

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 17 May on the following motion moved by Hon Michael Mischin (Attorney General) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 4085A–E (budget papers 2016–17) laid upon the table of the house Thursday, 12 May 2016.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral) [3.07 pm]: I rise today to make a contribution on the budget that was released last week. I will say from the outset, Madam Deputy President, that I have a cold, so I will not be taking interjections this afternoon from anybody, and I will not be encouraging them either, because the nasty people on the far side know how to, and love to, drag me astray. However, I will be focused on making my contribution and pointing out how terrible I think this budget is and how people right around Western Australia, but particularly in regional Western Australia and in my Mining and Pastoral electorate, will suffer as a result.

What do we know? We know that the Treasurer has revealed that debt is heading towards \$40 billion in this budget and in the years to come. We know, too, that we will have a record deficit of almost \$4 billion this year, leading to that record debt of \$40 billion over the years to come. We know from the budget papers that the budget deficit this financial year is forecast to be \$2 billion and \$3.9 billion in 2016–17. State debt is forecast to reach \$27.8 billion this financial year and \$33.8 billion next year, before hitting that \$40 billion mark in 2018–19. We know, too, that people right around the state will face increased costs and charges as a result of this budget. Household fees and charges are estimated to rise, adding \$257 to family bills. Power will go up by three per cent and water by 4.5 per cent. Members have to recall that since this government came to power in 2008, we have had massive fee increases to water and electricity, so much so that people right around the state are well and truly suffering.

We have also seen a range of changes in the budgets of the three agencies for which I am the shadow minister in this place. In the child protection space, some of the much-needed money that was added to the budget last year because of the growing need in that portfolio has been taken back, with about \$3 million being removed from child protection. The government gave with one hand and took away with the other. It sang from on high last year about the extra funding it provided because of the great need in the child protection space, only to see this year that money taken away. That is an absolute disgrace. We continue to see the number of children in care rise. We continue to see vulnerable families around the state in need of more support, yet money has been taken out of that area in the budget.

We have also seen confirmation in the budget that royalties for regions funding provided for the Best Beginnings program over the past few years has been taken away. That money will be removed in total in 2017–18. That not only puts the program at risk, but also is the death knell for that program. That program worked with families and, by intervening early and providing support and assistance to families, it helped stop the need for children going into care. Yet again, the government has taken money away from that area.

In the disability space, the Disability Services Commission did not fare quite as badly as some other agencies but, according to the budget document, its funding is also going backwards. I will delve into those issues in greater detail later on. I am afraid to say that the Mental Health Commission's budget has not fared as well as those of some other agencies. We see, as a result of an authorised expenditure review, that over \$28 million will be gouged from the Mental Health Commission over the next four years. That includes over \$13 million that would have gone to non-government organisations providing much-needed and very valuable services to the people of Western Australia who need to access mental health services. We have also seen taken away \$4.4 million worth of grants that would have gone to non-government organisations to help them with a range of programs to prevent mental health issues and to promote mental wellbeing.

Earlier this week I asked a question of the minister in this place who represents the Minister for Mental Health to find out which mental health non-government organisations would receive less funding next year than they received this year. In her reply, the minister told me that organisations such as DADAA, which was formerly known as Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts WA, had received \$171 000 in funding last year, but this year will receive zero. This occurred only days after DADAA won a community services excellence award for the work it does. Cutting its funding is an absolutely appalling decision. We also saw the Mental Illness Fellowship of Western Australia lose over \$112 000 of funding. The funding for Midwest Community Living Association that began providing vital services in the Agricultural Region has decreased from \$21 000 this year to zilch, zero, next year. We have seen funding for the Silver Chain Group of \$328 000 last year from the Mental Health Commission reduced to \$240 000; an amount of \$68 000 has been taken away from that organisation that provides services right around the state, including my own electorate of Mining and Pastoral Region. Silver Chain engages, particularly, with elderly people who may well have mental health issues or

whose family members may be dealing with mental health issues. We have seen funding halved for the school of psychiatry and neuroclinical sciences at the University of Western Australia. This year it will receive \$1.2 million, but that will go down to \$600 000 next year. What will that change mean for the staff providing research or other services there? What will this 50 per cent reduction do to that service? We have also seen the school of psychology at UWA lose over \$40 000 worth of funding. We have seen the Youth Affairs Council of WA, which previously received \$150 000 from the Mental Health Commission, have its funding reduced to zero. Funding for Befriend WA was reduced from \$56 000 to zero, and Blue Shirt Wednesday's funding was reduced from \$35 000 to zero. Funding for Living Proud, which is another organisation doing fantastic work dealing with people with mental health, goes from \$70 000 down to probably \$35 000, although the estimated final amount is to be determined, according to the minister's answer. Funding for Inclusion WA, which is another organisation with which I have had many dealings and which has done some great work right around the state, has had its funding reduced from \$125 000 down to zero. Consumers of Mental Health WA, in Cannington, is also losing funding—in this case, about \$13 000. All these funding cuts will make a big difference to these organisations and to the services being offered to people with mental illness and with mental health issues.

As I said, the government has removed \$28 million from the Mental Health Commission budget. That is a concern. Although members will have heard the government announce with much fanfare some money for a new plan to combat methamphetamine usage, which I have to say I welcome, it is disappointing that the government has given with one hand to a meth plan and taken away with the other. It is giving \$13 million or \$14 million to a meth plan, but it has taken \$28 million away from the Mental Health Commission. Again, that is a great disappointment. I will come back to those issues later on, but I wanted to set the scene and remind members what we have faced over the past few years under this government.

In 2013–14 we saw land tax rise by 12.5 per cent and again in 2014–15 by 10 per cent. We have heard Nigel Satterley and other people in the community tell us why these increases have not been good for their sectors or industry. Have we seen any relief for them in this budget? We have not! Over the years, since this government came to power, we have seen increases in the landfill levy, train station parking fees, the removal of motor vehicle concessions, and massive increases in utility costs, yet we find ourselves in this predicament—this government has led us into this, by the way—in which the state has record debt that is much worse than forecast and a record deficit that, again, is worse than forecast. How can Western Australia have ended up in this situation? As the Leader of the Opposition in the other place has said and placed on the record, the Liberal–National government's legacy to Western Australia is a financial wreck. It is leaving us with a record debt and deficit, with job losses and privatisation confusion. I will touch on those issues later.

I want to spend time this afternoon talking about my electorate, the Mining and Pastoral Region, which covers a big area of the state. Each region in my electorate is very different, but residents throughout the region face many of the same issues.

I start off in the Pilbara where over the past weeks and months we have had a massive spike in certain crime rates. We have had a great deal of antisocial behaviour. We have had young people roaming the streets at night getting up to all sorts of mischief and causing all sorts of distress throughout the community. What do we see in this budget for dealing with those issues? Do we see extra money for police in the Mining and Pastoral Region or extra money for police in the Pilbara, Port Hedland and South Hedland? We do not! We are seeing increases in crime rates, more antisocial behaviour and people starting to take their concerns into their own hands. In fact, last week a group of concerned citizens met in Hedland to talk about what can be done as they are frustrated with the authority's lack of action. So strong is the concern amongst the community that people are starting to take matters into their own hands. I do not encourage vigilantism. I abhor it. One story floating around town at the moment is that a driver of a car allegedly knocked down a young person whom they suspected of breaking into their property and stealing things. That was in only the last few weeks. That is a shocking thing to do and people should never do it, but such is the frustration amongst the community now that people are starting to resort to these things because they cannot get assistance and support from the police. I know the police officers in Hedland. I speak to them and they are a good, committed bunch of people who work extremely hard. Senior Sergeant Dean Snashall, the officer in charge of South Hedland police, started there recently and has brought innovation to that station and has tried to do things differently. He has tried to reduce crime and tackle some of the main houses in town where a lot of the antisocial behaviour occurs, whether it is drugs, domestic violence or whatever issue, but his hands are tied. He has only limited resources. Extra resources have not been given to him to tackle those issues around the community.

Again, we see another funding cut in this budget, and this time it is to the regional Youth Justice program. In the coming year, \$7.5 million will be removed from that program. It will go from \$15 million to \$7.5 million this year, and then it will be scrapped altogether in 2017–18. This program aims to reduce youth offending. Why is it being cut? This program was announced with much fanfare because something needed to be done to reduce youth offending. Last week's budget announced that this important program will be scrapped to fix this

government's financial mess. The Liberal-National government will cut \$7.5 million from the program in the coming year and then scrap it the year after. That will affect both the Kimberley and Pilbara, two areas within which members know there are issues, particularly among our younger Aboriginal population but also among the general population. Sometimes some of these Aboriginal people get in trouble for committing minor crimes. Once they get in the system, we send them down to Perth, they consort with other people here and go back to their communities with more skills or greater capacity to engage in much worse activities or commit worse crimes. This program was about tackling that and stopping youth offending or reoffending.

What is particularly galling about the budget papers this year is that this funding cut was listed as a saving. Let us be honest; no money will be saved as a result of the money being taken away from this area. Although the government can book it on a line item and a budget paper, it can rest assured that not tackling these issues will cost the community much, much more than \$15 million or \$7.5 million in the coming year. It will cost us much, much more in the long run.

Youth crime is a huge issue in the Kimberley and the Pilbara. All those towns, all those communities, have embraced technology. We all have Facebook pages and people share what is going on in the community. We have only to look at a Broome or Hedland Facebook page to see that people are at their wit's end. People are sick of their houses being broken into, their property being stolen and motorbikes or quad bikes roaming the streets all hours of the day and night. People want action and for this to be stopped. People want more money for police and more resources in those towns. People want more such programs. Any program that could prevent kids from entering into a life of crime should be supported. We all know that it is crucial that we address these issues in the early stages of a child's life. The longer we leave it, the more we put people at risk and the greater chance of kids reoffending. Really these cuts show that the Liberal-National government has given up on certain kids in the Kimberley and the Pilbara.

We should be investing more in these programs. We need to reduce youth offending. We need to give at-risk families the support they need. We should not be cutting the funding. One of the things this program did was enable communities to become more involved and to be part of the solution. Programs such as the Yiriman Project in the Kimberley, which has been around for a long time and has been funded only recently by government, is Aboriginal community-led. It is elder-led and gets young people involved in culture and out on country. It works to stop young people from reoffending. These programs work, particularly the Yiriman Project. The Minister for Corrective Services, Hon Joe Francis, announced in last year's budget that this program would get funding for the next couple of years. He did not do it because of public pressure. He did it because he knew that these types of projects work. However, as a result of these changes and the Regional Youth Justice program being gutted and scrapped, because the money is disappearing, those types of programs will fall by the wayside. As I said, that will not result in a saving of \$15 million to the state or anybody. We will all well and truly pay for this short-sighted decision. It shows that this government does not have a priority for reducing crime. It might talk about it at various times, but when the going gets tough, the tough get going. It is thanks to the government's profligate spending and wastage elsewhere that programs that deliver, do good work and help young people stop reoffending, get gutted. The government's own figures tell us—this is from a press release last year—that it costs more than \$814 a day to keep a young person in detention. Surely we are better off using a small proportion of that money and, instead of spending it on locking up kids, putting it into these types of programs to stop them from getting there in the first place and into a system of revolving doors. Surely that would be a benefit for all of us in this state.

This year's budget does not mention Port Hedland marina, but this is another issue that has people talking in the Pilbara in particular. There is money in previous budgets, and I dare say there is probably no mention in this budget because the government has not taken the funding away yet. The community and I believe that there is money on the table to build this marina, but we have not seen or heard anything from this government for at least the past year or so about where it is at. We are seeing no leadership on this issue from the government whatsoever. The last time the Premier was in Hedland, a question about this project was asked of him and he seemed to say that it was getting all too hard. BHP Billiton did not like the proposed siting of it at the spoil bank. There were environmental issues if we moved it elsewhere, but no solution was suggested. Problems were raised, but no solutions were proffered.

We have seen absolutely no leadership from the government on this issue whatsoever. People in the regions and in my electorate have loved the royalties for regions program and getting funding for various projects, but people have long memories. When something is promised and it is not delivered, people well and truly remember those broken promises. We have made many speeches in this place about the fully funded and fully costed policy promises that that mob on the other side have made and broken over the years. That is not what my speech is about today, but people remember that. Certainly in the case of the Port Hedland marina, people are talking about the lack of leadership from government in making sure that this long-promised project is delivered.

The other issue I raise is more broadly about the Pilbara rather just Port Hedland. I say today that I am pleased that finally we might see some movement on a new mental health facility for the Pilbara—another long-promised commitment. At the last election both Labor and the Liberals promised it, but we have seen nothing—absolutely no movement—since then. In fact, looking back at the budget papers over the past few years, we have seen money come in and go out again. We hear promises made that this will happen, only to see months later that it is not; it is not even on the table. I believe that finally in these budget papers there is money for such a service in Karratha. I know that members who represent other regions around the state, including Bunbury in the South West Region, share the same frustrations that I do as a member for the Mining and Pastoral Region. They, too, have been promised such a facility for a very long time and they, too, do not hold much confidence that such a facility will ever see the light of day. Although this facility is in the budget papers now, I have very little confidence that the service will be delivered. In fact, I feel like a doubting Thomas. Until I see the holes in the hands, until I see the key being put in the lock of the door and the door opening, I will not believe that the facility will finally be delivered to the Pilbara.

It is a much-needed service. I have known families who, over the past few months, have needed to access acute inpatient care in the Pilbara, and in the most recent case they have had to go to Broome. For people in the metropolitan area who do not appreciate the tyranny of distance or the size of this state, it is only up the road. I know it is not really up the road. I know I jokingly say that I am just driving home to Hedland for the weekend. It is 600 kilometres away. We are lawmakers not law-breakers, so if I drive at 110 kilometres an hour, it is five and half to six hours' drive away. When a person is suffering from mental illness and they are up for it, they want to be close to home. They want to have visits from those people who love them—their family members—and it is not always feasible for someone to pop to Broome, five and a half or six hours up the road, to visit their loved ones who are receiving inpatient care at the acute facility in Broome. Members would be surprised that that happens quite often; they have to go to either Broome or Perth. Finally, this service, hopefully being delivered over the next little while, will make a great difference to the lives of people in the Pilbara.

I want to keep on the mental health theme, but I will move to the goldfields–Esperance region now. Unfortunately, people in the goldfields–Esperance region will not get their much promised mental health subacute facility. The lack of this facility, or the on-again off-again or the much promised nature of this facility has been a sore point for the community. I know the member for Kalgoorlie in the other place has made public comments since the budget—in fact, she made them last week—about her frustrations with this on-again off-again promise. The new Minister for Mental Health has commented on the record in the past few days to say that it is not in the budget because of low demand. Try to tell that to the people of Kalgoorlie and the goldfields–Esperance region. Bear in mind that such a facility would service not only Kalgoorlie–Boulder, but also places like Norseman, Esperance, the Lands, Leonora, Laverton and the whole goldfields–Esperance region. The reason that the facility was promised a few years ago was the need for such a facility. There is a locked ward at the Kalgoorlie Health Campus, but a step-up, step-down facility would allow people leaving acute inpatient care to step down and step back out into the community. Such a facility would also, in some cases, stop the need for some people to seek acute inpatient care.

Minister Mitchell has said on the record that the decision to remove the money from this year's budget was due to low demand. She said that the decision was based on further analysis and a review of patient demand in Kalgoorlie–Boulder that revealed current and projected inpatient care requirements were adequately met by the mental health unit at Kalgoorlie Health Campus. That is not what I hear from the community. It certainly has not been the case over the past few months.

Over the past few months I have asked questions of the former minister and the new minister in the other place about the recruitment freeze that has been in operation since December last year. I have to say that Kalgoorlie–Boulder hospital has been one of those facilities that has been hit the hardest.

Hon Kate Doust: I was born there.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not going to take interjections from Hon Kate Doust either!

Time and again when I have asked questions in this place, I have had evidence presented to me in answers that show that when senior health staff at that hospital leave, they are not replaced. In some cases positions lie vacant for months. Senior mental health professionals were needed. The reason that the government funds these positions in regional hospitals—I was not going to say that it was for the good of our health—is for the good of our health. It is for the good of the community's health. Those positions are funded because they are needed. They are not funded because we think it is a good idea to have mental health officers or professionals in the goldfields region; they are funded based on fact, demand and analysis. Those positions were needed and they were funded previously in a budget. For that hospital to spend months without those officers is an absolute disgrace. I do not believe the minister's comment, which she put on the record, that the projected inpatient care

requirements are being adequately met by the mental health unit. That is certainly not what I hear from community members and from my constituents.

Previously that community was promised a six-bed facility that was supposed to be operational in 2017. We will see no sign of that. I, too, share the member for Kalgoorlie's frustration and disappointment, as do many others in that community who need and desire such a service.

I have to say that I am pleased the hiring freeze has finally been lifted. To quote the Treasurer in media comments in the past few days, it was a "pain in the arse". I think it was more than a pain in the arse; it was a millstone around our necks, basically. In regional Western Australia particularly—metro members can talk about their own services—this hiring freeze was a huge impost on the community because we had to go without a range of services for months. In the metropolitan area, some hospitals can get agency nurses or agency staff or whatever. We do not have that luxury in regional Western Australia. Plainly and simply, in some cases we went without principals, teachers and teachers' aides in schools and mental health staff or whatever. We went without for months. It was a short-sighted policy. The government said, "This will save X millions of dollars." It does not in the long run because when agency staff are employed, the government pays through the nose for them. Somebody profiteers outside—certainly not the agency staff member who does the work. They get paid probably similar to what staff on the books get paid, but extra is paid to those agencies that provide the staff. We do not save money in the long run. It is an absolute pain. It does not save money in the long run, but regional Western Australia has gone without certain staff for months.

While I am on the goldfields I want to touch on the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. There is no extra money in this budget to provide extra staff in that region, or indeed anywhere, to deal with the issues that that agency faces. As I said, with the Best Beginnings program facing the chop—certainly with it losing royalties for regions funding—the level of service given to regional communities and regional families in need will lessen over the next few years. There is no money in this budget to tackle the case loads of child protection workers in the regions. Over the past few years, DCPFS has downscaled its regional offices. Previously there might have been an office in Norseman, for example, with dedicated staff. This government has moved away from that. It has taken resources out of those communities. The services provided in regional centres such as Kalgoorlie–Boulder and in communities such as Norseman, Laverton and Leonora are crying out for these services and for child protection workers on the ground. They are crying out to have cooperation across government and across government agencies to tackle issues of antisocial behaviour and young people roaming the streets at night, to help make communities more liveable, but basically to tackle the social issues around town. There is no extra money in this budget to tackle workloads. There is no extra money in this budget to take the pressure and strain off child protection workers who are doing it tough and have been doing it tough over the past few years. This government gives with one hand and takes away with the other. Last year the government gave extra money for the child protection space. It said that it was giving extra money last year to tackle the problems that that agency faces, only to take that money away this year. We have seen cuts to its budget. That is a great shame.

I will also use this opportunity to again raise my concern about the long periods that Child Protection is taking to fill vacancies. When staff leave, months and months go by before positions are filled. That adds to the pressure and the workload of staff who are working extremely hard already and dealing with more kids with complex needs and behaviours. I have said this before and I will say it again: I fear that the agency is only managing. This government is putting pressure on it to screw down or to chop away any fat by taking money away from it. The child protection agency is managing its budget woes by simply not filling positions for months. On one hand I cannot blame the agency; it is constantly being put under pressure by this government. Some agencies have authorised expenditure reviews—although not Child Protection; that was quarantined. It has occurred in Mental Health. An authorised expenditure review resulted in \$123 million being scheduled to be taken out of four agencies over the next four years. In Child Protection, we have seen efficiency dividends and the workload management tool—is that what it is called? What is the other word we use if a person leaves?

Hon Sue Ellery: The workforce renewal policy.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The workforce renewal policy.

Hon Sue Ellery: That is code for workforce cut-the-costs policy.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Good point. Again, it is this workforce renewal policy. It does not appear as a line item under Child Protection this year because it is not a change in policy; the policy still exists. The money that was set to be taken out of the agency last year as a result of this policy will still be taken out. At the end of the day it is the workers at the coalface who face more pressures.

I again want to touch on the lack of a drug and alcohol facility in the goldfields–Esperance region. As a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, I know that a petition has come before us. In fact, the petition came before this chamber in the past year or so. It calls for a drug and alcohol detox facility at

Esperance Hospital. Have we seen any money in this budget for such a service? We have not. Even though members such as Hon Dave Grills, and Graham Jacobs from the Liberal Party, are on the record as saying this is needed, we have seen absolutely no action. There is no money in this budget for that service in that community. I will not go through the documentation. Community members are already on the public record as telling us that there is a need for such a service in Esperance. They tell us that their families are suffering, including their sons and daughters, with addictions to crystal meth or methylamphetamine. Although there is money for a meth strategy in the budget, will the Esperance community see any of that money? I doubt it, to be honest. I hope it does, but I doubt it.

I will move on to Carnarvon and the Gascoyne. Although there was some money for Carnarvon Community College in this year's budget, this community has been duded again. It did not get what it was promised. The Premier visited that community a few years ago and made an ironclad commitment that if it agreed that its schools could be amalgamated and put on one campus, Carnarvon Community College would be properly resourced. The Minister for Education is on the record as saying that it is needed. He acknowledges that the school and school buildings—certainly the high school buildings—are outdated and that a new school is needed. Yet again we saw only part of the commitment addressed in this year's budget. It is a disgrace. That community is very frustrated.

Hon Sue Ellery: It is still short \$17 million, isn't it?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is still short \$17 million for a long-promised school. That community is very frustrated. One has only to look at Facebook to see the dedication and passion with which that school community has been working to hold this government to account. There has been a slight move this time, purely because of public pressure, but this government has not delivered what it said it would deliver. This community should continue to feel frustrated, and has every right to continue to feel frustrated, because it will not get what it was promised. I will place on the record that the Leader of the National Party was in Carnarvon last week and he tried to explain this partial funding to the community. I understand he said words to the effect of, "The visible money you can see is in the budget but there is another piece to finish it off. I don't have either the business case or the structure for that to be visible, but I have made provision in what we call the unallocated part of the royalties for regions funds. Once the business case is submitted, I can make the case to finish it off and you have my commitment to do that." In saying that he has committed to the project, if I were a member of Carnarvon's community, I am not sure how much faith I would put in a commitment that either the National Party or the Liberal Party made to the school. The Leader of the National Party's comment is essentially saying he has the royalties for regions fund —

Hon Sue Ellery: Irrespective of the business case.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Irrespective of the business case and irrespective of anything, the Leader of the National Party is saying he has a slush fund—for want of a better term—that he can just take money out of and give to people! I am shocked. I thought that the Premier tried to stamp out how the National Party previously treated the royalties for regions fund as its personal plaything. The National Party would say, "What do you want? I'll give it to you! What will you give me in return?" This is proof that the National Party still has a slush fund at its beck and call. Although in this case a school in my electorate may benefit from it, I am very concerned that the Leader of the National Party would use such words: "I'll get it for you and I'll give you that commitment." I would not trust the Liberal or the National Parties on this school. Regardless, I will push both parties to ensure that they find this money and the school is funded. As I said, the Premier made a commitment years ago that it would be funded and we have not seen it yet. That community has every right to be concerned.

Over the past few months across my electorate, whether it is the Pilbara, the Kimberley, the goldfields, Esperance or the Gascoyne region, I have heard concerns from public housing residents. Earlier this year, it was announced that they would be hit with an increase in the payments they make to the government for their houses. Earlier in the year—there was debate in this place about it—many people were told that they had to pay \$12 a week more in rent. In this budget, those people are hit again; they are being forced to pay a further increase of \$6 extra a week to rent those properties. I mentioned earlier that an average household family has already been hit with another \$257 this year because of increased fees and charges. Families already have to pay an increase of \$12 a week for rent and now they will see another \$6 increase in rent. That is disgraceful. Yet again, vulnerable people in this state who are less fortunate are suffering as a result of this government's financial mess. That is a total increase of \$18.

Homeswest or housing issues are the number one problem that my electorate office deals with. I have been to numerous Homeswest or Housing Authority properties over the past few months and some of them are dives; they are absolutely disgraceful hovels. They are dirty and unfit to live in, yet we are charging those people an extra \$6 now and \$12 earlier in the year—an extra \$18—to live in them. In many cases, it is now cheaper to rent a property on the open market—certainly, in Port Hedland it is getting that way—than it is to pay rent for

a Homeswest property. Some people ask why the people do not move out. Unfortunately, some of those families are Aboriginal or they have had all sorts of issues in their lives. Quite often, private owners will not rent to them so they face a catch-22 situation; they are simply trapped in those houses. In one house that I visited a few weeks ago, the toilet did not run properly so every time someone used the loo they had to turn the water and the cistern on and off. Also, the cooker did not work. I have seen cases in which people have been offered houses after having been on the waiting list for up to eight or nine years. Finally, they are offered a place and it is disgraceful; it is disgusting. It has all of these issues—mould, and a range of problems. They are given the choice of living in it and it will be fixed later or they will come off the list. What do many people do? They choose to live in them but then they wait inordinate amounts of time for the problems to be fixed, if they are ever fixed. I have had cases on my desk whereby people have waited for months to get maintenance issues looked at that they have logged. It is a very frustrating process. Again, it was supposed to save us money, but it does not.

We know from Auditor General's reports in this place that the Housing Authority does not properly monitor some of the contracts that are given to contractors to deal with maintenance issues. The Auditor General's report last week included the fitting and maintaining of safety devices in public housing. The report pointed out concerns about the fact that proper monitoring is not happening in these houses and, in some cases, safety devices were not working. The Auditor General's report also pointed out that because of problems with the system, the Housing Authority could not be confident that the work that was supposed to be done in some of those houses was being done. The report mentions that happening with safety devices, but I hear from Homeswest or Housing Authority tenants that the same thing is happening with other maintenance issues that are supposed to happen in their houses. It is a real concern. Certainly, the issue of Homeswest or Housing Authority tenants facing another \$6 rent increase is really a concern to me and my constituency. Those people have been doing it tough and they will do it tough as a result of power and utility bill increases. They will do it even tougher as a result of this increased charge.

This government has been criticised for its failure to diversify the economy and for blowing the benefits of the boom. Around my electorate, but particularly in the Pilbara and Karratha, people are losing their jobs at a great rate. People are not only losing their jobs but, if they have previously had a house or an investment property, their values have substantially dropped. People are suffering; they are crying out for assistance and intervention by this government and we are seeing little or no action. Only the Labor Party is concerned about diversifying the economy; only the Labor Party has a plan for jobs. Mark McGowan has been going around the state to meet with constituents and groups right throughout my electorate to explain what we will do, should we get elected. We are proud that we will diversify the economy. We are confident that our plan will deliver jobs. People in Port Hedland and Karratha in particular are crying out for that type of leadership and for politicians to actually deliver for them. While everybody rode the boom for the past few years, they were happy to roll with it. However, since the boom stopped, people are suffering and we are not seeing any leadership from this government. Certainly, nothing in this budget says, "We're going to help you; we're going to end your misery!" or "We're going to find you a job; we're going to make your life better!" There is nothing in here. More misery is being heaped upon people. Charges are increasing for utilities, agencies are losing funding, or where funding is increased on one hand, it is being taken away with the other.

Going back to the child protection space, an article in *The Sunday Times* last week mentioned that social workers have said that hundreds more children will end up in care as a result of some of the programs that this government plans to cut from the budget. We already have a record number of kids in care in this state, which could be for a variety of reasons. Particularly every time this government gets in a bit of strife, we see money taken away from those services at the coalface, the early intervention services—whether it is Youth Justice Services, Best Beginnings services or whatever. When money is tight, it is taken away—all because government members say it will save us money and we have to make savings. However, it is short-sighted because, at the end of the day, we do not save money; society pays more in the long run.

I am starting to draw my comments to a close, but I want to briefly touch on a few other issues before I finish. I have mentioned Carnarvon Community College, because it is a big issue.

I want to briefly touch on disability services. There are some good things in this budget for disability services but, equally, money has been taken out. It is an exciting time in the disability space; there is no doubt about that. When the National Disability Insurance Scheme is eventually rolled out properly in this state, it will make a remarkable differences to people's lives. That is not to say that there are no teething problems at the moment. There are two trials and they are about ironing out the problems to ensure that whatever scheme we end up with is the best scheme in this state. I appreciate the openness of the new Minister for Disability Services in engaging with me and briefing me on a range of issues.

Hon Donna Faragher: I try to be helpful.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The minister is helpful and I appreciate it, as do other members on this side of the chamber. I appreciate the briefing that she offered and I received last week about the expansion of those trials over the next few years. Some people expect us to be critical all the time. I try to be helpful. We have to do a certain amount of critiquing because it is necessary, but, equally, I try to give credit where it is due. I have said on the public record, and I will say it again now, that I am relaxed about the trials rolling out further over the next year. I do not think the system could handle a full-blown NDIS starting on 1 July next year. I think it is commonsense.

Hon Donna Faragher: It's the same with the other states as well.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Absolutely; I know, but people in the community are frustrated that it cannot happen on 1 July next year. In practical terms, I do not think it can. I think it is sensible to roll it out bit by bit. I want to see, as I am sure does the minister, the best system in operation in this state. As I said, there are teething problems, but let us deal with them in bite-sized chunks. Let us iron them out as they arise so that the kinks are taken out of the system and the next lot of people who access the scheme get the best possible service. I just wanted to place on the record that, as frustrating as it might be for some people who are not receiving the service at the moment, there is a commitment that they will get there. I want to make sure that the scheme they get is the best possible system. In saying that, the state minister has made a commitment, as has the federal Minister for Social Services, that an agreement will be signed by October this year.

Hon Donna Faragher: Finalised.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Or finalised; hopefully, it will be signed by then. I will be holding the minister to account on behalf of the people with disability in this state. They have been promised an NDIS by a federal Labor and a federal Liberal government and these guys here, so I will be holding them to that date. We have to make sure that that agreement is signed off by then. I will be holding the minister to account on that. People are rightly frustrated about the process taking a little while. I say, "Hold your horses; we'll get there." I hold it as an ironclad guarantee that an agreement will be signed in October, and I will ask the minister questions to ensure that she is working towards that date.

I will wrap up. This budget is not good for the state. This budget is not good for people who are vulnerable and most in need. This budget is not good for the people in my electorate, whether they be in the Pilbara, the Kimberley, the goldfields, Esperance or the Gascoyne. This budget will see us all paying for the profligate spending habits of this government for a very long time. The fact that we have a record deficit and a record debt and we have no hope of returning to surplus for a very long time means that we will all be paying for the ills of members opposite. However, we will ensure that we hold this government to account. There is no doubt that, over the weeks to come, more issues will appear and more information will leak out about this budget and we will find that other services have been chopped or cut and more people will suffer as a result of this budget. Each time I find out about one of those things, I will come back into this place and raise it and I will ask the responsible minister to explain why people in the mental health system, the child protection system or the disability system will suffer further from this government's budget. With those remarks, I conclude my contribution.

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [4.05 pm]: That was a quite remarkable contribution to the debate by Hon Stephen Dawson. I listened to the whole thing with enormous interest. Hon Stephen Dawson may not be aware of this, but members on the other side who represent the same region as Hon Stephen Dawson also listened with extreme interest. Honestly, I think they learnt more about their electorate in his survey of the Mining and Pastoral Region than they have been able to glean from their own side and their own experiences. That was a very comprehensive summary of why this budget is not good news for the area that makes up the greater geographical part of Western Australia. I think we all learnt a great deal from that. I also appreciated his comments about his shadow portfolio areas, about which I will have a little bit to say in my contribution if I have time.

Several members interjected.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am not going to take any interjections, Madam Deputy President, because, as you know, speeches on the budget are limited to one hour. Although that might seem to be a very long time, and I realise that people on the government benches have got terribly out of practice at making speeches that go for much more than five or six minutes, I dare say that in 10 months' time they will get back into the swing of it pretty quickly.

Several members interjected.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is lovely that they have a chance to air their vocal chords while I am on my feet, but I do not have time to take interjections.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! We were doing so well. Hon Sally Talbot has the call.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Thank you, Madam Deputy President. As you will notice, I am addressing all my remarks to you and I will seek your protection from the unruliness of the other side.

When I picked up the budget documents and when I read the budget speech, because it was delivered in this place by Hon Michael Mischin, the Attorney General, I was expecting to see some sort of statement about a vision, but of course the only vision we got was about debt, deficit and disaster. I compare last Thursday with today. Six short days later, we got the response from the leader of the Labor opposition, which started with a statement of his vision. It is very easy to do if people believe in something. If they actually have a plan for the state, it is fun. It is interesting and stimulating to talk about the budget, and that is why people on this side of the chamber are queuing up to make their speech on the budget. All members opposite do is bring their smartphones into the chamber to try to while away a couple of hours, getting into practice for swapping sides of the house.

The leader of what will be the next Labor government in Western Australia has a very clear vision for Western Australia, and that vision is for a successful state brimming with opportunities for everyone. I subscribe to that vision absolutely wholeheartedly. It has been eight long years in the ideas wilderness. The people of Western Australia and the people in my electorate have suffered for that, in the same way as people in the rest of regional Western Australia and people throughout the metropolitan area have suffered for those eight long years. Fortunately, that is now coming to an end and I will be one of the people on this side of the house celebrating that with great vigour. This budget speech, which I intend to be my last in opposition —

Several members interjected.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is my intention to make this my last budget speech from the opposition side. It is one of my last opportunities to spend time talking about the conservatives because from the second week of March next year I will not talk about them at all because they will be totally irrelevant. They are going to be out of office for at least three terms. Look at the way they are going. Look at the mess that they are in at the moment. They have no idea what direction the state is going in because they have no idea where they are going. They are just blundering around in the dark trying to knock each other off and they will become totally irrelevant by the second week in March next year when none of us will be talking about them. However, I want to talk about them now because this is my last chance and I want to celebrate it. I want to make the absolute most of it.

What do we get in the budget papers? I always turn immediately to budget paper No 3. In my early days in this house 11 years ago, one of my colleagues pointed out to me that that is where the gold lies. Whether we are in government or opposition, that is where we get a feel for where the state is going according to the government. It tells us what the projections are and, my goodness me, that has made some interesting reading over the last five or six years. Those projections have read more like some kind of Walt Disney cartoon than anything connected with reality in Western Australia. We have seen wildly inaccurate guesses about things as basic as exchange rates. I have people in my electorate who live on British pensions and are more capable of anticipating the exchange rate than this mob sitting on the Treasury bench. We then go to volume 1 and 2 of budget paper No 2, which is where we find the meat and potatoes of the government's plan for the state portfolio. Have you noticed, Madam Deputy President, how much more slender each of those documents are these days? They have gotten smaller and smaller over the eight years of this government as the state's capacity to deal with its situation has diminished. Now, along with the diminishing size of the budget papers and the fewer details being provided so that we can judge how things are going, we have seen an increase in technology. We can now word search the entire budget document. We can word search things like "early intervention" or, as Hon Stephen Dawson mentioned, the Better Beginnings program. However, it is not in there. We no longer have line items that tell us what money will be spent where on what service. It is an entirely incompetent attempt to disguise things because when the government has a forensic opposition, as this government has, we will get there, as Hon Stephen Dawson said. Day by day we will chip away until we find the truth, and we are already getting there after only six days. There are very slim pickings in the budget papers. Nevertheless, a lot has been said already about the budget, and a lot will be said in both the community and this place over the next few weeks, because there is a lot to say. Despite the lack of vision, there is a lot to say about what happens to a community and economy when it is being run by people who have no idea and do not believe in anything other than their own careers. It is exactly as conservative parties in general have been described by several commentators in this country—it is just a club for preselection.

Sitting suspended from 4.14 to 4.30 pm