They are so dedicated that they cannot walk away when caring for a patient, and they feel such a strong commitment to their fellow workers and staff; there is great camaraderie amongst them. They have been put in an incredible situation of responding to a hospital system that is under-resourced.

Last year, ambulances spent more than 52 000 hours stuck outside our hospitals. When the government first came to office, it was under 10 000 hours. Roger Cook called ambulance ramping a crisis when he was in opposition. What does the Premier call it when current figures are now more than five times what would supposedly be a crisis or when, in just three months this year, ambulance ramping has already exceeded 2017 levels? There has been no shortage of excuses from the other side as to their failure to support our health system. Across our health sector, people are being made to wait unnecessarily, contributing to the domino effect of issues across the sector.

Given their inaction on these issues, those opposite need to think no further than a story heard last year in a litany of forms from different people right across this state. This particular incident—a tragic story—involved Mitchell Pearce, a 52-year-old Busselton man who spent 130 days in hospital waiting for appropriate disability accommodation so he could be discharged. He had recovered from the original illness that he was in hospital for, but the inability to be accepted into aged care was a significant barrier to his release.

Appallingly, that is not where it ends. Elective surgery numbers in our state keep getting worse. This state has seen a 55 per cent increase in the number of people on the elective surgery waitlist. In March 2017, the elective surgery waitlist was at just under 20 000 cases and it now sits at over 30 000. In a perfect world, no-one should have to wait for medical intervention. At the very least, a 55 per cent increase should never have been allowed to occur. As of February, over 5 000 people fell outside the boundary waiting in pain or discomfort. Of those, nearly 300 category 1 urgent patients—by definition, those who could deteriorate rapidly—were waiting longer than necessary. In 2017, those opposite claimed that the elective surgery waitlist was unacceptable, yet, seven years on, they have again proved they are out of their depth when it comes to these issues. They cannot manage or support them, and they refuse to effectively fund them and address these issues.

It is an absolute disgrace that Western Australian are still waiting. Adding insult to injury, these wait times extend to our children and their future. The first major report from the Select Committee into Child Development Services released in November last year made clear recommendations about what can immediately be done to reduce unacceptable wait times and expand service provisions. The Minister for Health's one-page response to the committee's report was beyond underwhelming, and gave no indication at that time of extra funding or meaningful plans for addressing these recommendations. In metropolitan Perth, nearly 10 000 children were waiting to access a paediatrician, as highlighted in figures obtained last month. For primary school ages, the wait list has jumped by around 2 200 children, with the median wait time ballooning out from 17.8 months to 21.3 months in the year to February 2023.

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Constant pressure on this issue, led by my colleague in the other place Hon Donna Faragher, has finally pushed the health minister five months later to announce a \$39 million commitment of funding for these under-pressure services. This was recognised quite clearly in the report, which had only seen an additional \$300 000 committed in that previous budget. This comes from a government that can throw \$10 billion extra at Metronet, which has blown out over the last seven years, with no issue, but takes five months—even longer, if we consider how long these wait times have persisted—to allocate funds for this vital sector of our health system. It should not be so difficult. We are enjoying the largest boom in WA's history, yet it took a petition, numerous calls from the opposition, led by Hon Donna Faragher, a committee making strong recommendations and at least five months for this government to commit \$39 million. As I stated in question time today, over that twelve-month period, an additional \$2 billion was committed through Metronet.

In the Child and Adolescent Health Service, these wait lists are unacceptable. The current system gives no confidence to parents or their kids that they are a priority for this government. Likewise, one year ago this month, the government announced that it was moving the proposed women's and babies' hospital from the desired location at the QEII site 20 kilometres south to Murdoch. The Premier and the Minister for Health have forged ahead with this unnecessary move despite warnings from over 200 clinicians about the increased risks associated with this decision.

Stories like those of Angela Courtney demonstrate the lack of forward thinking from this Premier and his ministers. When Angela had her son Hunter at 25 weeks, he was considered very high risk and required surgery at a nearby hospital. Angela had to wait anxiously until Hunter was stable enough to travel the very short distance for surgery, and even then the travel was always very much touch and go. Instead of having a women's and babies' hospital

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tri-located with the Perth Children's Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and being supported by various health institutions, families and their babies will face increasing rates of morbidity and mortality due to commuting to and in between these hospitals after high-risk births. This government's decision to move the women's and babies' hospital away from the widely supported location at the QEII site proves that its decisions do not reflect the reality experienced by those in the healthcare sector. The Premier should know the health system inside and out, given that he was the previous health minister and the shadow health minister. In such roles, he supported the women's and babies' hospital being at a tri-located world-class site, and should now know better.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L. METTAM: The Premier should be fighting for our health system and its future functionality. A real Premier would be taking active steps to address this issue. As is international best practice, a world-class women's and babies' hospital can only be at a site that is tri-located alongside an adult tertiary hospital and the equivalent of Perth Children's Hospital. A real Premier would be fighting for our frontline workers and supporting their needs. A real Premier would make sure that Western Australians see the prosperity that lines this government's pockets being put into our critical services. Across the health system, this government has shown that its priorities are not where they should be.

I will touch on now the area of mental health. Ward 5A, the mental health inpatient unit at Perth Children's Hospital, recently moved patients who are over 14 years old to Hollywood Private Hospital so extensive upgrades at Perth Children's Hospital can be made. It is a matter that we have been raising. The health minister stated that moving over-14s is a permanent move and that the leasing of beds at the private hospital would be utilised until a longer-term solution can be found. Despite the ward having been reported as the location of a number of assaults involving children and staff over two years ago, including an alleged rape of a 13-year-old, it has taken as long as this for the government to take any proactive steps on this issue.

Our children, especially those struggling with the mental health, deserve better stability than a bandaid model. They deserve long-term plans that are made with an urgency befitting their need for safety and support. The health minister has made it clear that these age cohorts needed to be separated because they need different treatment regimes and that facilities would need to be built. We know that this government knows that need for mental health support has grown significantly in recent years, with nearly 43 per cent of Australians aged between 16 and 85 experiencing some form of mental health disorder. Why has it taken this long for the government to take action on this issue, and why does the government not have a concrete plan for these children going forward? Again, that rape and the assaults happened years ago. If it were not for the parents of the alleged victim of that alleged rape speaking up, the public would be none the wiser about that. If the mental health of our children had been a top priority, decisions on the long-term future of the mental health inpatient unit would have been made when these incidents occurred, or better yet, the unit would have been assessed on its capabilities before these assaults were able to occur.

In 2017, the WA Labor platform stated —

WA Labor recognises ... the provision of mental health services is a priority and will focus on preventative and early intervention programs, appropriately qualified professional support ...

Either the government broke its promise by taking seven years to consider the future of this facility, or it should look up the definition of "priority". This is not the only time that this government has turned a blind eye to the struggle of many Western Australians in accessing critical mental health care.

We have heard time and again of young children, many reaching their teen years, when they should be having fun with their friends and learning for their future, who feel so unable to cope with their mental health struggles that they are, sadly, taking their own lives. I think regularly of one particular individual, who I am not sure is able to be named. She is a 13-year-old, whose family I am in contact with, who tragically took her own life shortly after she left an appointment with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in 2020. Her story highlights a serious problem with a system that has been struggling to cope with the rise in demand for years.

WA's Chief Psychiatrist, Dr Nathan Gibson, stated, after his review into this individual's death —

"The death of any child is appalling ... it cannot be rationalised for her family or for any of us in the broader community" ...

The deaths of our children, or any Western Australian desperately seeking care, is one death too many.

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Incredibly, four years later we are awaiting the outcome of this inquest. I understand it is imminent in relation to the failings. Sadly, it is happening more and more every day. Nathan Gibson also touched on the fact there is no

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shortage of reports and recommendations about what is required in the mental health system but what is missing is a government taking action on these issues. As I have stated, it is several years on from 2020 and we are awaiting an outcome from the coroner's report.

Sadly, it is happening more and more every day, including the south west where this system failed a 14-year-old who committed suicide in February last year. His mother, Michelle, had tried desperately to get her son an appointment with a paediatrician or a psychiatrist. It is incredibly concerning that Michelle, who was trying desperately to help her son, could not get a psychiatrist appointment until November—nine months too late—or was told she would have to wait 18 months to see a paediatrician.

Former Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People Michelle Scott put it quite eloquently —

For children and young people, mental health is critically important—not only because it is the key to a rich enjoyment of childhood and adolescence, but also because it provides the foundation for a resilient and mentally healthy adulthood.

As leaders, it is essential we ensure appropriate mental health support services are in place and effective. This is a vital part of keeping our children safe. In the words of the Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People, “Our children cannot wait.” This government is failing children, families and so many Western Australians across the board.

In relation to the portfolio area of the prevention of family and domestic violence, no priority has been given to addressing family and domestic violence and protecting those who are most vulnerable. Our Western Australia Police Force remains under-resourced, and our support systems for those fleeing domestic violence cannot meet the sheer number of people trying to access these services. Unlike the Premier and his ministers, we in opposition take time to talk and listen to individuals who are impacted by these issues. In 2017, there were around 19 000 family assaults in WA and that figure seven years later has reached over 29 000, a nearly 54 per cent increase in these assaults. Similarly, there have been around 3 000 more breaches of family violence restraining orders since Labor came to power. In our regions, family-related assaults are on the rise as well. In the Kimberley, 453 family assaults occurred in December 2023 alone, which is an average of over 14 per day. These figures are very saddening. In November, the Premier announced a \$72 million investment into family and domestic violence. Although funding for this area is necessary, it raises the question: how can Western Australians feel confident that this money is being directed appropriately and will help address family domestic violence and those fleeing it when the \$300 million invested since 2017 has not seen a reduction in this crime?

In the south west, Harbor Refuge and Support Services has received 718 calls since the beginning of this financial year and it has had to turn away 314 individuals due to a lack of accommodation. This is on top of figures that show five Western Australian women were turned away from domestic violence shelters every day last year, with 50 people going unassisted in their pursuit of short-term emergency housing. That is simply horrifying. Support from charities and not-for-profits is vital in getting many survivors of family and domestic violence back on their feet. Instead, these charities continue to struggle to meet demand escalated by cost of living and the housing crisis. The opposition has been calling for more support for our charities to assist the vulnerable in a range of areas. This is a compounding issue. The lack of planning for mental health services and wait times for psychological appointments means that many survivors go without essential mental health support at a critically important time. For children, access to mental health support in the face of trauma is also imperative, which is well understood. Adding to the often psychological and emotional trauma, family and domestic violence is resulting in many needing to leave their homes. In 2023, Western Australia had the highest rate in the country of women who had experienced domestic violence approaching homelessness services. That astounding figure sits at around 55 per cent.

Despite assurances from this government to the public that it would work to increase police numbers by 950 on our streets by June 2024, nearly four years later, we are no safer. In two months, Labor will have failed to deliver on this promise and left our police force without the support it needs to dedicate resources to this area and tackle family and domestic violence issues.

I appreciate that I am running out of time but if the government truly wanted to address the scourge of family and domestic violence, it would have to work to address these compounding issues that grow worse for all Western Australians. We must continue to provide appropriate funding and support for these agencies, along with making housing available and obviously supporting our police force by stopping the exodus of police leaving to ensure that perpetrators are held to account. No person ever expects to find themselves on the receiving end of family and domestic violence, and they are vulnerable when that happens.

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MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.06 pm]: I rise to briefly discuss the motion today, moved by the Leader of the Opposition, condemning —

... the Cook Labor government for its poor economic management, failure to deliver projects on time and on budget, and failure to deliver essential services when Western Australians are grappling with a cost-of-living crisis;

I think it is a well-worded motion and is something that strikes home with a lot of our constituents, especially in regional areas. Quite frankly, the people of regional Western Australia will not forget what this government has done to them over the last seven years and more. The feeling out there is quite palpable. We listen to people like I did on ABC great southern radio this morning. Tony from Cranbrook talked about having to euthanise his sheep. He was talking about how hard it is out there at the moment, the lack of state government support and the federal government's intervention into the live sheep market. When I heard the Premier's response today, I was appalled at the misunderstanding and lack of understanding that the Premier has on the live export market on how that flows on and provides a market to our sheep producers. Right now, their dams out there are going dry and they are running out of feed. The Premier stood here saying it has nothing to do with the government. He has no idea. It is upsetting to the people of regional Western Australia when they hear that attitude. I will be talking about that perhaps a little bit later in my contribution. I certainly want to emphasise the way people in regional Western Australia are feeling about the attack on farming, as I said; the attack on fisheries; and the attack on forestry. It is an attack on regional people who want to go out for some recreational fishing and commercial fishers, and on developing marine parks with a lack of consultation.

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They cannot believe it. Even though none of them are in the chamber at the moment, I feel sorry for the regional members. How are they going to defend the actions of this government? Nonetheless, I want to spend some time on education, so I am glad the Minister for Education is in here today. I am also glad that the member for Victoria Park will be responding. I thought we worked hard, member for Victoria Park, on the school bus review. We spent quite a bit of time in the regional areas. It worries me when we see an \$8 billion blowout in Metronet and we had to work through getting a few kids picked up at a bus stop by getting a bus run diverted to try to get some of those kids to school. It is very challenging when we see \$8 billion going adrift over here and how hard people like the member for Central Wheatbelt and myself have to work to get some equity for our regional students just to be delivered to school.

They are the challenges, along with the contractors who are working hard but finding conditions in the world of school buses very challenging. Those are the perceived injustices that our regional people feel when all they want to do is get their children delivered to school in a safe manner and picked up at the stop down the road or, for that matter, even drive 20 or 30 kilometres down the road to get them to a stop that then takes them another 70 or 80 kilometres to their school. Those are the challenges. We can see by the lighthearted response by the Treasurer, "Originally I think it was around \$3.5 billion but, like-for-like, it has blown out by \$2 billion, but that's the way it is." Of course, we started at \$3 billion and we are now close to \$12 billion and rising. Those are the issues that our regional families face.

We looked at the *Facing the Facts* report, which I think is a very good document. It was a review led by Hon Carmen Lawrence, the former Labor Premier. I picked out a few of the issues that the report identified and some of the things that were identified about describing teaching currently. That includes schools being starved of real term funding and the recommendation that WA public schools be funded to 100 per cent of school resourcing standard. I will say to his credit, with the federal Minister for Education, the Minister for Education has come up with a solution. Perhaps that one has been sorted out. She also pointed out that significant and growing pressure has meant teachers have reached breaking point, chronic and growing teacher shortages, increased volumes and complexity of the teaching task, challenge of educating more disadvantaged students and students with increasingly complex needs. I think that is something the Minister for Education has identified. That is a real challenge for our teachers in the current system when they have classrooms with students with complex needs.

I congratulate our teachers in the system who handle those challenges to the best of their abilities. I also thank our education assistants. I would love to see our education assistants rewarded for the challenges they face in those classrooms right through from our primary system to the secondary system. I would love to see them rewarded in the state budget as well. That is an observation. Our education assistants do a great job; I would love to see them rewarded to a high level, especially with our government delivering billions of dollars in surpluses. There is low morale and increased burnout, and teachers feel undervalued and disrespected. Of course, smaller classes are needed, which is a challenge with our shortage of teachers, and rural appointments needing to change. Those are some of the elements that Hon Carmen Lawrence pointed out in the *Facing the Facts* review.

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I move on to the child development service. In the past 10 years, referrals to child development service paediatricians have risen by 132 per cent. In May 2023, it was revealed in Parliament that wait times for children in primary years of schooling to access speech pathology, occupational therapy and physiotherapy could reach up to 193 days in the Kimberley, 165 days in the goldfields and 125 days in the great southern. As we know, the delay in assessment and treatment for allied health in schools is flowing through to our WA classrooms. It is creating challenges for teachers and education assistants. I thank Hon Donna Faragher for her good work over the last couple of years in her questioning and getting those figures about wait times for those paediatric appointments, which have blown out to anything from 18 months to two years, in some cases. Finding 3 in the interim report by the Select Committee into Child Development Services states —

Long waiting times for child development services can result in problems becoming more serious and difficult to address, not only for children but for their families, their schools and treating practitioners.

Students left unassessed and undiagnosed remain in the classroom with teachers grappling with not only classes, but also individual behaviour plans for each child, trying desperately to attract additional state government funding. It is an ongoing issue, and I hope the government will work hard on this. However, we have seen those wait times blowout, as we are in the health system. Recruitment of staff remains an issue and, as we have seen, there will be a strike next Tuesday. I understand it is the first strike since 2013. When I raised the issue today, the Premier did not seem to want to respond. He wants to talk about working through a good deal and having made another offer. It is a shame. It has been 11 years since the last strike. I can see that there will be challenges on Tuesday next week when some teachers who are in the union go on strike.

Several members interjected.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will not be taking interjections from the minister today.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday): Ministers, thank you.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am reporting on the state of the current education system. That is what I am talking about. I am talking about the frustration that our teachers are feeling and there is no doubt there is a sense of frustration. We are going to see, potentially, the first strike since 2013. The Premier did not seem that worried about it today, saying that the government had made a couple of good offers with its \$3.6 billion surplus, which it spends on Metronet.

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These teachers have had a rough time of it over the last few years. They have done a great job through the COVID years and many of them were health officers and the like. They have turned up and done the job. I congratulate them on that. It is a shame that it had to come to this. It is also a shame that when we pointed out some of the elements of the student assistance payment that were not readily advertised for people who cannot access the ServiceWA app or do not know how to use it, the minister had to resort to personal attacks on me. That is fine; we saw it in question time today.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, the member for Roe is not taking interjections.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am resilient. I am here on behalf of those multicultural families, those grandparents and grandcarers who have found it challenging. We welcome the payment; there is no problem with that. We are just trying to make it easier for people. That is where I am at.

Dr A.D. Buti: Don't be a hypocrite.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am here on behalf of our students, teachers, parents and families.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Point of order —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister! I am standing. I call you to order for the first time.

Dr A.D. Buti: Hypocrite.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

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Withdrawal of Remark

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday): Minister, if you would like to withdraw your comments to the member for Roe, please.

Dr A.D. Buti: Why?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, you need to withdraw calling the member for Roe a hypocrite. If you could do that, that would be greatly appreciated.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I just need to know the reason why. Is it unparliamentary?

The ACTING SPEAKER: It is unparliamentary. If you could, withdraw that with no further comment.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As it is unparliamentary, I withdraw it.

Debate Resumed

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I will be winding my comments up shortly. I am disappointed with the minister's attack today; nonetheless, I will rise above it.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, I call you to order for the third time. We are clear with comments—it is for the third time. The member for Roe is talking to me through the chair.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As I said, I have nearly run out of time for my contribution, but I want to point out the frustration that the people of regional WA are facing, our teachers' frustration and the fact that they will potentially have to go on strike next Tuesday. That is a frustration. The Premier's effort today with his response about live exports was very frustrating. The sheep flock in WA is under threat. The critical mass of the sheep flock is at a delicate point. This government does not understand that we are on a precipice. We are looking at potentially losing a large part of the industry. The response from the Premier today was quite disturbing, to be honest. That is what I wanted to point out. They are just some of the frustrations that are out there. This government has a very large surplus. I hope that it uses it in the right areas, but I do not think that the \$8 billion blowout in Metronet is one of those when our teachers and students are looking for a better deal. I will leave my contribution at that.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [5.24 pm]: I rise to contribute to this important motion by the Leader of the Opposition on the poor management of this Labor government. I will start by discussing the matter of public interest debate that we had yesterday. This side raised serious concerns with the Minister for Transport; Treasurer about the mismanagement of the Metronet project and the complete failure to contain costs in transport. I have said in this place before that the minister is clearly a very capable person, yet her response was disappointing to say the least. The first part of the response was to conflate our concerns with somehow saying that we were criticising her because she is a woman and a woman could not hold two portfolios. Of course, that is completely false. Somehow or other she constructed this contention and proceeded to debate that with us. Let us be very clear, As the Leader of the Opposition said, we have no issue with the Minister for Transport holding another portfolio; however, when the minister responsible for the greatest cost blowout in the history of capital projects in Western Australia is also the Treasurer of the state, the person who is supposed to hold other ministers accountable for their excesses, that is an intrinsic conflict of interest. If the minister wishes to be Treasurer, which I suspect is her aspiration, she should hold some other portfolio that is not responsible for a cost blowout and hold the new Minister for Transport responsible for constraining some of those costs. That would be appropriate. That is what we have said is inappropriate. It is a direct conflict that the minister responsible for this massive multibillion dollar cost blowout is also the Treasurer. I am surprised that other ministers are so patient. We all know that the Treasurer is a very strong character and clearly has the wood on her other cabinet colleagues because she continues to get vast sums of money when other critical priorities of the government are not being dealt with.

One of the worst characteristics of this government is that it is quite prepared to sacrifice various industries to suit its own political ideology and agenda, to the detriment of Western Australia. It has a cavalier attitude towards destroying businesses, jobs and whole industry sectors, sacrificing livelihoods and the things that people have worked their entire lives building with the stroke of a pen simply to appeal to the crowd and, in particular, the left. It should be noted that the target for that destruction is small business. We see the government trying to cosy up to the top end of town. We all know about the \$1 000-a-bottle wine tasting events with the property developer. We note the rubbing shoulders with the hoi polloi around town —

Ms M.M. Quirk: You have got the complete wrong meaning for hoi polloi; I suggest you look it up.

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Dr D.J. HONEY: Thanks, member. I have great respect for the member for Lansdale's understanding of the English language. Being a humble science student, I am happy to learn. Nevertheless, the top end of town—let me be more explicit.

Mr D.A.E. Scaife: It is Greek for “the many”.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is it. Thank you. In this place, I can tell members one thing: I am happy to learn. Members have hopefully discovered that.

Getting back to the serious issue at hand, the government is mixing with the top end of town and standing on stages with big industry at various things, but is happy to sacrifice small business to satisfy the crowd, to the detriment of those businesses and Western Australia.

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The government sees them as the political enemy and, therefore, expendable—sectors that it can do without. The government seems ignorant of the flow-on effects of its decisions. It makes a quick decision to appease a certain group and ignores the massive flow-on effect, and, invariably, the massive impact on regional communities that suffer from a closure, a loss of jobs and workers leaving small towns. This is a massive issue in regional Western Australia. Farming and stations in the north are being pushed out by new renewable industries such as those that involve wind turbines and solar panels that do not employ many people. With the consolidation of the agricultural industry in the south of the state, never has it been more important to have other industries in regional areas. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the government's indifference to small business when it closed Horizontal Falls. Recently, there was an awful accident at Horizontal Falls. There is no doubt whatsoever that improvements are needed at Horizontal Falls to protect the safety of people, but in a knee-jerk reaction to appease a small group, the government shut it down as an industry, destroying it as a tourist attraction. Those are not my words. People from the tourist industry are saying that this closure will substantially reduce one of the major activities that attracts tourists to the north of the state. They will not be able to actively participate in and enjoy that natural feature. It is not a feature created by humans; it is a feature created by natural forces. Apparently, we will no longer allow tourists to observe and delight in that.

Ms D.G. D'Anna interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday): Member for Cottesloe, are you taking interjections?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Madam Acting Speaker, I am sure the member will have ample opportunity to respond later if she wishes, but I have limited time and I want to give my colleagues an opportunity to speak.

It is not just the 15 licensed tourism operators and the 58 full-time jobs that will be directly impacted by that unreasonable and flawed decision because there will be wider impacts in that community. Typically for that sort of industry, the multiple in the community is three to four times. For every job that is not created directly, three to four jobs are lost in the broader community. That will have a massive negative impact on an area that is struggling because this government has failed to deal with the law and order issues in the north of the state. That is already a substantial challenge for tourism operators north of Geraldton. It is becoming a major issue. The word of mouth to people who are looking to travel to the north of the state—having spoken with someone from Melbourne, I know that this reputation is going outside our borders—is that the lack of law and order in the north of the state is a major problem that is affecting tourism. On top of that, there has been the closure of this wonderful and major tourist attraction.

Let us look at this government's decision to destroy the logging industry in the state of Western Australia. It is one of the most profoundly stupid and unjustified decisions that I have seen in my lifetime, and it was made on the pretext that it was going to help protect the environment by increasing carbon sequestration. The United Nations, at least the International Panel on Climate Change, stated unequivocally that the best way to increase carbon sequestration is active forestry harvesting and management. Members should look around this chamber. The honourable member for Lansdale may know the age of this chamber. I think it is around 100 years old.

Ms M.M. Quirk: I am not that old, member!

Dr D.J. HONEY: I know that the member for Lansdale is not that old, but she has a good memory.

We can look around this chamber and say that it contains beautiful jarrah. We can also look around and say that it is stored carbon; that is what it is. It has been stored for many, many decades and it will be stored for another 200, 300, 400 years or more. Managed forestry increases carbon sequestration because we end up with net increases in storage. A forest that is left by itself and not harvested reaches a plateau and no longer stores carbon. It has a dynamic balance, and it simply sits where it sits. If a bushfire goes through, that stored carbon goes into the atmosphere. The government shut that down in a cavalier way. There was absolute dishonesty in the government's

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argument. Two-thirds of the state forest are completely banned from forestry; it cannot be touched. We are talking about one-third of the regenerating forest being harvested on a sustainable basis. It was the most sustainable industry in the state, but the government shut it down to appeal to a small crowd without any regard for the impact. We are seeing that impact on communities in the south west, and we will continue to see it more and more. Nevertheless, the government went ahead and destroyed another critical regional industry to appeal to a handful of people in metropolitan Perth. It is interesting because if we look at the areas that can never be touched under the existing forestry industry, we see that the area of forest is bigger in size than half of the world's nations. That is how much of our forest is locked up, never to be touched. Only one-third was to be harvested, but to make an ideological point, the government has destroyed probably the most sustainable industry in the state of Western Australia, an industry that literally could have carried on for centuries in the way that it was being managed. As a result of that decision, this government has launched into the importation of deforestation. We still need hardwood timber; we are now importing it from countries that do not have any of the strict environmental controls that we had. It is a worse outcome globally. The government's decision has resulted in more carbon emissions and it has destroyed thousands of jobs for a cheap grab in metropolitan Perth. It is an absolute disgrace.

We saw the same cavalier attitude towards the fishing industry. We have heard the major concerns of fishers around the state, particularly, as the member for Roe would know, in Esperance and surrounding areas. Again, it was a superbly managed sustainable industry, but to get another little grab, a headline, the government was happy to destroy it. That will have a massive negative impact on the town of Esperance and other fishing communities. We have already seen fishing shops shut down. It is very clear that part of that decision was directed by science; I accept what the minister said. Equally, a large part of what is happening to the reserves has nothing to do with sustainability whatsoever; it is purely to get a momentary grab and headline to the massive and ongoing detriment to those regional communities.

This government has disregard for the impact that its decisions have on local industries. I want to briefly touch on the more serious end of heavy industry. I think the government's colleagues in the federal sphere are on a bender here, but time will not allow me to go through all that.

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What have we seen happen with heavy industry under WA Labor? Under the WA Labor government—the McGowan and then the Cook Labor governments—we have seen the BP refinery, the largest refinery in Australia, shut down. Alcoa Kwinana has announced that it will shut down at Christmastime under this government. We also know that the nickel industry in this state is under massive threat. In all those cases, the state government has been lacking. Yes, its federal colleagues will have a role in this, but my greatest disappointment is that this government has not done the serious, hard work to keep those industries going. That would not mean ongoing subsidisation of those industries. In the case of the BP refinery, it had a major overhaul occurring. That was a high-cost overhaul. If it had had support with that high-cost overhaul, it would have kept that refinery going. Instead, it made the choice to get its oil from Singapore. The government then gave BP exclusive access to the main fuel importation jetty in this state, so there is no extra competition on fuel. We have seen massive increases in fuel prices as a result of that. I know the Alcoa Kwinana refinery intimately. The actions of this government in delaying the mine plan and its inaction in ensuring that Alcoa could have an adequate supply of gas were direct contributors to the pending closure of that refinery. I desperately hope that that can be reversed, because that is not some penny-ante show; it is a billion-dollar plus industry and major contributor to this state. Members on the other side get excited about climate change and the contributors to climate change, but Alcoa's alumina refineries in Western Australia are the lowest emission refineries in the world. Every tonne of alumina that is not made here will likely be made in China, where carbon emissions are double the level of carbon emissions from the refinery here. In fact, they are more than double the emissions from Alcoa's three refineries in the south west. If that refinery shuts down, it will not only destroy jobs in Western Australia, but also lead to a direct increase in global carbon emissions. If members opposite are concerned about carbon emissions, they should be much more concerned about supporting those industries.

I do not have time to go on as I want to give other members time to make their contributions. This government is taking the boom for granted. It is living off record revenue that it had no impact on in terms of delivering, but, because of that, it is not keeping its eye on the ball and properly managing industry in this state.

MS M. BEARD (North West Central) [5.42 pm]: I rise to support this motion that condemns the Cook Labor government for its poor management by blowing the boom, failing to deliver key services and compounding the stress on Western Australian households. I will focus on the area north of Geraldton. A lot of what has been said today is relevant, but as I have said before—regional members will support this—the further north we go, the more difficult and challenging it gets. We all respect and understand that. The liveability of those regions is becoming increasingly difficult. The government has had large budgets, but a lot of people have said to me things like,

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“They’re getting a footbridge with lighting on it across the Swan River. I have no problem with that, but when our hospital is falling down and we are struggling to actually keep people safe and healthy, there is a mismatch and a problem. There is no equity.” That is what people are starting to reiterate to me.

The member for Cottesloe touched on the issue of small businesses. As others will attest to, the cost of doing business rises as we go further north. There are freight costs, fuel costs and power costs. The cost of doing business is enormous. Unfortunately, we will see businesses drop off. There is a fear that businesses will not be able to remain sustainable. The Minister for Water is not here, but I will use an example. I was in Shark Bay last week and businesses there pay \$15 to \$16 a kilolitre for water. Further north, some towns pay \$9 a kilolitre for water, when in Perth they pay under \$3 a kilolitre. Businesses in those areas pay nearly three to four times the price of water that the same businesses in the metro area pay, just to keep their business open. There is no alternative water source for them. It is becoming increasingly difficult for businesses to remain competitive. The shires that are dealing with these issues have very small rate bases and it is really hard for them to provide the infrastructure and level of services that are needed. That impacts growth and development, so it is becoming increasingly hard to retain people in these areas.

A key focus of this motion is the failure of the government to deliver key services. Those key services are really important in the regions. They are the services that people who live south of Geraldton—probably more in the metro area—take for granted every day. Some regional managers are now located in Perth. They are hundreds or thousands of kilometres from where they need to be—that is, the regions they are trying to manage. Staff on the ground have relayed to me that it is becoming increasingly difficult for them as they have to contact someone who does not even live in the same town or region to get guidance. There is a total disconnect in that those managers do not understand what is happening in those areas.

As the member for Cottesloe touched on with small businesses, there has been a big impact on tourism businesses in the north. I think Tourism Western Australia has done an amazing job in promoting its Drive the Dream campaign and some of its other promotions, but we do not have the infrastructure in parts of the north west to support them. We can drive tourists to the north and through all these small towns, but it will be disastrous for our reputation if things are closed when people get there. Giralia station, just north of Exmouth, is a prime example. Access to the stromatolites has been closed for a long time as they are under repair. All this has an enormous impact on regional businesses and the tourism reputation of our state. These things need to happen. Parts of the region are being locked up in national parks and people are struggling to get into some of those areas. Giralia is an example of something that has not worked well in terms of the government’s decision to take that on. It has not managed it well at all.

Another issue that the member for Cottesloe touched on—I think everyone has—is regional crime. Violent crime is escalating. Just this week, the security company in Carnarvon contacted me to say that three security guards had been attacked in the supermarket. After the last incident on the weekend, the security guard ended up in hospital to get stitches. It is becoming increasingly apparent that there is a lack of consequences and no accountability, and that crime is escalating. A lot of it is youth crime. I was told on the weekend that the burglary rate in the north is up. I say all the time that the police are doing an incredible and amazing job, often with not a lot of resources. We need more people to provide wraparound services, such as drug and alcohol services, particularly for the police. As I have said in this place before, everyone understands that it is an incredibly complex issue and that there is no silver bullet coming over the hill, but the police cannot continue to manage these situations without additional help and support. The situation is becoming dire. En masse stealing from shops is happening all the time. The offenders abuse staff and people are too afraid to intervene. When security guards are getting hurt, it shows that it is a massive problem. We need to look at that.

That dysfunction flows through to education. The issue we have in some smaller towns is that there is only one school. It is really difficult for this to be handled when there is only one school. Some of these kids have not been to school for years and it is creating issues for the kids who want to be at school. We need to look at the whole education model in terms of some of these specific issues in the north. There is a high turnover of staff, as teachers feel that there is a lack of support. I know that children can be expelled or suspended and that suspensions happen a lot, but there is no alternative for those kids to get any other form of schooling. That is not an ideal situation for them. Every day across the state, many people feel the full force of lawlessness. It is having an impact across our region on community members, the police, hospital workers, school employees and small business operators.

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It is actually driving people to question how they can sustain that in these small towns and communities when they are actually contributing significant amounts to the bottom line for the state and the country. They are not getting the reward back for their effort in the regions. If we talk about health, there is Tom Price Hospital, Meekatharra

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Hospital and the issue of a lack of maternity services in Carnarvon. All these things are exacerbating the situation. The government needs to look closely at how it is going to carve up the budget and address some of these issues.

In terms of crime, the banned drinkers register was called for by the opposition for a long time. It has been put in place, and, to a degree, it has worked. Contrary to what has been hammered at me, I was in full support of the banned drinkers register, and I still am. However, the unintended consequences of that need to be looked at. If this register is rolled out across other towns or in other suburbs, it will have a massive impact on businesses and tourism. It has already had an impact on certain towns in the north. To counter that, we need to provide wraparound services. The banned drinkers register is just one lever that needs to be used in liquor restrictions. We have had liquor restrictions in the north forever that I can remember. They are just two tools that we can use. In the towns that I visit, I have seen a remarkable increase in drug use on the street. We need to really try to nail these services such as drug and alcohol centres. We need to look getting a safe house, which I have asked to be considered for a long time in this place. We need to look at housing for the men who have nowhere to go. We need to look at transitional housing. The women's refuge in Carnarvon is full again. It has done a big circle. It was all right for a while, but we are back to where we were. The police are clearly struggling. The more names they put on the BDR, the more they have to police it, and if they do not have the resources, it becomes incredibly difficult for them to do that. I do appreciate that. However, youth crime is a completely separate issue and we need to find a circuit breaker for that situation because it is becoming untenable for many people. This links into housing as well, which we need to revisit. For many kids, their mother will be taken out of a situation and put into a refuge, and if they are boys and teenagers, they cannot go to that refuge, so the mothers will not leave them. We need to make sure that we address this issue of child protection, which I come onto now. I am racing through this. I am sorry, but other members from our team need to speak.

We all recognise the incredibly difficult job that our dedicated child protection workers undertake. According to the people I have spoken with, they have massive case loads. In 2007, the Prudence Ford review recommended that child protection should be a standalone department, which was implemented. However, in 2017, it was changed to become one large department with other portfolios. The feedback I get is that that is actually difficult. The Department of Communities' annual report states that there are five ministers across 11 portfolios, which is an enormous workload, as we can see from youth crime. I see another cohort of children all the time who are clearly not getting the care they need. For example, the guys that bring the Centurion truck in to fill up the shelves in Woolworths with produce—when they have produce to bring—say that kids are there at five o'clock in the morning asking if they have food. I do not think that is right. It is a difficult problem to resolve, but we need to find a way to get these kids off the street and into safe spaces. Without safe houses, it will be impossible to do that because these children really are racing around, going from place to place, and some of them do not live at home for four or five days at a time.

I will finish up on health services and the patient assisted travel scheme. I have had numerous calls all weekend from people in trouble. On Friday, a lady was flown to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. She was discharged from hospital on Saturday and was left to find her own way home. She did not have the money, so she borrowed it and got on the first flight home on Monday. She then had to use food vouchers when she got home to survive until her next pay cheque. The government needs to look at processes of refining this. If health services are not provided in these towns, we need to find a way to make this easier for people. I had another message while I was sitting here just now. A lady needs to come to Perth. She cannot find her way through the process to get any help, and financially she needs it. These are really important things. The minister has said to me that there has been some uplift in PATS accommodation and fuel prices, but with the cost of living right now, it is not satisfactory and it really needs to be looked at. A large cohort of people in the north are struggling to get help, medication and meet their medical appointments. The Royal Flying Doctor Service's *Best for the bush: Rural and remote health base line 2022* report released in 2023 outlined the biggest problems that rural and remote primary health care are facing, including a lack of services in each of the regional towns and campuses. The report showed a rapidly growing number of aeromedical retrievals in recent years. People in need of urgent surgery have said to me that they have had to wait in hospital for two days, in pain. According to that report, the RFDS conducted 36 937 aeromedical retrievals in 2022–23, which is equivalent to 101 retrievals per day—or four an hour. It is unsustainable, and, according to the RFDS report, it is a major issue because a high number of rural and remote people have died from potentially preventable deaths because they do not seek treatment sooner and because it is difficult to get. I raise this in an effort to highlight the difficulties because I know that it is an issue that people who do not live with this day in, day out feel disconnected from and find hard to understand. With the money that the government currently has in surplus, it is time to look at these basic services for regional towns and spaces because they are deteriorating at a rapid rate. I will leave it there and let the member for Central Wheatbelt speak.

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MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt) [5.57 pm]: I rise to contribute to this debate. The Minister for Regional Development posted me copies of the *WA regional development framework*. I received a whole packet of them in my office today.

Mr D.T. Punch: They are to distribute to your community.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, minister.

Mr D.T. Punch: We are very thoughtful on this side.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It was a little light on, I have to say. There is not much to it. The package was heavy, but I am not sure about the content in the document. I want to reflect on some comments from the minister at the beginning of this debate and take members back to the point of the motion—the government’s failures around economic development and diversity, and the challenges that so many of our communities are facing under this government.

There is much talk about diversification, new industries, technology and infrastructure. I am very supportive of diversifying our state’s economy, but I am equally as passionate about holding onto and building on the standing industries and sectors that we already have. From a wheatbelt perspective—I am wearing my member for Central Wheatbelt hat—the agricultural sector is, without doubt, the underpinning driver of that local economy. The member for Roe spoke earlier about some comments from the Premier during question time today. Time and again, this government has failed to understand or even try to understand how our agricultural sector works, how it can actually support the sector instead of undermining it and why it is important to our state’s economy. It is very easy say that we support farmers and farm businesses, but the actual rubber that hits the road fails when it comes to this government. I could talk about the many conversations I have had in this Parliament on the views of those in the industry who feel constantly under attack by their own government, whether it be at a state or a federal level.

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This diversification of economy and commitment to making sure that we have a fantastic place to live and work for generations to come are sentiments shared by both sides of Parliament. I just think that we on this side of Parliament do not see what needs to be delivered being delivered. Members opposite should not just take our word for it. The results of a 2023 Ray Morgan survey on the agricultural sector came out at the end of last year. It is Australia wide but it drills down into states. It showed that the greatest challenge for 41 per cent of surveyed farmers in Western Australia was government policy, which was up from seven per cent in 2022. I have a suspicion that that is strongly linked to the absolute debacle of the government’s efforts around the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021. A number of other layers have come into play, particularly surrounding live export, which is uniquely Western Australia when it comes to the sheep industry. These farmers were concerned about the impact of government policy. That has doubled nationally but in Western Australia, it has increased almost six times. That is an indictment on this government. This is a proud industry that contributes significantly and is the lifeblood of the communities in the part of the state that I represent. We now see them in real trouble because we have had a sustained period of dryness in the community. It is broader than just the wheatbelt. It has been brewing for a while. The member for Roe and I, the Leader of the Opposition and other members of our party have continually tried to prosecute in this chamber and to those on the government benches who will listen why the live export industry is so important during periods like this.

During the Labor Party’s period of government, it has not been through a prolonged dry season. It was the mark of our government. We experienced some of the worst years in this state around 2010. We dealt with ongoing dry seasons. I am passionate about this because it impacts our community so very deeply. It does not take long for that sentiment of optimism, when there should be absolute passionate confidence in our future from the agricultural sector, to be whittled away. When we hear the statistics from the Roy Morgan survey about farmers being concerned about the impact of government policy, doubling nationally but increasing six times in Western Australia, I have great concerns about what is being announced by this government and its failure to understand what part the livestock industry, particularly sheep, has to play in responding to this.

The minister has only just established the 2024 Dry Season Taskforce. I was not full of confidence when I read her comments on what might be made available. Some farmers and farm businesses have been carting water for some time at their own cost. Some farmers are facing severe fodder shortages and need to pay for freight to get fodder to their property. There will be a requirement to agist animals if farmers can find anywhere that has feed, and that will require funding and support.

In a news item posted on the ABC Great Southern website on Monday, the journalist’s interpretation of the minister read as follows —

Ms Jarvis said the WDC taskforce would look at access to feed and fodder in affected areas, but downplayed providing any new subsidies or financial support.

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“Tens of millions of dollars since 2021 have been rolled out across our farming regions to provide the support but also for the research and extension activities to actually teach farmers what they need to do differently in the face of a drying climate.”

Honestly, if only I was there when the minister made those comments! It was extraordinarily offensive for her to say “teach farmers what they need to do differently in the face of a drying climate”. Our farmers are incredibly aware that they live in the driest corner of the driest state of the driest nation. They are some of the best dryland farmers. They are most efficient. But we cannot make it rain and we cannot conjure water up from nowhere. Sometimes there is nowhere to send these sheep. I can tell members that there are about 300 000 sheep—I am happy to be corrected on the numbers; this figure was written on the back of an envelope, so it may be more or it may be less—that need to get off farm now. There is no feed and water. That is why the livestock industry and sector in Western Australia is significantly important. The Premier showed his ignorance today when he said there was no link between dry seasons and live export. This is what we do. We as farmers manage our businesses so that the taxpayer does not have to foot the bill. The Labor government has taken away one of those avenues. Yes, the industry will turn up and say that it needs assistance now because when there is no access to water there are limited options. I will talk about why there has been limited opportunity for farmers under this government to improve their own self-sufficiency: it is because it cut that funding as well, so there is a heavier reliance on scheme water, which is expensive and it is also delivered at the cost of the taxpayer. These farmers will come to the government and say, “We are in a difficult position right now and we have limited options.”

I am not confident that the Dry Season Taskforce or the experience within this government will deliver a satisfactory outcome. Going by the way it has treated the agricultural industry up until now, I think we can expect more of the same. That is incredibly disappointing because it is a very valuable part of our state’s economy. It has dealt with challenges that were wrought by this government as a result of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act. We are dealing with live export changes and a loss of confidence. There is a lack of domestic processing opportunities in our state at the moment. It is already difficult to get those sheep into domestic processing. Unfortunately, we are left with a very unsavoury option, which is to destroy the animals ourselves, which can cause mental health issues, which is already happening in our community. There you go, government! We have a really difficult time ahead. The government will discover very quickly that the sentiment in those communities, where there was a fair bit of resilience, give and take and patience, dries up pretty quickly when people start to see their livelihoods and their communities suffer. It needs somebody who has a degree of experience and some sensitivity to what is happening in those communities to get this right on their behalf.

I want to move to one of the other elements that I was asked to speak about. I return to the Minister for Regional Development’s strategic framework. It refers to regional liveability and making regions good places to live. Part of that must be a housing strategy. There is a significant lack of housing in our communities. I listened to the Minister for Housing talking about the government pulling every lever that it has to deliver housing. I have just finished touring the eastern and north-eastern part of my electorate. People in every single shire said to me that they have challenges in land assembly and development, access to land through Landgate, serviced blocks or the ability to engage with the government to access funding to assist in building houses essentially for state government entities. Government Regional Officers’ Housing is coming to our local governments with very small rate bases and asking them to dip into their funds to deliver houses for nurses, police, teachers and the like. In some cases, they will do it because they know that they will not have staff in their towns without doing that. But it is not their responsibility. For every dollar that they spend on building a house for a government employee, which should be provided by the state government, they are not doing something in their community that they are responsible for. That is the challenge. I can tell members that in Koorda, access to land is an issue. Communities have been unable to find and deliver serviced blocks. These communities are the developers of last resort because no residential or commercial developer will go out to Koorda or Mukinbudin. They will get no return on building a house on a block. The block and the servicing of the block will cost almost twice the value of the house at the end of the day.

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It is always left to local governments in my part of the world, which is why they are heavily reliant on the government actually delivering some of these outcomes.

Westonia managed to develop a block. It took two years to connect the green dome so that it had power, and then it got charged \$25 000 for the pleasure. That is \$25 000 on top of developing the block with water and actually delivering the house. I think this government is going out of its way to make things difficult. A conversation with Western Power about the length of connection times and the cost of delivering those houses needs to be had. If the state government wants the local governments in these regional areas to do the job that it should be doing, it should be pulling out all the stops with the agencies that it has control of—that is, Western Power and the Water

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Corporation. They have big budgets. I know how they work; they can shift and shuffle things around if they need to according to government priorities.

The government also has a significant budget surplus, so how about we actually see some real commitment being delivered, as opposed to the headworks fund that was announced, which is a little bit like spreading vegemite across the entire state, so that these communities can assist in delivering the houses that are necessary? When I spoke to one of my towns, I was told that a couple of young single teachers, probably in their first or second year, were being accommodated in the pub because there was no other accommodation. Some people might find that to be an adventure. If someone is not from the community and it is their first foray into regional Western Australia, which it quite often is, they would not know their neighbours and there would be itinerant travellers and probably tradies working for Main Roads or the Water Corporation coming through. It might be fun and an adventure for some, but I can tell members that the feedback from those two young teachers was that that was not the ideal outcome. They come back to Perth, or wherever they have come from, and they talk. Then they do not want to be part of the flying squad that goes out to provide relief when schools need them, so it becomes very difficult to attract teachers. As a consequence, one of my high schools has not had any teachers for a couple of classes, which means that it merges all the classes together, and there has been a similar outcome with primary school teachers. When a town cannot get a relief teacher, what happens, particularly in Mukinbudin, is that the primary school merges its classes, which makes it very difficult to deliver the curriculum across a number of years. It is a far from positive outcome when a town has teachers but cannot house them.

I was told another story. We had a fantastic deputy principal who wanted to bring his family out to the region. He was living in a small unit in the town. He was told that if he wanted to stay and take on that role and bring his family and be a part of the community, he would have to find his own accommodation. That was it; he was out because there was no accommodation. We have a constant rotation of leadership of principals, deputy principals and teachers in our schools. Most of the accommodation for the police is reasonable. There are probably outliers, but I am talking about the wheatbelt. It is very difficult. When I go to my zone meetings, the constant theme is that land assembly and housing is very challenging.

This is pretty simple stuff. It is bread and butter for the state government to be involved when there is market failure. I see that as the government's responsibility when there is market failure. I do not want to spend taxpayers' dollars when there are opportunities for the private sector to deliver these outcomes, but we all know that it just does not operate in these small and very thin markets. For me, housing is a fail for this government. When we cannot get essential workers into these communities to educate our kids or get nurses at the hospital, we are really starting to talk about a serious fail. Sadly, that is where we have come to.

Member for Roe, one of the last things that I want to raise is School Bus Services. I appreciate that the Minister for Transport allows us to have conversations with the Department of Transport and School Bus Services in particular, because they are very localised issues, but it is very challenging for me when they work stringently to a policy without flexibility, even though the priority, as the member for Roe has said, should just be to get our kids to school. In one of my towns, there are about six families who are just within the five-kilometre mark of the town boundary, so they do not qualify for the school bus. All the parents work; the families have a dual income. They are going to have to change how they get their kids to school. Members might say that they are only 4.3 kays from school, so they could ride their bike or they could car pool.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: They are not options. It a 90-kay-an-hour freight route, with trucks barrelling along the road. These parents are not going to allow their year 2 kid to walk along the side of the road to get to school. They are now no longer able to get on the school bus. I genuinely think that the budget for School Bus Services needs to be increased so that we have flexibility to make sure that the kids are put at the centre of all this and we can get as many kids to school as possible. It makes it difficult when a lack of flexibility in applying the policy means that a flood of parents and others are impacted. I am talking about one community, but I can tell members that we had a meeting with School Bus Services and I have been following up on seven families in my electorate. It is a constant challenge in my electorate.

These are basic things to make sure that we are underpinning the economic development of our state. Sadly, the government is failing on these basic things—to deliver power and housing and to make sure that we have essential workers in the places we need them.

I round back to the thing that I talked about at the beginning. Our agricultural sector is under pressure. Whether people are in the central wheatbelt, the south-west corner or in the north-west of the state, these are challenging times. I have no confidence in this minister or this government navigating these difficult times.

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MS H.M. BEAZLEY (Victoria Park — Minister for Local Government) [6.15 pm]: I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this motion today. I am always a little bit staggered by the wording of the motions during private members' business, because they tend to be really easy to pull apart and prove to be demonstrably baseless. The words used include "poor economic management", "failure to deliver projects", "failure to deliver essential services", "cost-of-living crisis" and "special inquiry", and I will very much go through all those terms one by one. Given the track record of the previous government, it is quite a remarkable statement to make.

Arguably, our biggest infrastructure project over our two terms has been Metronet. It is a once-in-a-lifetime investment for our state and it is an important investment in generations not yet alive. The scope and number of rail projects currently underway is unprecedented. We have delivered seven projects so far, including the airport line, Lakelands station, the Bellevue railcar facility, the Denny Avenue level crossing removal, the Caledonian Avenue level crossing removal, the Mandurah station multi-deck car park and the new Bayswater station. Most recently, we have delivered the C-series railcars, the first railcars made in WA in decades.

A government member: Hear, hear!

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes. I was very pleased to be on the inaugural trip as the train left Perth Stadium station in the Town of Victoria Park.

The Cook Labor government is righting a wrong after the Liberals and Nationals closed the Midland Workshops, giving away Western Australian jobs—yet they talk about mismanagement! This is an exciting time to be a fan of Metronet, which I very much am. There is still more to come. Let us go through it.

Bayswater station is now complete, with all the platforms and track work done and ready for the Morley–Ellenbrook line. The station looks fantastic, with expressions of interest currently being assessed for the shops underneath. The future is incredibly bright for that town centre. We will be celebrating the mammoth effort this weekend with a street festival. I encourage anyone to come down for the free face painting. The member for Moore may be able to turn that frown upside down and paint on a smile.

The Yanchep station is yet to come. It will be open a little later this year, with an announcement expected in weeks. I know the community will be as impressed as the minister is with these stations. I believe that the artwork is incredible. I also believe the minister was fortunate enough to ride with me—I know she was because I was there!—and the Attorney General, and they are both raring to go. The Morley–Ellenbrook line is also on track to be open this year. Ellenbrook station is complete, with the other four stations in the final stages of completion. In my neck of the woods, the Victoria Park–Canning level crossing removal has made significant progress following the Armadale line shutdown late last year.

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Significant piling works have been completed. Many columns, headstocks and L-beams are already installed, including over Oats Street and, as of last weekend, Mint and Archer Streets as well. Early station works have started at this end of the project. Our bright red gantry cranes, Victor, Becky, Yira and Kediny, are now local celebrities. I know my local community is proud of having such a huge achievement in their area and to have it done in a relatively short space of time. I particularly thank them for their continued patience during the shutdown and the associated works. There are works for the Thornlie–Cockburn Link at both Nicholson Road and Ranford Road stations. They are progressing well and in time for the reopening of the Armadale line next year. This comes after the relocation of the freight rail was completed last year. The Byford rail extension is also progressing well. Piling works are complete with precast sections of elevated rail expected to start to go up in Armadale in the coming weeks. Major progress has also been made on the Byford station itself.

I cast everyone's minds to how this compares with what was happening under the previous government. There were broken promises on MAX light rail and broken promises on the Ellenbrook rail line—a bus to Ellenbrook until 2050! Broken promises on the Yanchep rail—maybe, but not until 2031. The Byford rail extension would not have been delivered until 2050. Their record in government is they closed the Midland Workshops, which is something I have spoken about many times. They closed the Fremantle line. They sold off Westrail freight. They privatised the rail network. They closed tier 3. Now, they oppose Metronet.

As well as Metronet and its major level crossing removal project in my electorate of Victoria Park, we are also delivering another major project, which literally has its footing in Victoria Park—our new Causeway pedestrian and cycling bridges. The bridges will completely separate users from traffic. Two connected bridges are being built alongside the Causeway to provide a six-metre-wide segregated path connecting the Victoria Park foreshore with Heirisson Island or Matagarup and on to Perth or Boorloo's CBD at Point Fraser. An important milestone has been reached on the Causeway bridges project, with the first bridge module now lifted into place. The remaining 15 modules range from 22 to 42 metres in length and will be lifted into place by the middle of the year. This project

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is running on time. To construct the bridges, we will be using some of the biggest cranes in Australia to do the heavy lifting needed for such an iconic structure. There is a huge crawler crane online as of last week. It is one of the biggest in Australia. I took my boys down to McCallum Park over the weekend to show them and they were in awe. It is a pretty impressive site, especially if you cast your eye down the project to the other cranes operating along the site, and then see the cranes in Perth and across the river in the distance. This is evidence of economic investment everywhere. Some statistics for this particular crane that blew my boys' minds included that it took a convoy of over 100 trucks to transport all the parts to McCallum Park, and it took two weeks to put together. Now fully assembled, it weighs over 1 500 tonnes. To put that in perspective, it is about the weight of 14 blue whales or 100 buses! The crane will be handling loads ranging from 45 to 125 tonnes and uses over 600 tonnes of counterweight to do so. The counterweight itself is a sight to see. Concepts for the new lighting and visual design, including static and moving messages and images, will be displayed, which will transform the bridges into unique works of art. I have a few ideas in this space that I hope the minister may take into consideration!

As well as Metronet, one of our other top priorities—there are a few—is undoubtedly our number one priority of housing. Members opposite have spoken about the need for housing and that is not something we have denied. If members opposite are questioning our priorities within this motion and they know our priority is housing, it concerns me that that may mean they do not agree with that. The Cook government takes seriously the need to provide housing for the most vulnerable members of our community. That is why, as the Minister for Housing; Homelessness consistently says, we are using every lever available to boost housing in Western Australia. Our government has made a record investment of \$2.6 billion into social housing and homelessness measures, which will see the delivery of 4 000 homes. We have achieved a lot, and nobody thinks there is not a lot more to do, but some of the things we have achieved so far include the following. We have invested a record \$2.6 billion in housing and homelessness, which has already delivered more than 2 000 social homes with more than 1 000 under contract or construction. We are accelerating social and affordable housing supply by investing \$150 million in grants for community housing across the state and initiatives like the Subiaco East and Smith Street housing developments. We are supporting regional renewal and workers' accommodation via the \$80 million infrastructure development fund and unlocking lazy land. We are not ignoring the regions. We have made major planning reforms to cut red tape and boost housing supply. We are subsidising apprenticeships and supporting businesses to bring in skilled workers to boost our construction workforce and get more homes built.

Those are probably our top five achievements in this space, but we are also doing the following. We are investing \$225 million to support homelessness initiatives, supporting more than 130 organisations to deliver critical services. We have established a number of alternative and flexible housing supply programs to bolster the supply of social housing across Western Australia, including timber frame, modular and pre-fabricated construction, as well as spot purchasing of homes. We have made procurement easier and more streamlined by creating established builder panels where builders are pre-approved to deliver housing. We introduced tax reforms to incentivise the development and uptake of apartments, including a 50 per cent land tax concession on build-to-rent developments, stamp duty concessions for off-the-plan and under construction apartments and a new Keystart product aimed at high-density living. We boosted housing affordability through changes to Keystart such as increasing income eligibility and property price caps as well as reducing the Keystart interest rate setting, providing cost-of-living relief. We are unlocking lazy government land in key locations through the pilot housing diversity pipeline to encourage new developments and create diverse housing choices. We have added over 155 crisis accommodation places for those most in need. We opened Boorloo Bidee Mia—low-barrier supported accommodation for rough sleepers, which has now been successfully operating for over two years. We acquired the Murray Hotel or Wandjoo Bidi and provided 30 extra beds for rough sleepers with low-barrier supported accommodation. We are delivering on our commitment of 100 homes through the Djuripiny Mia program, providing a supported landlord model that accommodates vulnerable and complex individuals. Nearly \$100 million has also been delivered for two Common Ground homelessness facilities with East Perth now under construction and Mandurah in the design phase.

Much is also going on in the regions specifically. Our government understands the need to diversify the way we deliver housing to combat the challenges in the regions. We recognise the importance of growing our commercial regional centres and we are investing to unlock more residential and commercial land to facilitate the development of regional communities. We are investing heavily in GROH, Government Regional Officers' Housing—around \$234 million across the next four years to deliver critical housing in regional towns. This ensures our regions get the teachers, police officers and other state government workers they need to service their town, as has been identified by members opposite. We are investing \$49 million through the 2024–25 budget for a pilot program to partner with community housing organisations to provide 100 homes as part of a supportive landlord model for people experiencing rough sleeping in regional Western Australia. To do this, we have focused on reforms such as the modular build program that provides an alternative and faster pathway to deliver social housing, particularly in the regions. We have contracted more than 200 modular homes to be delivered across regional Western

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Australia, with around one-third already delivered. Our government is also releasing land through the \$166 million regional land booster program. This program has already seen 626 lots released to the market and subsequently sold or under contract across 89 projects in 78 regional towns.

To directly help all renters across metropolitan and regional Western Australia, in November last year, we announced the state's first WA rent relief program to help Western Australians at risk of eviction and experiencing mental stress to stay in their rental properties. This program has already delivered more than \$1.7 million in support and help to over 400 Western Australians to keep their lease and a roof over their head.

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As well as housing, providing cost-of-living relief is another top priority. The one thing I agree with the motion on is that Western Australians are grappling with rising costs of living. The difference is that our community knows that this government has their back. The proof is in the pudding. We have a new student assistance payment—a direct cost of living measure. Families are eligible to receive payments of \$250 for every secondary school student, and \$150 for every primary school and kindergarten student. This is part of our \$103.5 million package to reduce the pressure of school expenses on parents as part of our 2023–24 budget. Applications for payments via the ServiceWA app or online and by other methods opened this week. As the Minister for Education pointed out today, more than 70 000 households have already applied. That means that more than 100 000 students have already been captured by the scheme. This program will assist parents and carers with the cost of school essentials, which I know very well: books, IT equipment, sport and music costs, stationery, school shoes, uniforms, excursions and camps. There are also the extra costs that families with school-aged children endure, including extra food and groceries. Like I said, every parent in this place will know those expenses well. Eligibility is validated through the student's unique WA student number. If parents or caregivers have not already done so, I encourage them to download the app and apply for this measure.

In addition, we recently announced free public transport for school student travel, and also for the entire community every Sunday. That is estimated to save families with two children up to \$560 a year, which is nothing to be sneezed at. This comes on top of the free public transport we provided from Christmas Eve 2023 to January 2024. I have already mentioned our \$24.4 million rental relief program that supports at-risk renters, and we are also providing fee-free TAFE places with the commonwealth government, which equates to 22 200 fee-free places over 2024, 2025 and 2026. This is an investment of \$44.5 million. We provided back-to-school payments for foster and grand carers, valued at \$3.6 million and we have doubled KidSport vouchers from \$150 to \$300 for the next two years.

On top of previous years' measures, we have committed \$715 million towards cost-of-living measures in the 2023–24 budget. The government delivered its second electricity credit of \$200 to Western Australian households in late December. Additional assistance continues to be provided for those most in need of support, with around 350 000 households that are eligible for the indexed energy assistance payment to receive total support of \$826, including a \$500 household electricity credit split over two payments, in addition to the \$326 EAP paid over the financial year. The seniors' cost of living rebate will be increased in line with inflation over the next four years, boosting the 2023–24 rebate to \$104 for singles and \$156 for couples. Hardship utilities grant scheme payments, for those who are in financial hardship and require assistance to pay their utilities bills, will be increased by 10 per cent to \$640 per household, or \$1 060 for households above the 26th parallel. There is \$20.7 million for the regional airfare zone cap scheme to support affordable flights for regional residents, following the scheme's introduction in July 2022. In total, the WA Labor government has now spent nearly \$3 billion over the last five years to deliver cost-of-living support. If members opposite do not think that that is a priority we should be dealing with, they might want to reword their motion.

In comparison, under the previous Liberal–National government, household fees and charges rose by almost \$2 100 in nominal terms during its eight years in government. In today's dollars that would be much higher. The previous government did not manage in any year to contain household fees and charges to inflation over its two terms in government. Household electricity prices rose by an average of 8.4 per cent per annum over the eight years of the previous government—a 90 per cent increase over its two terms. Household water prices increased by an average of almost seven per cent per annum. To top it off, the Liberal–National government left us with a budget predicated on seven per cent rises in electricity and six per cent rises in water, on top of net debt on a path to \$44 billion. If lower increases in fees and charge were assumed, this would have made the state's finances look even worse.

On that note, in terms of comparison and performance, I turn to the second point of the motion, which calls for a special inquiry into this government's economic track record. It is amazing to me that members opposite keep calling for special inquiries. It is lazy. I wonder what members opposite think their job is as an opposition. I always thought it was holding the government of the day to account. After sitting through three years of question time, I

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can assert that members opposite are failing to meet that essential KPI, but that does not mean that they get to outsource their job to public servants and third parties. We know that they are fans of outsourcing and not having skills and expertise in-house, but this is just ridiculous. I will save members opposite time, and WA taxpayers millions of dollars, and go through our track record.

Western Australia is the economic powerhouse of the nation. Keeping our economy strong and creating jobs for Western Australians has always been one of our highest priorities since coming to government in 2017. WA consistently punches above its weight, contributing almost double our population share of the national economy. Our domestic economy grew by more than double the pace of national growth in 2023, and was once again the strongest in the nation with growth of 4.7 per cent compared with 2.3 per cent nationally. Our strong growth was underpinned by strong growth in business investment, which grew by a massive 10.7 per cent in annual terms—the highest in 7 years; our government's record investment in infrastructure to continue to grow our economy and meet the needs of a growing population, up by a massive 18 per cent in 2023; and the resilience of household consumption, which grew by 2.7 per cent, the strongest in the nation. Western Australia accounted for nearly half of the nation's goods exports, generating a massive \$260 billion in wealth for the nation in 2023, underpinned by our strong resources sector. This provides a massive contribution to the national economy, the commonwealth, and other state and territory finances.

Our government is very proud to have created more than 300 000 jobs since coming to office in 2017. We have record levels of employment for both men and women, and we have smashed our target of creating 125 000 jobs during this term of government, with more than 210 000 jobs created. Unemployment in WA is the second lowest of all the states, and WA's workforce participation rate remains well above other states. I take issue with the member for Moore's assertion that the thousands of employees working in the public sector are dysfunctional and chaotic, and under poor leadership. The member can hold the government to task, but to throw our hardworking public sector employees and their professional leaders under the bus is beyond the pale. Our public sector is not political; they are the workers the opposition will depend on if it is ever gets back into government. I would not recommend such a strategy. In respect of directors general dealing with more than one minister, there is benefit in having more than one voice at the cabinet table that is well-informed and pushing the same cart.

I turn now to the member for Moore's opening point about net debt. Net debt is forecast to be \$27.2 billion at 30 June 2024—\$16 billion lower than the level of debt projected under the previous government. Over the time in office of the previous Liberal–National government, net debt rose almost eightfold, on a path from \$5.6 billion to a projected \$43.7 billion. It is of concern that more than 80 per cent of that rise was in general government sector debt, which went from a \$2.1 billion net asset position in June 2008 to a projected \$29 billion in debt by 2019–20. We have kept debt manageable, unlike the previous government's out-of-control debt growth.

Under this government, a sixth consecutive operating surplus of \$3.7 billion is forecast for 2023–24, after record deficits under the previous Liberal–National government.

<041> J/3

This builds on a \$5.1 billion operating surplus recorded in 2022–23, and a record \$6 billion surplus in 2021–22. Operating surpluses are expected to be maintained in the remainder of the forward estimates, despite conservative iron ore price forecasts. Our operating surplus will enable a record \$43.9 billion investment over the next four years in critical infrastructure for our hospitals, schools, Metronet, regional roads and decarbonisation projects while not burdening future generations with unsustainable levels of debt.

Public sector net debt as a share of the state economy is a very valuable tool of comparison, and it is much lower in our state than in any other jurisdiction, rising to just 10 per cent by 2026–27. That is about a quarter of Victoria's, and a fifth of New South Wales'. Queensland and South Australia also have a higher share of net debt to gross state product ratio. We manage the budget well throughout every single policy and portfolio area. It is not just the job of the Treasurer. Even in my local government portfolio, the Cook Labor government has delivered significant reforms for the benefit of all Western Australians. We continue to work closely with local government sector stakeholders to deliver important reforms that benefit residents, ratepayers, small businesses, community groups, local government employees and tourist operators across WA.

As we should all know, local government is critically important for our state's economy. It delivers many services that are essential for economic growth and productivity. For instance, small business owners depend on local governments to provide support services and timely approvals. Mum and dad landowners depend on local governments when they build or improve their homes. Every Western Australian depends on the services and infrastructure delivered by local government. The local government sector employs around 23 000 Western Australians to deliver those critical services. They are a major employer in our state. That is why our local government reform agenda is focused on supporting local governments to deliver that work. We are delivering the

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most significant changes to local government legislation and operations in more than 25 years, including a range of measures to cut red tape and standardise and streamline typical government processes.

Last year we passed landmark legislation to deliver a range of reforms, including reforms to local government elections. Many positive changes were then implemented in the October 2023 ordinary elections, including new measures to backfill vacancies. Our new laws have worked to reduce costs and prevent disruption for local governments by greatly reducing the need for extraordinary elections. For example, I understand that these new laws have already filled a vacancy on at least five occasions, and the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries estimates that the cost of holding an extraordinary election at the City of Gosnells, which now did not need one, would have been in the vicinity of \$250 000. Our reforms just saved those ratepayers a quarter of a million dollars. We are also working to simplify council meetings to make local democracy accessible and efficient. It is critical that every member of our community has the opportunity to engage in council meetings. Standardising meeting procedures will also simplify the way meetings are run, which will reduce costs and make it easier for local governments to train and share staff, representing another saving.

Just this morning I announced that the Cook Labor government has made new Local Government (Long Service Leave) Regulations. Importantly, these new regulations will improve the operation of local government long service leave portability schemes. They will also deliver administrative improvements to streamline the transfer of entitlements when an employee moves from one local government to another. This stands to benefit thousands of women and all employees of the local government sector, and will improve the money that they will be able to call on later when they take long service leave. We have also delivered a range of reforms to improve local government financial reporting, such as the new model financial statements. All of this streamlining frees up resources in each local government that would usually work on such things to instead work on areas of high priority for their communities.

As I have outlined, the Cook Labor government has a strong track record for delivering local government reform. This is in comparison to the botched forced amalgamations by the Barnett government, when so many local governments ground to a halt under the uncertainty of those forced measures. The utter disappointment about the then coalition government's complete mismanagement of this issue continues to be talked about in the sector today. Compare that with our reform record. We are delivering positive changes, working with the sector to support local governments to deliver critical services for our communities.

I could speak for quite a bit longer about our cost-of-living relief, and I particularly wanted to talk about fee free TAFE courses, but I know that other members want to talk about this in their local area. I will leave my comments there and hand over to the incredibly capable member for Kimberley.

MS D.G. D'ANNA (Kimberley — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.45 pm]: I am going to talk fast, too. I have all these pages and limited time. I rise today to address the motion raised by the Leader of the Opposition, which unjustly criticises the economic management of the Cook Labor government. The motion not only overlooks the significant achievements of our government, but also misrepresents the reality faced by Western Australians, particularly in the regions and the Kimberley. First and foremost, I will talk about the tangible achievements that everyone is aware of, such as the Fitzroy River Bridge. This project stands as a testament to the effectiveness and responsiveness of our government after the devastating floods last year. We acted swiftly. The result, the new Fitzroy River Bridge, was completed six months ahead of schedule, just 11 months after the original was destroyed. This was not merely a construction project; it was a lifeline reestablishing the connection between the East and West Kimberley, enhancing regional connectivity and providing substantial economic opportunities through local employment and business engagement. Over 250 local Aboriginal workers were involved, with nearly \$34 million spent on Aboriginal-owned businesses. This project alone illustrates our commitment to timely and impactful project delivery.

Another section I will talk about is how the opposition criticises our handling of the cost of living without acknowledging the comprehensive measures that this government has implemented to mitigate some of these pressures. These include substantial electricity credits to households, caps on essential service fees and direct rental support for tenants. These measures are directly beneficial to people, especially up in the north. As the member for North West Central said, the further north you go, the bigger impact you feel. While people down here are saying they are such small contributions, they are felt quite largely up where we come from. Furthermore, I acknowledge some of this government's recent announcements about how we are stimulating our tourism industry, including the recent announcement of the season pass; regional capped airfares for not only tourists, but also residential people to access the same opportunities for people up there to come down here; ongoing investments in regional tourism infrastructure; and significant upgrades to TAFE facilities in the Kimberley, with fee free courses in hospitality and tourism. These demonstrate our proactive approach to bolstering the local economy and enhancing our educational outcomes.

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On a note about tourism, I quickly take this opportunity to clear up a mistruth or not clear fact about the recent decision regarding Horizontal Falls. It does not mean that you cannot observe that area, as the member for Cottesloe said. I want that on the record. This decision does not mean people cannot observe special areas such as Horizontal Falls.

Dr D.J. Honey: Will tourist operators be allowed?

Ms D.G. D'ANNA: Tourist operators are allowed, and discussions are going forward. The correct terms are “negotiations are happening to diversify the tourism product”, which means that you can still go there, experience the ambience of the natural order that is there, as well as be culturally, geographically and environmentally educated on what is there, but it is about traversing the falls, which is one section. The Kimberley is not a one-trick pony.

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Horizontal Falls is not the only thing up there. If the member for Cottesloe comes for a visit, I will show him what else is beautiful in the Kimberley.

In the area of social and community welfare—I am running out of time—this government has a strong record of delivering meaningful reforms and substantial funding across the sectors of health, education and housing. Our efforts in expanding the availability of social housing, enhancing local healthcare services and supporting local industry through grants and development programs are clear indications of a government that prioritises the wellbeing of its people.

In light of these facts, it is clear that the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition lacks substance and fails to recognise the extensive and positive impacts made by our government. The evidence speaks for itself. Through dedicated effort and strategic planning, this government has delivered some awesome infrastructure. This government is about offering solutions, not excuses. Therefore, I urge my fellow members to reject this motion and recognise it as a political manoeuvre rather than a constructive critique. Let us continue to support a government that is truly making a difference in the lives of Western Australians across the state.

MS R.S. STEPHENS (Albany) [6.50 pm]: I echo all the comments of my fellow regional member, the member for Kimberley, the honourable and amazing Divina D'Anna.

Ms S.E. Winton: Honourable?

Ms R.S. STEPHENS: She is honourable!

I want to acknowledge Minister Beazley for going to our regional communities. She understands what is out in the regions and what is important to people in the regions.

The member for Central Wheatbelt talked about some of the work around housing. I want to bring to the attention of the house and the Minister for Regional Development, Hon Don Punch, that the Great Southern Development Commission is working on a strategy, with upcoming sessions on working with local governments to address challenges faced by regional businesses attracting and accommodating workers. We are doing amazing things in the regions. I acknowledge that the development commissions play a pivotal role in being the glue in the inception of some of these projects.

The Albany ring-road is partly open. Upon completion, the project will establish an 11-kilometre free-flowing road. This \$250 million investment in the City of Albany will help local shires and regional areas and will assist in taking our grain and trucks to the port in a much safer environment. The project has injected so much money into our community and economy, especially in the great southern. It has employed local contractors and created a significant number of jobs. We are moving on to the next section of the road, which is a \$37 million flyover at the intersection of Menang Drive and Chester Pass Road. That work will continue and hopefully complete the project later this year. It is an incredible project in our community.

The government is investing in TAFEs and training. It has invested \$22 million in a trade training centre at South Regional TAFE, which is due to open shortly. The building is incredible. The local contractors working on that project have done a fantastic job.

People are still looking to open businesses in the regions. There is a thriving economy. Zambrero will open a restaurant in Albany in April. My kids are pretty excited about that, but I cannot say that I have visited a Zambrero restaurant before. Businesses are investing in daycares, which is critical for people in the regions who want to return to their employment. One such business did not need a handout from the government; rather, it is proactively investing in regional communities. It is committed to building a brand new daycare centre in Bayonet Head called the Bayonet Head early learning centre.

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The other day I met with representatives from Commodity Ag—the member for Roe is no longer in the chamber—which is an incredible business in Gnowangerup. It employs more than 56 people from the small town of Gnowangerup. It builds trays for trucks but is starting to diversify its business to have lots of different avenues. I think it is incredible that it employs that many people, including apprentices and quite a lot of Indigenous people. The minister touched on the wage subsidy for apprentices. Business owners have come to me and said, “How amazing is this?” Small businesses can receive up to \$134 000 to employ an apprentice in the building and construction industry. One of my lovely constituents has employed 22 apprentices. He was blown away to learn that he can continue to employ apprentices in his glass supply business. This money will help him take on his next apprentice and increase employment in his business.

A few months ago, we proudly brought road maintenance contracts back in-house under Main Roads. They had been outsourced in 1990 by the Liberal–National government. It was an incredible day. A total of 39 new people now live in the great southern and are employed by Main Roads. I was there the day they started. They had on shiny new tops and boots. They were so proud. These people know that they have a solid job. After going to work, they volunteer and give back to the community. It was such an amazing day. Member for Collie–Preston, I know that another 61 jobs are going into the south west, which is just incredible.

Recently, the Cook government invested \$30 million over four years in regional fire management through the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions’ Parks and Wildlife Services. This will create five new full-time positions in the great southern, with an additional two trucks and a dedicated bulldozer. I am yet to see the bulldozer, but I look forward to it being based in Albany and deployed around the great southern.

I know that fabulous other members would like to make a contribution. It is significant to show that we have good economic management. I am proud to be a part of the Cook Labor government.

MR K.J.J. MICHEL (Pilbara) [6.56 pm]: I thank all members for their contributions, especially the government members who promoted their electorates and showed what a wonderful job the Cook Labor government is doing. I rise today to give a contribution to the ridiculous motion moved by the opposition. I put on the record that I do not support the motion.

I take this opportunity to update the house on the pipeline of projects in the Pilbara. I cannot understand the opposition’s gall to move a motion like this without looking in its own backyard. Let me remind the opposition of some of the commitments it made in the past that never got off the ground. Opposition members should not forget the more than \$40 billion debt that the former government left us when we came to power. The former Liberal–National government left us a more than \$40 billion debt, yet it says that we are not delivering. The former Liberal–National government put the state in debt and did not deliver any of its election commitments. Let us start with Spoilbank Marina, which was one of my election commitments. I have been told by locals that it was promised in 2008 but no-one talked to them about what was happening. Only the Cook Labor government will deliver the marina. I had the opportunity to open the boat ramp and parking area. I also went down the boat ramp with the Minister for Ports, Hon David Michael, to look at the wonderful job that the Pilbara Ports Authority has done and that the contractors are doing. It will be an amazing marina once it is completed. I say to everyone in this chamber, watch this space!

Another project that is close to my heart, which was also another of my election commitments, is Newman Hospital. Once again, construction of the hospital was promised by the former Liberal–National government. I have been told by locals that it was promised in 2008. Once again, it was not delivered. Only the Cook Labor government is committed to delivering its election commitments. The Cook Labor government is working hard to deliver road projects in the Pilbara. Last week, I had the privilege to welcome our Premier, Roger Cook; the Deputy Premier, Hon Rita Saffioti; and the Minister for Road Safety, Hon David Michael, to open the \$112 million Hedland Road and Rail Safety Improvements project.

<043> C/G

In the past, people and businesses in Hedland faced challenges with the Great Northern Highway. There was a constant clash between road and rail, causing disruptions for local vehicles and freight transport. To address this, we invested in several key projects—the \$76 million Port Hedland airport deviation and the \$32 million Buttsweld Bridge and road realignment, along with the closure of Powell Road. Those projects aimed to remove conflicts between road and rail. The Buttsweld Bridge and Powell Road project started in October 2021 and finished in November 2022.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm