

Hon Steve Martin; Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon James Hayward; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Wilson Tucker;  
Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Neil Thomson

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## HOUSING — VULNERABLE WESTERN AUSTRALIANS

### *Motion*

**HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural)** [10.06 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house acknowledges concerns about the McGowan government's ability to address the current housing and rental crisis facing vulnerable Western Australians.

I thank the house for allowing me the opportunity to raise this important issue today. I will begin by giving members an update on the statistics facing vulnerable Western Australians as we speak. Our homeless population has increased by over a thousand. Rents are rising at approximately 18 times the rate of inflation. Rental vacancy rates are at their lowest in decades right across Western Australia, from Kununurra to Albany, including the metropolitan area. At the end of April, 16 000 applicants on the public housing waitlist were facing an average wait time of 100 weeks—two years! People are living in cars. People are living in tents in backyards or in the bush. People are over-bidding on rentals. When people turn up to a rental property these days, there is a queue outside the front door. People are living in their parents' homes. Younger Western Australians are moving back into their parents' homes. People are staying on friends' couches. Those are some of the raw statistics.

I thought I would include a couple of personal stories that I have recently been acquainted with that would give this argument some focus. I am sure there are members here who are more experienced than I am in dealing with this sort of thing. I took a call yesterday from Amanda Zera from Dalyellup, and it was very confronting for a new member of Parliament. My first instinct, of course, was to try to help. As a member of the opposition, that was awkward. During the conversation it became evident that Amanda wanted me to shine a bit of light onto her situation. I offered to make some comments on it in Parliament, and she welcomed that approach. So I will tell members a little bit about her personal circumstances.

One thing that affected me greatly was she told me that recently she could not afford to celebrate or buy a gift for her daughter on her twenty-first birthday. She is in the rental market. She cannot find anywhere at all to live. She has applied for endless rentals. She has written to the Premier but has not received a response. She has written to her local MP, Hon Don Punch, who has been in touch. She has talked to every community service organisation she can find. A gentleman from the local Salvos has been in touch with her. He was in tears talking to her about how he might be able to provide a tent at an unpowered site with a dry toilet for her family—her, her partner and four children. That was the best that he could do. She is at the end of her tether. She has run out of options. She does not quite know where to turn. Her partner is recovering from cancer treatment and that is adding to her stress level. One of her children is doing year 11 ATAR subjects. Members can imagine the stress on that family. When my children were at school, they had a lovely home to live in and were well-fed and well-clothed, and they were stressed about their ATAR subjects. I can only imagine what Amanda and her children are going through at the moment. I would like to read briefly from an email that she has sent to me, just so we get a bit of a sense of what she is going through, in her own words. The email reads —

I have applied for so many rentals, even ones I can't afford. Most are let out before a viewing even can be arranged.

I honestly don't know what to do.

I have no friends or family to "couch surf"

I have contacted Entrypoint, crisis care, Salvation Army, accord west ... you name it I have tried ... Salvation Army emergency housing support Jon, suggested that my family and I stay in a tent at buffalo beach national park in an unpowered site with a dry toilet. As much as I am willing to rough it, my children can't, my eldest 2 spend upwards of 2.5 hours on homework and study each day. They are expected to charge their school issue laptops overnight.

I'm really at a loss at what to do tomorrow.

It's very frustrating for me to continue to find empty department of housing homes. I have found 3 in my short walks around my previous suburb of Dalyellup.

I think we can sense the level of frustration that she is feeling.

Another story that members might be aware about that has received some media attention recently in the *Broome Advertiser* is that of Ms Uweinna Albert. Uweinna was born and bred in Broome and is a long-term resident. She gave birth to her third child recently and immediately after that event was informed that her rental accommodation was coming to an end and she would have to move out. Minister Carey has described what is happening in our state at the moment as a "rental tightening". I will explain what a rental tightening in Broome means: there is a 0.0 rental vacancy rate. That means Uweinna Albert had nowhere to rent—not anywhere. There is a waiting list at the caravan park. Again, she described to the *Broome Advertiser* what that means and the stresses on her family with young

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children. Interestingly, neither Amanda nor Uweinna mentioned what the stress is doing to them. We can imagine the stresses and strains on them as they attempt to find accommodation for their families.

The Broome market is very tight. There are now only a couple of houses available and the nearest alternative to that major regional centre is Derby, which is a two-and-a-half-hour drive away. Regional Western Australia is tough. By the way, this is a new definition of homelessness—Uweinna is fully employed. She is not like some of the other people we see. Obviously, homelessness is a very complicated issue, and there are a variety of reasons for people becoming homeless, but being fully employed is not usually one of them. That is what faces this woman and her family from Broome.

Back to the broader story. I have been across various parts of the state recently and the broader housing issue is raised with me everywhere I go. I was in Williams recently, which is a very small town. The first item of business at our meeting was that we need more homes for our residents and to attract staff and labour to the town. I went to Moora recently, which is an interesting place. Some very large businesses are coming to Moora and are in the process of setting up. There is a large feedlot just out of town and a large piggery. A combination of about 120 workers will arrive shortly in Moora to take up those positions. At the moment, there is nowhere for them to live. That was raised. Of course, the metropolitan area also has an issue. It is not quite as bad as the regions but it is close.

The lower priced rental markets in the metropolitan areas of Armadale and Rockingham are seeing some of the biggest rises, and the people seeking those rentals are in the least powerful position to take advantage of that. In Armadale and Rockingham, prices for those rentals have surged by 20 per cent in the past year. A year ago in Armadale, a renter could possibly have got a three-bedroom home for \$250 a week. It is now well over \$300; our research tells us it is \$320. That extra 70 bucks a week makes a huge dent in disposable income for those potential renters. I will talk a little later about what that cut in income is doing to those people.

Some of the community service organisations that we have spoken to about this are in despair. They cannot make a meaningful contribution to help these people. We heard about the Salvation Army person in Bunbury who was in tears at the suggestion that a tent was the best he could do. We have heard that the Salvos are paying regos on cars to house homeless people. That is appalling.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Could you tell us what you find the solution is? I would be very interested in that.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** We are not in government and we have not been in government for well over four and a half years. I will get to some of our solutions.

The CEO of Foodbank Western Australia, Greg Hebble, has said that in March this year his organisation saw a 40 per cent annual increase in people using its services. In April, we saw a 25 per cent increase on March's figures and we are expecting that to get worse. Those community service organisations are very nervous that people who are desperate to keep a roof over their head are therefore cutting back on food for their families, not to mention medication, clothing and power. A moratorium is about to end at the end of June on those power bills, and disconnections will follow. Those organisations are hearing anecdotal evidence that that is a building problem.

The honourable minister asked about solutions. This is happening in Western Australia at the moment, with a very powerful government that has recently been elected for a second term, with a very large surplus about to happen. The GST problem has been fixed. We have seen rivers of gold flowing in from the mining sector in royalties; yet in Western Australia, a very fortunate and very wealthy state led by a very powerful Premier who is also the Treasurer, people are living in their cars and tents. I do not think that is acceptable.

I will give members some of the numbers on the rental vacancy rates. We have heard about Broome. For a brief moment, it was zero. In April 2021, in Albany, the rental vacancy rate was 0.5 per cent; in Karratha, it was 0.9 per cent; and in Perth, it was one per cent. Those numbers tell us that the rental market is virtually full. The rental vacancy rate was well over three per cent in most of those areas 18 months ago.

This morning, some bad news for the Premier and the Minister for Housing was released related to our population numbers. In the December quarter, there was a net interstate increase in population of 1 205. That is the largest increase for a quarter since March 2013, when it was 1 601. If we have a problem now, the indication that the trend in the population numbers will go up will further test an already fragile housing market. Can we imagine if overseas students return and we get upwards of 300 000 or 400 000 coming back to Western Australia? This housing market is fragile.

What has the government done in the past four and a half years? From the figures I can find, the government built 47 homes last year. It has lost 1 350 since 2017, mostly through sell-offs. That is a staggering figure for a Labor government. In four and a half years, the government lost 1 350 homes. From the figures I have found, the government is planning to add only 2 000 homes over the next decade. That will not help. We have seen that the government is competing in the private rental market in a number of areas, Broome in particular. Where it is hard to get a government rental, it jumps into the private market. We saw an example of that recently in Guildford, where

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a Housing Authority tenant who was being housed by a private operator at the Stirling Arms Hotel did \$15 000 worth of damage. Despite what we heard from the Leader of the House yesterday, it took that operator over a year to recoup those funds. Why would a private accommodation provider give the Housing Authority a hand?

What do we want from the government? What do we want from Premier Mark McGowan and Minister Carey? A whole-of-government response to deliver affordable housing is badly needed. We need to address the growing homelessness problem and we need to back up those important community service organisations, because they are in desperate straits. Western Australians deserve that. Amanda Zera and other vulnerable Western Australians in similar circumstances to her want some hope. They badly want Minister Carey and the Premier to admit there is a crisis. “Rental tightening”—really? It is an interesting euphemism. I cannot use the language that Ms Zera used on the phone to me yesterday to describe the response she has seen, but members can imagine.

Some of the consequences from this inaction affect our vulnerable Western Australians. For example, if there is nowhere to go, victims of domestic violence will be forced to stay in dangerous situations. That is clear. There are impacts on our economy. If the rental rate in Broome is 0.0, what does an employer do? We have heard about accommodation and tourism providers in Broome and other regional centres that cannot open seven days a week and are not serving meals because they cannot find staff. How do they possibly attract staff when there is nowhere for those staff to live? What does the feedlot operator in Moora who wants 70 staff onboard shortly do when there is nowhere for them to live? As we have seen, that population number is starting to kick up. It will get worse in WA before it gets better.

I would like to close and again mention comments by Amanda Zera in Dalyellup. She is desperate for us to shine a light on this issue. She wants some hope. There is every chance that the Premier or the housing minister will not take a call from me, but they would probably take a call from members opposite. We heard some inspiring speeches from new members about their level of compassion and how they want to help vulnerable members of the community, and I agree with them. I suggest they get on the phone to the housing minister and the Premier and get them to sort this. We have a looming \$5 billion surplus. It is extraordinary that in a state as wealthy and as well resourced as this one, we have a homelessness situation and a rental crisis like we do.

I welcome contributions from other members and I thank the house for the time.

**HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [10.21 am]: I rise in support of the motion brought by Hon Steve Martin. I think it was the member’s first motion under non-government business. It is a good one too, because it is about an issue that plagues this state, as do a number of issues at the moment. This particular issue is one that we collectively need to do some work on. It is an issue of a scale that we have not seen for some time in this state with the number of people really struggling to find homes and on the waitlist for public housing. Coupled with that, of course, we have the extraordinary circumstance of tropical cyclone Seroja and the damage and devastation that caused to many communities and homes. The recovery from that will be a big challenge for the state.

It is interesting to look at the number of people looking for housing. I asked a question about the public housing waitlist in this place back in May. Indeed, the answer to that question states that as at 30 April 2021, the number of wait turn applicants for public housing in the north metropolitan region was 5 521; south metropolitan, 3 169; east metropolitan, 2 654; great southern, 539; south west, 1 201; goldfields, 451; midwest–Gascoyne, 924; Pilbara, 730; West Kimberley, 758; wheatbelt, 333; and in the East Kimberley, 380. That is a total of 16 660 people from all over Western Australia who are on the public housing waitlist. That is a significant number and an issue that needs to be addressed. One of the challenges that I came across—this was last year, really—related to people in Esperance applying for Keystart loans. As members would know, this great system helps people get into their first home and provides them with the opportunity to have some security and backing when they might not be able to get a loan commercially straight through the banks.

One of the big issues that came across my desk last year was the length of time it was taking for Keystart to approve loans and the incredible mess it made of these applications and the processes involved in people getting the security of finance they needed. I found it quite extraordinary. It was taking an inordinate amount of time. It was not the banks that were delaying it; it was Keystart. The banks were also a little bit slow, but Keystart not only took a long time to provide finance approvals for people, but also slapped unprecedented requirements on these loans—those requirements had not been seen before by many of the real estate agents out there who were trying to move or get rid of these houses.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** When was this? I want to respond.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** I am not taking interjections at the moment, minister. If the minister allows me to keep speaking, I will elaborate on when it was and what happened. One classic example is that a vendor of a house was told by Keystart that the house had to have soakwells put under the guttering downpipes. This was not a local

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planning requirement in the Shire of Esperance, but it was conditional on that loan being approved. It had never been done. It was not a requirement imposed by the local government, so the vendor said, “I’m not paying for it. Why should I have to pay for it?”, and the borrower said, “Why should I have to pay for it?” The real estate agent paid for it out of his own pocket and went out there on the weekend and dug those soakwells into the ground by hand just to get the finance across the line. I found that quite extraordinary. This was happening only mid to late last year. The agents reported to me anecdotally that they were seeing more and more requirements tacked on. They were not sure where this was coming from—whether it was a policy directive or what. These things were being tacked onto the conditions required for successful applications for these Keystart loans. It was very, very frustrating for not only the agents, of course, but also those trying to buy their first home and those, of course, trying to sell. I find it quite extraordinary that these things were being done. I know that this was raised with the then Minister for Housing, Mr Tinley, by people down in that part of the world during last year, but I am not sure what his response was. This is obviously something that will contribute, given a place like Esperance has an extremely low rental vacancy rate. It has a number of houses on the market, but it is harder for people to get into those houses when it should not be. Even though they were able to apply for a loan, the extra conditions put on them were quite extraordinary. That is one example of the issues that afflict housing. It affects, obviously, not just public housing but also people going through the Keystart program.

In the time left, I want to talk a little about the issues around the recovery from tropical cyclone Seroja. We have spoken about it in this place before, so members will be well and truly aware of the devastation that it caused and that, unfortunately, many of the houses in those smaller communities are quite old. In many cases they are probably underinsured or not even insured. The challenge then becomes how do they rebuild those homes. Added to the equation is that many of the banks will not lend large enough sums of money to enable people to rebuild those houses. Therefore, they have the challenges of the insurance issue and the financiers not wanting to willingly lend money to people in those places. On top of that is the challenge that not many people are available to go up there and build the houses, because they are all under pressure. We have this extreme situation of a lack of availability of people to build houses and a lack of available finance for those in particular areas of the state, which is a real problem. I understand that the state government is somewhat limited in its ability to tell the banks to change their practices. However, it is certainly something the government needs to work on with the federal government and the banking industry to find a way forward to ensure that people do not end up simply packing up and moving away from those regional communities, because that is not an outcome that anyone wants to see. It is not a good outcome for Western Australia, particularly regional Western Australia. It would also be an outcome that will obviously mean more pressure on housing in Perth and other bigger communities because where will those people go? That is a real problem.

With the recovery from tropical cyclone Seroja, we will no doubt uncover some real housing challenges in those regional communities on top of the existing challenges. It is therefore incredibly important that we debate a motion such as this one from Hon Steve Martin, which acknowledges that there are concerns about the way this is being addressed and about the crisis that is facing not just vulnerable Western Australians, but ordinary folk out there who, even with the wherewithal to buy, build or rent a house, are still struggling no matter where they live. We must debate issues like this in this place. We must all try to find a way forward with them and acknowledge that the government needs to step up to the plate here. This is not a problem that has gotten better over the past four years; it has gotten worse and it needs to be addressed in the immediate term so that we can continue to maintain viable regional communities as well as, obviously, look after those most vulnerable in our communities who need to have a roof over their heads. It is incumbent on all of us to try to find a way to ensure that they do.

**HON JAMES HAYWARD (South West)** [10.33 am]: Thank you very much, President. I rise to make my contribution today. Some may recall that in my maiden speech, I told two stories about the fate of some people out in the burbs. One of them was about an elderly couple I met at the Perth Caravan and Camping Show, a pretty successful event given COVID had shut down the last one, so it was pretty packed out. I was having lunch with my wife and when we went to sit down at a table there was not enough room, so we asked an elderly couple if we could join them on the other side of the table and they graciously agreed to have us.

While we were sitting eating our lunch together, they told us a story about how this married couple had been separated because they could not afford to live in their home any longer. The wife was living with one of their kids and the husband was living with another child in a different home. They had come to the caravan show and spent about \$70 000 buying a caravan so that they could reunite and live together. They were elderly people. What a terrible circumstance for them to be in. Thankfully for them, they found a solution that would allow them to reunite and live together again. I was stunned that these elderly people had somehow got through their lives to retirement and were faced with this really difficult circumstance.

I spoke also with a single mum with older kids in their early 20s in a similar situation. During the COVID pandemic, while a moratorium was put on rent rises, they could stay in their house and pay their rent. These people were

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employed. After the moratorium, the rent went up and they could not afford to stay in their house and that caused that family anxiety. That family also was separated and now living with other relatives because they simply could not find a house. These are terrible circumstances for people, for whom, in every one of our electorates, these stories are replicated. This is something that we should all be working on together. I am certainly happy to take the minister's interjections and I am happy to participate constructively in any way I can to help find some solutions that the government can put in place to help these people. That is our duty and responsibility. We will have to think outside the box. We know that down the line, I think—someone might correct me—around 22 000 new dwellings are on their way, but they will not be available for a significant time, probably two years. Right now, the situation for people like Amanda's family in Dalyellup is horrendous—the amount of anxiety it must be causing people.

Recently, I needed to rent a place to live up here while travelling for parliamentary work. I attended a couple of home opens where 12 or 16 couples were waiting to go through the houses. I have never seen anything like it. The thing is, honourable members, we are able to pay a bit more than the going rate and can solve those problems, but many Western Australians do not have that capacity. One of the great things that the Labor Party has said over the years is that it is there for the battlers, the rank-and-file workers, who do not have the capacity to deal with these things. There could be nothing more urgent, in my view, than getting some solutions to this. We need only think outside the box. We have hotels in Perth that have been used for quarantine, so maybe there is some capacity to put some people whose situation is urgent into some of those vacant hotel rooms. Maybe with perhaps some changes to planning laws some of the empty commercial buildings that line the streets of our regional centres could allow them to be converted to housing. There have to be some solutions. Every single day in this place we hear how fantastic the McGowan government is. That fantastic superhero McGowan government, as it is described almost daily in this house, needs to use that energy and great skill to solve this problem for the people of Western Australia. As I said to the minister, I am certainly happy to do whatever I can and I am sure that the opposition is happy to do whatever it can to support the government addressing this urgent need, because it will only get worse. What will happen if it gets worse? What will it mean for the people who live in our suburbs, towns and the electorates that we serve? How are they going to deal with these things? Will they have to move into caravan parks? What will happen when they are full? Will they be living on our streets? Anecdotally, there has been a rise in the number of people living rough on the streets. In Bunbury now, the number of people camping out at the Bunbury sound shell is unbelievable. I know that the state government has spent a significant amount of money on trying to help homeless people, but the reality is that the need is outstripping the supply. These are the urgent matters that the government needs to put its mind to and solve. What can we do? We need to do something. This needs to become a priority of government. The ministers and members from the McGowan government and members from the opposition need to do whatever they can to find some solutions. I would hate to think that when my children have their own families in the future, they might not find shelter. It is a basic human right. We have a massive surplus in this state thanks to the wealth of Western Australia and its iron ore royalties. It is incumbent on this government to find some solutions. We simply cannot have families living rough because of the tightening of the housing market. We must find some solutions. It is winter now. I cannot imagine the level of anxiety that those people must be feeling not knowing whether they will have shelter for their children next week or next month. It is a very difficult circumstance and a sobering thought. All members need to be working on this. I implore the state government and members to do whatever they can to find a solution for these people. Thank you.

**HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (South West — Minister for Regional Development)** [10.42 am]: I really appreciate the member bringing forward this motion. Homelessness is a very important issue in Western Australia. When we hear stories like Amanda's from Dalyellup, we are deeply concerned and we want to find a solution. I absolutely understand Amanda's experience, because I have seen this happen in other towns where I have spent a bit of time, where there appears to be vacant Homeswest housing whilst people are struggling to get into accommodation. I know that Minister Carey has made it absolutely a priority to make sure that each and every one of those houses is identified and that we get on with repairing them. Members will recall that in 2019, we made a significant commitment of around \$400 million to the Social Housing Economic Recovery Package, which was designed to move forward with repairing those houses. We are very committed to doing that.

I am going to explain some of the bigger underlying problems in this area in Western Australia and how a great deal of social disadvantage is created when governments drive our economy into a decline. I want to outline a couple of key facts. Since 2019, we have committed a billion dollars to improve public and social housing stock. One of the challenges is that we are now entering into a very heated market and it is very difficult to get the money out the door in that heated, building environment.

**Hon Neil Thomson** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

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**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN:** I am going to explain how this works and outline one of the fundamental problems with the Western Australian economy. Before we get ourselves totally into a negative space, and without denying that there are instances of very tough times, I want us to have a bit of a sense of where we really are. Earlier this month, an article by the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia stated —

Despite strong market conditions, Western Australia is still the most affordable state for housing and rentals ...

It refers to the Real Estate Institute of Australia's report and continues —

The report found that the proportion of family income needed to meet loan repayments in WA during the March 2021 quarter was 24.8 per cent, while the proportion of family income needed to meet rent payments was 18.7 per cent.

That was contrasted with every other state and found that we were certainly the most affordable state. For example, in New South Wales, 43.5 per cent of an income was required to fund a housing repayment, and 28.6 per cent was needed for rental payments.

We have a fundamental problem with our economy: it is a boom and bust economy. I am not going to blame the previous government for anything, but members have to understand what has happened. The massive mining construction boom started around 2004. It dipped during the global financial crisis, but it basically continued up until 2015. At the end of the boom, it collapsed. The economy then went into a tailspin. Mining is a fantastic industry and it underpins the economy, but we have been saying that we have to do more. We cannot just be all about mining construction. We have to diversify the economy with, for example, manufacturing and food processing. We cannot keep having these cycles, because when we have the next mining construction boom, we will not have the people or the materials to get more done. Those of us who have been in government over a number of decades have seen these cycles. It is very unfortunate that during those great opportunities that were available under the Barnett government, it made very little effort to diversify. We are trying to do that because if we continue to go through this boom and bust cycle, we are going to have a major problem.

After 2015, the housing market collapsed. It peaked at around 24 000 housing approvals per year, and then it collapsed down to as low as 10 approvals per year. It has only started to build in the last two years, and now it is back up to 24 000 building starts. During that period with a low number of housing starts, stock is not coming onto the market, so first home buyers who would normally be buying their own home are not. They stay in rental accommodation, which puts pressure on rental accommodation. I know that Hon James Hayward feels there is no end in sight to this. We do not think that is right because there has been tremendous growth in the number of building approvals. That will obviously take a year or so to translate into housing, but we will see a very significant increase in housing stock. We have been actively putting in place these first home buyer and building bonuses, and working with the commonwealth to put in its bonuses, to stimulate construction. A considerable percentage of these housing starts are first home buyers, but there are also investors. We brought investors back into the market. No investors were entering the market between 2015 and 2018. They were not in the market, but they are coming back into the market. That means we will have an increase in housing stock. Overlaying the boom and bust cycle is the COVID-19 problem and, as Hon Colin de Grussa said, we had cyclone Seroja. We have all these issues, but we are investing and finding ways to assist. We are confident that this housing supply problem will be addressed over the next 18 months. The clear, demonstrable figures over the last 18 months have shown a massive increase in housing starts. That is good news; it means more product on the market, more available housing and, hopefully, we will start to see a stabilisation of the construction industry. The government is pushing a billion dollars into various programs to build new housing, renovate existing product and stimulate affordable housing through the Metronet project.

I will tell a bit of a story about negative equity. In 2017, when I first came back into this place, a former constituent of mine from when I was member for Armadale had died and I was the executor for her will. Joyce had worked very hard all her life. She had asked me to be the executor and trustee of her estate because one of her children had a disability. She lived in the old part of Armadale. She had a beautiful four-bedroom house with two bathrooms and a built-in swimming pool; it was in a bit of disrepair, but, fundamentally, it was a beautiful property. But the value of that property had gone down. Ultimately, we had to sell that property for about \$260 000. Many, many people in Armadale who bought their houses some time after 2003 would have paid much more for those houses. They were in a negative equity situation. Members have to remember what was going on in the community in 2017. One of the things that contributed to the Liberal–National government losing office was its financial mismanagement, and property values were going down. Certainly, rental vacancies were going up, but the value of people's homes was going down. The member talked about the people of Armadale. I know the people of Armadale; I represented that area for 17 years. One of the things those people hate the most is when their only asset goes through a period of depreciation. The whole area then feels like it is in a black hole. These things are not good. It is not good for areas like Armadale, Rockingham or Kwinana when property values are going down. Those people, whose only

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asset is their house, are the people who differentially suffer. They do not have a block of shares or other things. When the house price market drops, those low-income working people are the most differentially disadvantaged. We want to make sure that people in suburbs like Armadale and Gosnells have pride and a sense that they have an asset that is valuable, and that they will be able to have something to pass on to their children or so that they can move, if they so desire. It is really important to see the impact of negative equity.

Many people were really surprised to see the demise of Brendon Grylls, the former Leader of the National Party, in his seat in the Pilbara. I campaigned with Kevin Michel in that electorate, and one of the key issues that we constantly came across was the negative equity situation that so many people in the Pilbara were experiencing. I remember Brendon Grylls standing in the Parliament and criticising us for the price of rental properties. Well, at the end of the day, when the whole market collapsed and a three-bedroom house in Karratha could be purchased for \$400 000, if not less, attached to that was that a whole heap of people who had worked very hard to buy properties were in a situation of negative equity. Let us be aware of the sequelae of this.

There are some good sides to what has been happening. WA has started an uptick in its population. Notwithstanding COVID, people are coming back to Western Australia. The population in Melbourne is declining and people are migrating elsewhere, but WA is seeing a modest growth in our population, which is a sign of our strength.

**HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral)** [10.57 am]: I rise to make a small contribution in favour of the motion moved by Hon Steve Martin. I recently met with a representative from Shelter WA, which is a frontline First Nations housing advocacy group that is calling on the government to increase its contributions to help fix the housing crisis. In a recent media release, Shelter WA set out three simple demands of the current government. The first is to commit to building 2 500 public houses a year, with 20 per cent put aside for vulnerable First Nations families. To put this into context, public housing stock has decreased by more than 1 000 properties over the past four years, and now 17 000 families are on the wait list, which is an increase of 3 000 since the start of the pandemic. The second ask is to save the First Nations homelessness project. Shelter WA claims this is the most effective eviction-prevention program in Western Australia. It is a voluntary-based program and its mission is to prevent Indigenous families being evicted from public housing across Perth. The third ask is to end the policy of no grounds for evictions, which is forcing record numbers of WA families from their homes. To expand on this, there have been more than 600 evictions from public housing each year since the current government came to office, half of which were of Indigenous families. Given the Victorian government recently committed to building thousands of new properties in its recent budget announcement, it seems that WA should be in a strong position to increase its commitment given the recent \$5 billion budget surplus.

**HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan)** [10.59 am]: My contribution to this motion follows on nicely from Hon Wilson Tucker's. Whether we call it a crisis or a severe challenge, we all agree that there is undoubtedly a major homelessness issue facing WA right now. I will not repeat the statistics that have been mentioned by members, but I will add a couple. Of the more than 9 000 people experiencing homelessness in WA right now, one in three—over 3 000—is a child. That statistic is worth remembering. We need major investment in social and affordable housing if we are to seriously help the more than 25 000 people on the public housing waitlist. I do not want to go into a tit for tat about what should or should not happen, but I am pleased that we are talking about this issue and that both sides of the chamber acknowledge more needs to be done. That is something I fully support.

I also want to acknowledge that we have come a long way. It is important to mention that we are talking about a Housing First approach—one that acknowledges that we will not solve homelessness or these issues unless we actually get people into housing. The sector broadly agrees with the approach of the Housing First Homelessness Initiative, but, of course, the Housing First initiative will work only if housing is available and we have places to put these people. To do that we need to strongly focus on getting people into housing and ensure that the wraparound services that are a part of the Housing First initiative work.

Minister McGurk spoke in the other place recently about the success of the Housing First project in Fremantle, which was largely funded through the philanthropic work of the private sector. I want to acknowledge Matthew McNeilly of Sirona Capital, who drove that program with contributions from both the state government and the City of Fremantle. That project was hugely successful and resulted in 20 long-term homeless people living in housing for the first time. It has a very high retention rate in terms of the people who are coming in and is a really good program, but the fundamental fact is that the funding for that program has now ceased. It was a great program that was largely funded by the private sector, the City of Fremantle and the state government, which prompts me to ask the question: why are we not seeing grant funding for successful programs like the Housing First initiative going forward? That is at the heart of this matter. I hope that we can maintain this multi-partisan agreement as we approach the state budget in September so that we can increase the funding for programs such as 20 Homes, 20 Lives and it becomes a project for several hundred homes and several hundred lives, and targets rough sleepers across our state. We also need to target greater investment into building social housing.

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The minister talked about the \$1 billion investment in social housing. That is great, but we need to be more ambitious. Hon Wilson Tucker talked about Victoria, and I want to add some numbers to that. Victoria is spending \$5.4 billion to create 12 000 new homes in four years, 9 300 of which will be social housing. We need that kind of ambitious project. There is a very big gap between what Victoria is doing and this state government's approach of about 260 houses a year, which clearly will not meet the demand. Of course, some of that will be lifted by the private market, but most private rentals are not affordable for people on basic minimum wages. There needs to be greater investment in social housing if we are to be serious about this.

Investment is needed in wraparound services—in mental health programs and other programs that support people to get out of being homeless and into housing. I want to back up Hon Wilson Tucker's comments about the First Nations homelessness project. Through early intervention, that program has helped to get more than 1 500 children off the streets and into houses, but it will lose its funding at the end of this month. The federal government argues that housing is a state government responsibility, but it is important that that is picked up. It would be absurd if, right at the peak of a housing crisis, more First Nations people in this state were evicted from their homes.

Finally, I want to say that we need to rethink planning. If we are serious about addressing the housing shortage in the long term, we need to rethink our planning systems and how houses are built. The grants that came out through the last COVID-19 stimulus were really good in stimulating the building of houses. A vast majority of that money went towards building houses on the urban fringe, but we have to ask ourselves: are we building the right houses in the right place or are we just building more large houses? I make that point because in Australia, and in WA in particular, we are actually building the largest houses in the world. It is no wonder we have a housing affordability crisis when so few people are living in those houses. We need the right kind of incentives, the right stimulus and the right investment from this government so that we can get housing where it is needed. We should be building housing that supports our urban centres, is well linked to public transport and adds to the diversity of the size and mix of housing that is needed, and not just predominantly building housing on the urban fringe. These are just some long-term solutions to the housing crisis. We need to get out of the loop of creating huge amounts of stimulus, which just push more and more housing to the urban fringe.

The housing and homelessness crisis that the state is currently facing is solvable. I congratulate the opposition for bringing this issue into the public realm. We need to have this discussion. At the back of this I do not want to see us reverting to a business-as-usual approach. As we come to the budget, this is an opportunity for us to start thinking about how to better deliver housing and wraparound services in the right place, and the right amount of housing. We cannot simply do what we have always done and think that the problem has been solved. I hope that as we approach the budget, we can get agreement across all sides of the chamber for more investment in housing, and more investment in social housing, homelessness housing and wraparound services. For me, that would be a sign of success in moving the state forward.

**HON PIERRE YANG (North Metropolitan)** [11.07 am]: Members may recall that I have been participating in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout for the past four years, and next Thursday I will be participating for the fifth time. This motion has a lot to do with providing a very important service to the community—that is, housing. Homelessness is part of that. Homelessness is related to the very important issue of housing. Members should also remember that this government has worked tirelessly to address this very important issue. There has been a lot of investment. As we heard from the minister, \$1 billion will be spent on providing related services to address this very important issue. Members opposite need to remember that the Barnett Liberal–National coalition government had no strategy and no plan to address the issue of housing.

Several members interjected.

**Hon PIERRE YANG:** Some members of the opposition are interjecting. Those members need to remember that housing and homelessness did not just become issues when the McGowan government was elected in 2017; this is a longstanding issue, and many governments around the world are trying to address it. If there were a solution, I am sure it would have been found already. Hon James Hayward said that this is a very important issue that we need to work on together, and I agree with the honourable member. This is a very important issue. It is a human rights issue and we should work together to find a solution. The government is on the right track. Former Minister for Housing Hon Peter Tinley worked tirelessly on this issue. The current minister, Minister John Carey, is a compassionate gentleman who has been working on this since the start of his time as minister. It is important that we look at the history of this issue rather than saying, “You guys have been in government since 2017; it's your problem. You solve it!” No; it is not.

I wish to remind the house that back in 2011 when Hon Rob Johnson was the Minister for Police, we had the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth. It was a very important event in the history of this state. The Barnett government moved hundreds of people who were experiencing homelessness out of the city area. When a question was asked of him in Parliament, he said words to the effect of: “We had to find a place for them to



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sleep. I'll give them a tent or a sleeping bag." That was the attitude of that government. Members of the opposition are in coalition with each other. Let us not forget what their former colleagues were doing at that time. That is in stark contrast to this government. We have people's best interests at heart. We know that it is important for people to have a roof over their heads. That is the difference we see.

Let us not forget what their federal colleagues did. I spoke in this house after the federal budget had been delivered for the 2018–19 financial year. Millions of dollars previously allocated to the state of Western Australia for remote housing were chopped from the federal budget. Where were those members when that happened? If they are truly interested in this issue, let us talk about the whole history. Let us look at what was not done and what should be done from here. Those members should look at the 10-year strategy that this government has put in place, which addresses the issue of homelessness with the support of industry leaders like Ruah Community Services.

The minister mentioned that our state relies on the mining and resources sector. Inevitably, we go through boom and bust cycles, as we have seen over the past 20 years. As a direct result of that, the property market also goes through cycles. Let us not forget that in March 2017, more than 80 000 Western Australians were unemployed. Because of the McGowan government's plan for jobs that we took to the 2017 election, over 80 000 jobs have been created over the past four years. I remember something Bill Clinton said during his first presidential election campaign in the 1990s: "It's the economy, stupid." Members opposite should know that. The last Liberal–National government wrecked the state's finances, wrecked the state's economy, had no plan for housing or addressing the issue of homelessness and had an arrogant attitude when it came to people who were experiencing homelessness. Let us look at the difference between that government and this government. Let us look at the stark contrast between the attitude of the Barnett government and the caring and compassionate nature and approach of the McGowan government and its passionate and hardworking ministers.

**Hon Neil Thomson** interjected.

**Hon PIERRE YANG:** Members opposite are just trying to politicise this issue, which is really sad. It is very sad that such an important issue is being politicised by members opposite. They will not, and cannot, hold back; they cannot help themselves from interjecting.

Several members interjected.

**Hon PIERRE YANG:** Members opposite were heard in silence all along. I was here a lot of the time this morning, and it is really sad that members opposite are trying to politicise this issue and score political points.

I come back to the issue of the economy. When people have jobs, they are more likely to be able to afford rent and mortgage repayments. This government, during COVID, put in the rent moratorium. Members opposite should look at that and say that that was a good initiative on the government's part and that it helped a lot of Australians during a time of crisis. But no; we heard nothing from the opposition. The only thing those members want to do is criticise the government and try to hide the devastating impact of the federal government's funding cuts from its budget. I said in my speech back in 2018 that the federal government showed great contempt for the people of Western Australia by removing a big chunk of the budget that was supposed to be for Western Australian remote communities. It is really sad that members opposite are trying to politicise the issue. They ignore the \$1 billion put in by this government, the 10-year strategy that the government has developed and the fact that their mismanagement of the economy had a devastating impact on housing in this state.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot):** Just before I give the call to Hon Neil Thomson, I remind members that should no-one seek the call once a member finishes their contribution before the time allocated to the motion has expired, I will offer the call to the mover of the motion by way of a reply.

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [11.18 am]:** This debate on the motion is very frustrating. Members have heard me interject a few times. I am feeling frustrated because we are not getting any acknowledgement of the problem; we are just getting more of the same old, same old. It is *deja vu*. The Minister for Regional Development spoke about the economy and all the issues around the demand side—I am really surprised by that—for housing and the way the Western Australian economy is going.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** I talked about supply!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** No, the minister hardly mentioned it. The minister did not say a single thing about what the government is going to do to supply.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** I talked about supply. I talked expressly about supply. I was talking about the number of housing sites.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** It was all about how great the McGowan government has driven the economy—all demand economics. I am surprised with the minister. I am really surprised because this is *deja vu* from the honourable member. She has been in exactly the same —

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**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** I am struggling to hear the debate over the noise. I am sure you were just about to raise that.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot):** Yes. Hon Colin de Grussa, you are not the only one. Can I suggest to the member that you address your remarks to me. That will make it very easy for everybody to stay calm.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you, Acting President. Yes. This is *deja vu* for the honourable member. She was in exactly the same position in 2005 when the north of Western Australia, the part of the country that I live in, had the same problem. We had an absolute housing crisis and we saw the consequences of that. She referred to Hon Brendon Grylls, an absolute hero of the north. He turned the situation around and we saw new housing and apartments built in unprecedented numbers.

Hon Pierre Yang spoke about all the work that this government has done in the area of public housing. He talked about all the things that the Barnett government did not do and all the cuts that happened. Not a single bit of data was put on the table of this house to present what has actually happened. I can tell members what has happened. I am not going to spend too much time because I just want to get down to the data and the facts. Before I do, I want to mention that I would give counsel to this government to go onto Facebook, go to those community pages, become a member and listen to the Facebook chatter. On those community pages there is an absolute stream of desperation being presented to the community about people's housing situations. There are many situations like the examples given here, such as the single mother who is looking for social housing but is not able to find a house and has been told that there is a five-year waiting list, or the poor French backpackers in Broome who were trying to do the right thing and work in the area of hospitality who were told that they will have to spend \$400 a week for a tent site in order to stay in that community and provide a valuable service for the tourism industry.

At the moment, we can just go onto that thing called the internet, have a look at it and see what people are saying, go on to realestate.com.au, check it out today and find out how many houses are available for rent in Kununurra right now. There are two houses available on realestate.com.au. That is the situation. We know it is a crisis. There is something that the government could do about it. In fact, there was something the government could have done about it over the last four years and actually made a difference. Instead, we are in a crisis situation. We can talk about building houses and making things happen or whatever, but unfortunately the horse has already bolted. If the government did something, I would be the first to get up here and commend the government and the minister on the things that she is doing. I would commend the Minister for Housing on the things he is doing if he were actually going out and doing something. But let us look at the actual facts on WA public sector new houses and other dwellings. These are the facts: under the Barnett government, in construction, a total of 10 157 houses were built. Under this Labor government, 2 449 were built. I ask this question: how is that more than under the Barnett government? Let us have a look at the housing commencements for all houses in the Kimberley. Under the Barnett government, in 2014, for example, 202 houses were built in the Kimberley. In 2015, 123 were built, and in 2016, 93 were built. Yes, the economy was going backwards. Maybe the alarm bells were starting to ring. In 2017, 53 houses were built. But do you know what happened when the Labor government came into power? It went down to 44, and in 2019 it went down to 31 housing commencements in the Kimberley. We have a situation in which 31 houses were built in the Kimberley, and we wonder why there is a shortage. We have to do something. I am not going to take any more time—I know other people would like to speak—but I could talk for a very long time on the data. There is data there to prove that there is a problem.

**HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [11.24 am]** — in reply: I would like to thank honourable members for their contributions. I agree with Hon Brad Pettitt that this should be a bipartisan situation. We have people sleeping in cars and tents in Western Australia. That is not appropriate.

I would like to thank the minister for her contribution. She reminded us that Armadale is one of a number of electorates and districts that she has represented and she knows that area well. She mentioned the REIWA stats and she said that WA is affordable. It is, but that only matters if there are houses available. In Broome, a rental vacancy rate of 0.0 means it does not matter what they cost, there are not any available for rent. Availability is the issue here, not necessarily the dollars that people are spending. Hon Wilson Tucker mentioned Indigenous housing. The waitlist rates on Indigenous housing are longer than everywhere else. I agree entirely that that is an issue that needs our urgent attention.

Hon Pierre Yang mentioned Colin Barnett. I will pass on to Amanda Zera that he is responsible and that she should give him a call to sort this problem. After four and a half years, I am getting a little sick of hearing about him. I was not in the Parliament when Colin Barnett was here; I have been here three weeks.

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**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** I am keen to see how many more years of blaming Colin Barnett we will get.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** I am in reply. Minister, I am not taking interjections with 30 seconds left. I will pass on your remarks to her. You mentioned that it was sad or you were sad or there was a sad response to what has happened today. You never mentioned her.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** I did!

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** I am talking to Hon Pierre Yang. I am sorry, chair; I should have addressed that through you. I never heard Hon Pierre Yang mention her circumstances as being sad.

I thank honourable members for the chance to raise this important issue this morning. Thank you.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.