

Consideration Resumed

MR K.M. O'DONNELL (Kalgoorlie) [10.48 am]: Greetings, Mr Acting Speaker. I would like to talk about my electorate and the recent fires. The fires started in my electorate well before Christmas. There were several, and some even joined together. Firefighters, volunteers, station owners and workers fought these fires from November last year. There were several closures at different roads from this period, including Eyre Highway, goldfields–Esperance highway, also known as the Coolgardie–Esperance Highway, and Hyden–Norseman Road. This occurred before and after Christmas and into the new year. Our office monitored the fires and shared Department of Fire and Emergency Services info the whole holiday period. I even visited the Coolgardie evacuation centre and spoke to truck drivers and those receiving meals before Christmas, and attended various DFES briefings. During this time, many travellers were stuck for days at a time or held up. Many travelled longer distances, with over eight hours of extra travel, just to reach their homes or holiday destinations or to return to work. These included alternative routes to Kalgoorlie and Esperance via Hyden Road. They also tried bush tracks along Trans Access Road and “Outback Highway”. Some even talked about travelling to Kununurra to get around the fires. By 5 January 2020, several roads had been closed for days, and, in effect, all major exit and entry points into Norseman—roads north, south, east and west—had been closed for some time. They were isolated for 12 days. By the way, I support any road closures that were made because they were made to ensure that people were kept safe. There is no criticism of the agencies involved. My staff and I flew to Norseman to attend a community meeting; we could not drive. We met with shire representatives, including shire president, Laurene Bonza, and chief executive officer, Peter Fitchat. People there were upset, including the travellers, because there had been no answer to the question about when the road would reopen. Most people, especially the residents of Norsemen, understood the situation. Emergency agencies dealt with this situation well. It seemed that people in Norseman had up-to-date information.

On Sunday, 5 January, a gentleman by the name of Russell Smith from the eastern states contacted my office to alert us to the fact that there were a lot of travellers stranded in Kalgoorlie–Boulder—we were aware of that, but we were not aware of the number—who, according to them, had no information, apart from Department of Fire and Emergency Services information and normal emergency updates. Seventy-five people were stranded at the local caravan where he was staying. The following Monday, everyone was due to be back at work because the holiday period was ending. That day our office began fielding calls and emails from people either stuck in my electorate—mainly in Kalgoorlie, Boulder, Coolgardie, Kambalda and Norseman—or people from those places and others in our electorate who in stuck in the eastern states, mainly in Ceduna and Streaky Bay in South Australia. That day the road had been briefly opened to free up those stuck on the highway at various roadhouses, but it seemed that a lot of people were still unable to get home. It seems that a lack of communication about road closures was a big issue. The biggest and most common theme I heard from Western Australian people who were stuck in the eastern states was that they contacted the office to say that they had reached the South Australian border—some had not reached there and were stuck in Ceduna—and were told that they could not go any further. They said they were totally unaware that the road was still closed and said that there was a distinct lack of information. It seemed that many just thought it was a little road closure that had not been reported or that the message had not gotten through. There was a common theme among those who were stuck. They were running out of funds because it was the end of their holiday. Sometimes people do not budget for long delays. They were overdue for work, due back for medical appointments or needed to get back to family and pets—the list goes on. Some had been stuck for nine days or more at that stage. People asked for assistance. Most had not complained before. People wondered whether they had done the right thing in staying put or staying on a major road so as not to put stress on the number of people stuck on the border or Eyre Highway. Many people felt unfairly treated because those who had gone to the border highway were escorted through by convoy that day. Minister Logan flew to Eucla to witness the clearing of the border and to see the number of trucks and stuck travellers. However, the true number of stranded travellers and affected trucks was far higher than anyone anticipated, as we were about to find. It seemed that once the 300-odd people travelling in trucks and cars were cleared that day, the state government thought that that was it and the road could be reclosed, as it needed to be because the fires flared up within an hour of the convoy moving off.

Meanwhile, because people were stuck in my electorate, my office was still fielding calls. They were in my electorate and whether or not they were from my electorate, they needed help. I had my office contact Minister Logan's office that afternoon on 6 January to explain the situation—that we felt that a large number of travellers from both my electorate and other parts of WA were stranded in the eastern states. We asked what assistance there was. The minister's office called us back just before 5.00 pm and informed us that they would be attending a meeting that afternoon and would update us. They said they would also get in contact with Minister McGurk's office. We informed them that we were thinking of starting a traveller register to see how many people were stranded and in difficulty. My staff and I were fielding calls and emails when we left the office at 6.30 that night. Nadia, my electoral officer, put a post on Facebook that night to say that if people were stranded in the electorate or could not get into the electorate, they should contact the office. We were unaware of what was about to be unleashed. I wanted to assist to people, but before we knew it, people from all over WA who were stranded on the other side of the

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

border and people from all over Australia who were stranded in my electorate contacted us. It started immediately. That post alone attracted more than 57 000 views and more than 300 shares. Imagine the number of people who are not on Facebook and did not even see it.

Mrs A.K. Hayden: Or they did not have a signal.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Correct—no signal. I am not all over Facebook technology and I am not internet savvy, as many members know, but for a little electorate office in Kalgoorlie with me and two staff, I have been told that that is a lot. Our suspicions were correct: a lot of people were stranded and needed help, but even I was about to be shocked by how many.

One of my staff rang me at 7.00 Tuesday morning on her way into the office to say that I might need to get in early because we had been inundated with emails and calls. I thought that that might have been 20 calls. When I got into the office, the phone was ringing off the hook and more than 100 emails were already sitting there. There were hundreds of comments and messages on Facebook. We ended up receiving 200 emails that day. People did not know where to go or who to call. DFES updates about the fire and road closure status were great, but they did not say, “Hey, if you need help, this is what you need to do.” Once again, it came through loud and clear that they could see information on the DFES website, but no-one warned the travellers, especially those stuck in the eastern states, that they could not get through. They were caught completely unaware and were still out there days later. The transport industry relying on that highway and other roads was also grinding to a halt. When the Leader of the Opposition and I met with a company the following week, we were told that the road closure had cost it more than \$750 000. No-one can insure against that.

Once again, our office spoke with the offices of both Ministers Logan and McGurk to update them. We told them about our register and how it was growing. Maybe they thought we were exaggerating—who knows?—but they did not seem to grasp how many people we were dealing with. We were given a Department of Communities phone number to use in our updates for those on our register, but we were told to use it at our discretion. We gave it—posted it—to everyone because who were we to distinguish those who needed help from those who did not? At this stage the number was only for those Western Australians stranded on the other side of the border, but we released it generically. That day I fielded many of those phone calls myself.

I will describe some stories. A family with six foster kids was stuck in Kalgoorlie and had to sleep in a tent in 40-degree heat. Another lady who was stuck—she was in her car for days—was stuck with her husband who has Alzheimer's who became increasingly distressed and confused. Another stuck family had three autistic kids. A woman lost her job because the small company she worked for could not keep her position open. People missed weddings and funerals. It went on and on. Some eastern states people who were stuck in Western Australia lost their homes in fires.

Meanwhile, the register grew and grew. We contacted the offices of Senator Lynda Reynolds and Minister David Littleproud regarding disaster funding. We appreciated their advice and cooperation. Each day, funding was announced for those affected by bushfires; however, WA was ineligible—as it apparently still is. We kept updating our Facebook page and sending emails to those on the register. We started to get replies that people had contacted the Department of Communities but it could not help. We told them to try again. In the meantime, my staff contacted local relief agencies to see what help they could give if our state government could not help. I decided to see whether I could assist myself and my office decided to hold a community meal on the Wednesday night to assist the eastern states travellers who were stranded in our electorate. I am so proud of my community: straightaway, businesses and individuals contacted the office to see what they could do to help. I also contacted both Qantas and Virgin to see whether they could assist with cheap airfares to help get people home. The number of stranded people on the register continued to grow and the stories got worse. Wednesday was another long day. We again tried to find out whether we could get help for people. The Department of Communities had by this stage a 1 800 number that people from WA could use. However, this apparently was not an option for many with pre-paid mobiles or those in areas with poor range.

People continued to contact the office. We contacted the local governments in Ceduna and Streaky Bay in South Australia. One of the chief executive officers had put up his own hand-painted sign to say to travellers, “Don't go any further; the road is closed.” Why did any state government department not contact the shires in the areas in other states in which Western Australians were stuck? Why did they not contact other state departments of communities or the equivalent and say, “Hey, we know you have bushfires over there, but you also have people stuck in WA because of fires, too”? I was still trying to get help for people to find ways to travel back, contacting ministers' offices here in Western Australia and federally, but we were advised that the help must start from and be directed by the WA state government. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services continued to be outstanding, and I commend it for that.

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

The community event was held and it was a great night. A hundred people turned up and they were fed and looked after. DFES attended and updated people so they could be aware of what was going on. It was great throughout. We had Jody and Gavin from the local Salvation Army there to advise them about funding. The Department of Communities also came and helped people. By this stage, we were on board to help people from the eastern states, which was good. The department handed out a flyer with information that included my phone number, and that is what this is about: this was a non-political, bipartisan effort, and I commend that government department for including my Facebook page in its additional information and updates. My whole idea was that we do it together; no-one gets accolades, and everyone gets out there. I thought that was great.

The following morning I spoke with Ministers Logan and McGurk, who both rang me. I was chuffed that Minister Logan rang me. I have spoken to various other ministers since I have been in government and many of them have given me advice that I have run with, and I appreciate that. However, although I felt good when Mr Logan rang me, by the end of the conversation I did not feel so good.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Sorry.

Dr A.D. Buti: Why, he is asking.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: The minister said to me, "Let me give you a piece of advice."

Mr F.M. Logan: I did try.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Yes. He said, "Kyran, let me give you some advice. These people are not from your electorate. They don't vote for you. Move on." He said, "Cut them loose."

Mr F.M. Logan: No, I asked you to move on.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: I understand that they are not in my electorate, but I was trying to help whoever needed help. At no stage did I ever mention that I am Liberal. At no stage did I ever lay blame. At the meal I did not put any Liberal banners up and there was not one word at that community meal to say that this was a political thing. We did not do that. I put my hand on my heart in saying that. When I got the phone call from Minister Logan, I was really, really pleased; I really was. I thought he would say, "All right, you've got this going. We're doing this; can you do this?" "Yep, beauty. We're there to help. Whatever you want me to do." I just think it was wrong. I was disappointed. I held him in high regard, but once we cross the white line, that is it. I just need to say that, minister.

I then had a phone call from Minister McGurk regarding the phone number we were handing out. She mentioned to me about speaking to one of the heads of the Department of Communities, which I did, and we were grateful. On the night of the meal we worked together, and that was good. When I was on the microphone to the people in the park, the Department of Communities was there and I said it was good to have it there. At no stage would I ever say, "Oh, hold on, I'm going to do all the talking. This is Liberal and the Liberals are all out there to help you." Never, ever. I did not wear a shirt with "Liberal" on it; sorry, Minister for Tourism, but that is just a fact.

Mr P. Papalia: Did you have "Kalgoorlie" on it, though?

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: All right.

At no stage were any ministers criticised; at no stage did I ever say anything about any of the ministers. We said we were just as frustrated when people contacted us, voicing their frustration and disappointment at the lack of help and information they had received from the government. When I flew to Norseman, they said that not one minister had been there, but then I ascertained that the minister was coming to my electorate the next day. I was disappointed that the minister's staff did not even advise me about that. I believe I got a 99 per cent hit there.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: I really thought we were doing the right thing and that we could have worked together in an instance like this. I see on television people saying, "This is not a time for political grandstanding", and I agree. I hope, going into the future, that members in various electorates in the regions can work with ministers and government departments.

The road was then opened, and to say we were all relieved would be an understatement. People have been fighting fires since November. During this whole process I was in contact with local governments in my electorate. They did a great job. They had been battling fires since November last year, and there was money and funding flying everywhere from the feds.

I just remembered: I said that we never branded Liberal, but I want to bring up one point. We sent an email to a doctor who was coming into this state and was stuck at the border for days. He was not happy. He sent us two emails, and

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

the reply was the only email my electorate officer sent with Liberal branding. It stated that I had suggested sending his concerns to Ministers Logan and McGurk and also to Premier McGowan. She then put down below some of my Liberal Party colleagues—various shadows, for communities, emergency services, health, and transport, and the Leader of the Opposition. That was the only time we used the word “Liberal”, and that was to one individual. We were told by the government, “Tell people, if they have any concerns, to contact their electorate and their member.” I do not think my electorate officer did anything wrong. She just provided that if he had any further concerns. He was the only one we told that; we did not direct anyone else to contact a government minister, at all.

There was money and funding flying everywhere from the federal government; my perception was that it appeared that the WA government was not interested in that. It did not assist local governments to get that funding. A \$240 000 threshold for one event should be over the whole region and for the whole fire season, not six fires counted individually. These fires were on different fronts that joined up. They were fires that flared and re-flared; they were fires that joined shires and local governments. They should be able to use the fire season as one event, and once the amount is triggered, they qualify. Often these fires roll into one, but the criteria are not calculated like that. A shire with a small budget, like the little Shire of Dundas—Norseman is there, needs different criteria, formulas and percentages from those of big local governments. Just like other funding, the criteria need to be fluid and there should be some ministerial discretion. I have said in the media that I would love to see whatever criteria they have for disasters and have one more line for special or extraordinary circumstances to allow those local governments to underwrite it if they do not meet the thresholds. If they do not meet the thresholds, they just think, “Oh, well, we’ve got nothing.” But for little shires like Dundas, which have hardly any money and are using all their reserves to help fight fires, it is not fair, and they are hurting very badly.

Do not forget that local government is the first to attend these fires and also is the body that often must end up looking after the fire when responsibility is handed back to local government from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. A lot of fires start on crown land yet local government bears the burden. The state government needs to address these issues and be more responsible for what happens on crown land. It cannot leave local government to look after these huge areas on their own just because there are not a lot of people or votes out there. We need to learn from these incidents and to better manage people, not just fires. We need better lines of communication between states when people get stranded and major highways are closed. We need better support for local governments and better avenues and channels made available to them to source funding. We need state governments to work with local governments to help them whenever possible. We need better road networks and viable alternative routes. The government needs to listen to those asking for help and those giving it, and not bury its head in the sand. There is a big, wide state out there. It is not just in the city that people notice the supermarket shelves are bare. I do not do this for votes or pats on the back. My staff did not work 15 to 17 hours a day for the whole week for that either. I can tell members that I have hundreds more emails of thanks. They were still coming in the other day from people saying thank you for how we helped. We do not help just for the thankyou. How many thankyou did the minister’s office get from those stranded travellers? If we had done this together, we would have been thanked together. Let us do more next time and learn from this. The minister’s office has more resources than my office.

I would like to talk about alternative routes. I spoke to some people who said that because Eyre Highway was closed, people were travelling to Norseman from all directions. Some people in Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie were talking about driving back to Perth and all the way up to Kununurra to try to get around because there was no end in sight to the fires. However, with a cyclone brewing up north at the same time, people shelved that idea. Up north, people had issues because of the cyclone. Because of flooding on the “Outback Highway” out of Laverton, that road was closed, along with Eyre Highway. Every road into Western Australia was either closed or had the potential to be closed because of the cyclone up north. We need alternative routes. I am glad that the federal and state governments are working to upgrade the “Outback Highway” and seal it completely. The quicker that is done, the better.

Again, I implore the state government to look at budgeting to upgrade the Trans Access Road. We need people to travel through Eucla and be able to make a sharp right up to the railway line and then make a sharp left. That will help not only tourists, but also pastoralists and trucking companies. We cannot have a highway closed indefinitely and everyone just banked up. A lot of the produce that comes to Perth arrives from the eastern states. Truck after truck after truck was sitting idle. We saw it happen nine months earlier in Coolgardie when 100 trucks were banked up because the highway was closed. We can say, “We’ll be right”, but we need alternative routes. One family could not wait for the highway to open so they drove in their sedan along the Trans Access Road. Every tyre was ripped. They drove on rims until they could not drive anymore. I am told there was a family of three in the car and they had just five litres of water. They were lucky the temperature did not reach the 40s, because five litres of water would not have lasted a family of five for very long at all. That is why we do not want people to make their own way or try a new road that they do not know.

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

I would like to see the Aboriginal affairs office reopened in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. It was closed back in 2018 and still has not reopened. We need that reopened. We need staff from there integrated and talking with locals about incidents and also helping them and directing them. The mob have to ask the police where to go, and the council rangers are saying the same thing. They are being asked because no-one else is there. We need an Aboriginal affairs office reopened in Kalgoorlie–Boulder.

I will touch on the budget. I have stood in this place before and brought it to the government's attention. My electorate of Kalgoorlie has been placed either last or second last in the first three budgets this government has handed down. It places last or second last compared with the other regions. I have sat back and watched my good friend in the Pilbara get allocated nearly \$1 billion.

Mr F.M. Logan: Did you say \$1 billion?

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: It is nearly \$1 billion.

I hope that in this budget we show improvement and move forward. I would be happy with being third last or fourth last, but I would love it if we could rank in the top three and the Treasurer gave us specific money, not just money that goes everywhere.

Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski: Specific like an MRI machine? Isn't that what you got? You got nothing except an MRI machine?

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: An MRI machine is fantastic, but we are talking a couple of million dollars.

The Treasurer said the government has spent a lot of money on roads in our area, and I appreciate that. Everyone deserves that. I am referring specifically to different things for us.

Amendment to Question

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Therefore, I move —

That the following words be added after “noted” —

and this house calls on the Premier to stand down the Minister for Emergency Services for grossly failing in his ministerial responsibilities to the people of Western Australia, in particular during the recent goldfields bushfire emergency

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Leader of the Opposition) [11.17 am]: I rise to contribute to the debate on this amendment. The Liberal opposition had a number of speakers lined up to outline why we believe the Premier should stand down the Minister for Emergency Services for his mismanagement of the bushfire disaster. The member for North West Central has some supporters in the Speaker's gallery waiting to hear his speech. To that end, and to not keep his guests waiting for too long, I will be the only speaker from the opposition to speak on this recent amendment.

I think every member in this place would appreciate that the member for Kalgoorlie has a heart of gold and wears his heart on his sleeve. He absolutely shamelessly represents every one of his constituents and he extends a helping hand to every person in need who crosses his path. He has a heart of gold and he is as kind as the day is long. When most cabinet ministers were on holiday, the member for Kalgoorlie found Western Australia in the grip of a disaster.

Mr P. Papalia: You disappeared over Christmas.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: No, I didn't. I will show you my diary.

The member for Kalgoorlie sought advice from my office during this time because he needed some assistance about what he needed to do for these travellers. His hardworking staff, Nardia Turner and Christie Tan, worked with the member for Kalgoorlie. People were knocking on his door saying they had a real emergency in Kalgoorlie. The bushfires had cut off the Coolgardie–Esperance Highway and Eyre Highway for an unprecedented period of time. That highway was closed for 12 days. At one point, vehicles were queued for several kilometres at the border because they could not get through because the road was closed.

Mr F.M. Logan: That's not true.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: There is footage of it, minister. The member for Kalgoorlie called me and asked what he should do. He had started a Facebook page for stranded travellers and had been inundated with emails and phone calls. His phone was ringing off the hook and he did not know what to do. He said that he was going to contact the Minister for Emergency Services and the Minister for Community Services after seeking advice from my office, and that is exactly what he did.

I flew to Kalgoorlie around 10 or 12 January just to go and meet with some of these people and understand the impact of this road closure on that community. The member for Kalgoorlie took me to visit Jodie and Gavin at the

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

Salvation Army. The Salvation Army in Kalgoorlie had handed out \$10 000 worth of fuel, accommodation and food vouchers to travellers from the east coast who were stuck in Kalgoorlie. The member for Kalgoorlie outlined some of the horrendous circumstances of those families. One family with six foster children stayed in a tent in Kalgoorlie in January in over 40-degree heat. There was the lady who could not explain to her husband with Alzheimer's what was going on. Travellers who were stranded and trying to get back to the east coast had a number of issues. Western Australians stranded on the border of South Australia at Bordertown, Ceduna and other places were getting no information from the government. The only information they received—we saw photographs of it in the media—was on a sheet covering an orange bollard, which had the words “WA border closed” written on it. No information was coming through. The only information those travellers received was because of the efforts of the member for Kalgoorlie and his Facebook page. It was an absolute disgrace.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, you will have your chance.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Emergency Services, you will have your chance to reply. Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: We have brought this amendment to Parliament because of the disgraceful comments this minister made to the member for Kalgoorlie when he was trying to help people. The member for Kalgoorlie dipped into his own pocket to provide a barbeque dinner for people who were stranded and had run out of money. They could not afford to put fuel in their vehicles. The member for Kalgoorlie provided a meal for them. Did the government provide a sausage sizzle for them? No; it was missing in action. The Premier and the minister were missing in action, and that is not good enough. To add fuel to the fire, to coin a phrase, there was a temporary reopening of the highway. What did we see? The minister flew in to get a happy snap—a media moment—to show that the highway was open and 300 vehicles were being escorted through. Do members know what that did? It sent a message to everyone queued up on the other side of the border that the road was open. That sent a flood of vehicles heading west, with people trying to get back to work, their families and their pets. However, the fire flared up again and they got stranded at the border. They had reports of the minister hopping out of a helicopter and saying that the road was open, but they then did not hear any further information from the minister. Did he speak to any of those stranded travellers? No.

Mr F.M. Logan: Don't mislead this house. You're supposed to be a Leader of the Opposition. Stop telling lies!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I have a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr R.S. Love): Thank you; I am handling it. I know what you are saying.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: What was I about to say?

The ACTING SPEAKER: You were about to say that he is interrupting.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: No, that was not what I was going to say.

The ACTING SPEAKER: What are you saying?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I am saying that the minister just said that the Leader of the Opposition was telling lies, and I ask him to withdraw it.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I withdraw.

Debate Resumed

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

I met with some travellers who were stranded in Kalgoorlie.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Emergency Services, I call you for the first time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker; I expect the minister is sensitive about this issue because he knows that he was missing in action.

I met with some of the travellers who were stranded. I also spoke with some constituents of the member for Kalgoorlie who had made it back to Kalgoorlie. One of those travellers had been stuck at the border for five days. He was

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

going to lose his job, so he drove back to Adelaide, parked his vehicle on a friend's front lawn and flew from Adelaide to Perth to Kalgoorlie so that he did not lose his job. He now has to find a way to fly back to Adelaide to retrieve his vehicle. Many travellers had similar stories. He is more than \$5 000 out of pocket. That is just one individual. Another family was stranded with two grandchildren. They lived in their car at Caiguna in 40-degree heat for days. They ended up having to cancel a trip to New Zealand for a family wedding because they had used up all their money. They were buying little bottles of water for \$6 a bottle because of the scarce resources at that tiny little roadhouse at Caiguna that was trying to cope with hundreds of stranded travellers. Where was the Premier? Where was the minister? Where was the relief and comfort for the people who were stuck there? They were missing in action, and that is why we have moved this reasoned amendment.

The effects of this road closure were felt not just by those individuals; this has had an economic impact on the state of Western Australia. Western Australian producers had to dump produce that they had tried to get across the border to east coast markets. Those producers are collectively out of pocket by millions of dollars because they could not get their produce to the east coast. It also impacted the trucking industry. One business alone in Kalgoorlie has lost \$700 000 and has not even counted up the overtime owed to drivers who were stuck for 12 days with trucks full of goods that were unable to make it across the border to get back to Kalgoorlie. That is \$700 000 lost by just one trucking company. Craig Smith-Gander from the Western Roads Federation had a lot to say about this, too. I understand that he is still waiting for an audience with the government so that he can explain the impact of that road closure on the transport industry.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Tourism!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The government has not approached him to find out about the impact; he is waiting to get an audience so that he can try to explain the impact of more than 300 truckies being stranded for days and losing subsequent business.

Mr F.M. Logan: You're making a political statement out of bushfires. It's a disgrace!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: This is the nonsense that we get!

Mr F.M. Logan: You should hang your head in shame.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Emergency Services, you will have your chance.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: This sort of nonsense infuriates me! The opposition raises valid issues in this Parliament. We do not politicise things.

Several members interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The Minister for Emergency Services and Minister McGurk accused the member for Kalgoorlie of pulling a political stunt because he dared to tell an angry traveller that they could write to the ministers and complain, and gave them their email addresses. Because he gave them their email addresses so that they could complain, the ministers accused him of pulling a political stunt and politicising the issue. That is exactly what people do. When ministers do not perform and the government lets people down, they write to ministers. That is our job in this place. Ministers should not tell the member for Kalgoorlie to cut people loose because they are never going to vote for him.

Several members interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: That was shocking advice from a minister to a local member!

To quote from an ABC online news article —

Western Roads Federation chief executive Cam Dumesny said closing the vital route for nearly two weeks was unprecedented and would have significant consequences for the state's economy.

“We have a lot of our produce growers here in WA who were sending their seasonal produce across to the east,” he said.

“Because of this closure, they've probably missed a fair chunk of their profits for the season.

“It'll take some time to stabilise.”

Mr Dumesny applauded DFES, police, volunteers and the communities who supported the stranded motorists.

I would like to put on the record the Liberal opposition's appreciation of the efforts of those volunteer firefighters, career firefighters and police officers, and also of the volunteers in the communities of Ceduna, Eucla, Caiguna,

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

Bordertown, Esperance, Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie who actually put these people up, fed them and gave them shelter when the government was missing in action. I commend all of them; they did a terrific job.

Mr Dumesny then said —

... the state would “need to take a deep breath once this is over and have a hard look at how we’ve managed it”.

We need to learn some hard lessons about how we look after people, sustain them, and keep them updated about what is going on. The reason the opposition has raised this is that this was a difficult time. Fires were raging on the east coast, and they absolutely dominated the news. To put this in context, travellers had been stranded for five days on the other side of the border. They were told to go to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services’ website to get information about the road closure. That is really useful. They have no money, and their phone battery is dead because they have been stuck in the middle of nowhere for so long, so they have no way of accessing the information. What were those people supposed to do? Luckily, a few people in the roadhouses were able to get the member for Kalgoorlie’s Facebook page up and find out what was going on.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The member for Kalgoorlie acted in an outstanding fashion in managing those stranded travellers.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

THE ACTING SPEAKER (Mr R.S. Love): Minister!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I will touch on another issue that sits underneath this. The local governments that were managing the bushfires, the Shire of Dundas, and the volunteers are out of pocket. The transport industry is out of pocket. Small businesses are out of pocket. The stranded travellers are out of pocket. They have no ability whatsoever to access any kind of emergency relief. The state governments on the east coast have gone in to bat for those businesses that suffered secondary impacts from the bushfires by providing bushfire relief funding to help them with some of their out-of-pocket expenses. However, the people I have talked about have received nothing from this state government. The shires have received no additional funding. This state government is not talking to the commonwealth about the opportunity to provide relief funding for the people in this state who have been affected.

Mr F.M. Logan: You know that, do you?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: That is what they are telling me.

We do not take these things lightly. I was incensed when I heard the Minister for Emergency Services say to the member for Kalgoorlie, “They’re not your constituents. They’re not going to vote for you. Cut them loose.” That is appalling. That is why we have moved this amendment. That is the standard of this government. This government has let the people of Western Australia down in every area. The government had one opportunity to shine in managing businesses that were out of pocket and helping travellers who had been stranded by the bushfires that had cut off Eyre Highway for an unprecedented 12 days, and what did we get—a helicopter that flew in, and a photo shoot, and then crickets. It is not good enough.

MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn — Minister for Emergency Services) [11.33 am]: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for allowing me to respond to and add to this amendment.

This is disgraceful. I have never, ever heard something like this in this house. I have never heard it. I have never heard an opposition politicise emergency services. Just think about what has been going on in the eastern states. Has any opposition—Labor or Liberal—in Queensland, South Australia, Victoria or New South Wales attempted to do what the Leader of the Opposition has done today? Has any opposition done that? No. That is because the one thing we do not do—it is bipartisan—is politicise emergency services. The reason we do not insert ourselves, as politicians, into emergency services is that we can provide bad advice and wrong advice, and someone may die. The member for Kalgoorlie tried to insert himself into the incident on Eyre Highway. This is how it happened. The member for Kalgoorlie inserted himself into the emergency services incident because he was asked to do so by the Leader of the Opposition’s office.

Several members interjected.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, he was.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! Settle down.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I know that because one of its own members told me.

Several members interjected.

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

Mr F.M. LOGAN: One of its own members from the upper house told me.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Several members interjected.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am not making it up.

Point of Order

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Mr Acting Speaker, just on what the minister said, I firmly believe he is misleading Parliament in that comment.

Dr A.D. Buti: How would you know?

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: I know that my electorate officer did that Facebook page, not the LOOP. The LOOP did not do it.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr R.S. Love): Member for Armadale! Member for Kalgoorlie, would you like to continue raising your point of order or have you completed it?

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: I just want to say that I believe he is misleading Parliament in that comment.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Armadale! There is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I was told quite clearly by a member of the Liberal Party that he had been asked to raise the issue of what he said was poor government performance on Eyre Highway, and to politicise it, and he refused to do so. What the member for Kalgoorlie forgot to add as part of his discussion about the two phone conversations that we had was that he told me that he had been put up to it. When I asked the member for Kalgoorlie who had been doing that, he said it was a federal Liberal minister. I said, "Name who it is." Does the member for Kalgoorlie remember that? Yes, he remembers. I said, "Who was that?", and the member for Kalgoorlie said, "I can't tell you, but they have suggested to me that I criticise the state government." The member for Kalgoorlie should not tell me that he has not politicised this. I have got one of his upper house —

Mr K.M. O'Donnell interjected.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Of course he did. He told me that. I am not standing here telling untruths. I am telling the member exactly what happened.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Transport! Enough.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: An upper house member of the Liberal Party told me that they had been asked to intercede in this issue to make it bad for the government over the bushfire on Eyre Highway, and they refused to do so. I then had the member for Kalgoorlie advise me in our conversation that a federal Liberal minister had also asked him to make it look bad for the government. The Leader of the Opposition now has the audacity, for the first time ever —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Churchlands, and member for Darling Range.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: For the first time ever, I think, in Western Australian history, the Leader of the Opposition has politicised emergency services. She is now saying, "No, we were not doing that. The member for Kalgoorlie was acting out of the kindness of his heart." The problem, member for Kalgoorlie, is that when we put so much on Facebook, people can take screenshots. I have some screenshots of the member for Kalgoorlie's electorate officer, Nardia Turner, replying to Scott Morrison, "This is great"—with a handclap emoji—"but we need you in WA. The electorate office I work in is inundated and our State Govt isn't interested."

Several members interjected.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Do not tell me it is not politicising it.

Several members interjected.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: A federal minister was advising the member for Kalgoorlie to make it bad, and his electorate officer was facebooking Scott Morrison asking for intervention! For God's sake! Do not tell me that it was not

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

politicised. I feel sorry for the member for Kalgoorlie. He knows I like him, and I feel sorry for him and the way he gets used. I think it is appalling. I remind the member that he was once a policeman—I presume that was in Kalgoorlie as well. If someone, whether it was another MP—it does not matter from which party—or a member of the public was putting stuff out there on Facebook about an incident that the police were dealing with, would he be happy about that? No. Would the Commissioner of Police be happy about it? No. Would he take action on it? Yes, he would. This is no different. I tell members what I said to the member for Kalgoorlie, and he can confirm this, with respect to how he deals with the people who come to his office. I said, “Kyran, mate, just send them down to the incident control facility where the Department of Communities is. They will look after them. There is no point in you getting involved. If your office gets requests or inquiries, you don’t have to take them on.” Member for Kalgoorlie, remember, I said that to you. It is not your job. Pass them on to emergency services. Pass them on to the Department of Communities. Pass them on to the volunteers who are down there. All the volunteers, whom the Leader of the Opposition just referred to, were down at the incident control centre. That is where they should have gone. I said to the member for Kalgoorlie, “Kyran, if you want to keep going down this path, when you complain about people who believe they have lost money, no worries. If you want to take that on, I will send them all to you and you can deal with them for the next six months.” Does the member for Kalgoorlie remember I said that to him? I was pleading with him to stop getting involved. I was telling him to do the right thing and send those people to the professionals. That is what I said. It is disgraceful that he put himself in there.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: That’s what he did.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, he did not. He and his electorate officer drew up a list of people, they claim, and then started to act on it. That is not what he should have done. Does the member for Kalgoorlie remember what I said? I said, “Take that list of 800 people and give it to the Department of Communities. They will contact them; they will fix them up”, just as they were doing in Esperance, where there was an evacuation centre; just as they were doing in Norseman; just as they were doing in that spot halfway between Norseman and Esperance, where the Department of Communities had set up another centre; just as they were doing when they were going to every petrol station, when they were going to every campsite and talking to people putting up signs, and letting people know what was going on. There was no feedback from anybody that said they were not getting the right communication. If the Leader of the Opposition is saying that they were, she should put that in writing to the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner. We will make it very clear exactly what we did and what they did as great emergency services, making sure people knew exactly what was going on at the time.

At the end of the day, that road was closed. The fire, as the member for Kalgoorlie knows, kept on coming. It went down overnight and then roared back to life the next day. That continued to occur. They opened the road for three days—not even three days; it was just over a day—to get 300 people out from the various places along the Eyre Highway. The next afternoon the fire took off again.

Leader of the Opposition, I was not in Norseman at that time. When the road finally reopened, I was in Norseman to thank all the people who were involved in getting that road open and putting the fire out, so just get the facts right. The Leader of the Opposition comes into this chamber all the time and simply makes things up. She makes them up. That is the why I was getting frustrated with her. It was not true. If she does not believe me, put whatever she likes in writing to me. I will back it up with both the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner and the volunteers on the ground, who will confirm what I have said. Stop walking in here and just politicising and making things up.

At those various stations across the Eyre Highway, at Caiguna and all the others, helicopters were going in every day taking in supplies, from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. Did the Leader of the Opposition know that?

Mrs L.M. Harvey: Yes.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: So why did she say to this house that people were left there in 40-degree heat and were paying for expensive water, with no information? Why did she say that? She knows that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and all its equipment took every single one of them, yet she walked in here and said the opposite. Why did she say that?

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: She is supposed to be the Leader of the Opposition. We are going to an election in 12 months and people are supposed to trust what the Leader of the Opposition says. She is now admitting that what she said in Parliament a minute ago was untrue. She knows it is untrue. She has just admitted it. It is unbelievable for the Leader of the Opposition to simply come in here, spray me as the minister, say whatever she likes and then when I put the facts to her, say, “Oh, yes; that’s right.” It is just really unbelievable. Members of the Liberal Party should

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

not have to put up with this. It is damning those people out there—the volunteers, the career firefighters, and the SES and St John Ambulance workers, who did a remarkable job. That fire was unbelievable.

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The Leader of the Opposition flew over it; I went into it. I saw what the fire was like. Fire has a unique pattern of behaviour out on the western woodlands. The fire dies down overnight when the dew comes in and then it roars back to life during the day. It was a very, very difficult fire to deal with in the western desert. It was just the nature of where it was. Those firefighters did everything they possibly could.

The road was closed. I went on TV—the member for Kalgoorlie saw me—and made no apologies for not opening that road and for asking the commissioner to open the road. I make no apologies for it. Only a few years earlier, three truck drivers died when people made a mistake and opened a road too early. The trucks drove into the fire and three truck drivers died. At those various places, like Caiguna and others, there were lots and lots of trucks. They are not able to turn around. They are road trains. Once they go, they go. They would not have found a space to turn around if the fire was there. That is the reason the road was closed.

It is unfortunate people lost money and it is unfortunate people were put out—of course it is. But what can you do about it, Leader of the Opposition? Do we tell them to go and do something dangerous and to take a risk? People were trying to get onto the railway line—that is what the Leader of the Opposition was talking about—and were trying to drive around the fires. They ended up getting bogged and being pulled out by the police and other emergency services. People who should have been involved in fighting those fires were out on the railway line trying to get people out of the mud that they had bogged themselves in. That is not what they should have been doing. Any information, member for Kalgoorlie, that you provided to those travellers could easily have been very, very wrong and put them in danger. As a policeman, the member for Kalgoorlie would never ever have done that, would he? He would not. So why did he do it as an MP?

Mr K.M. O'Donnell: Only information. They did not know the roads were closed.

Several members interjected.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: This is just —

Several members interjected.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Honestly —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is the reason —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! We are hearing from the Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is the reason that we do not insert ourselves. I do not insert myself in the front line of emergency services, because I am not a professional. I leave that up to the people who know what they are doing. I do not involve myself. I just make sure that they get the right equipment, get the right funding and do the right thing. I do not try to tell them what to do. That is what I said to the member for Kalgoorlie: “Do not involve yourself.” I say that every MP: “Do not involve yourselves in emergency services.” Let them do what they want to do—what they have to do. They are the professionals. Otherwise, someone could end up losing their life. The Leader of the Opposition, after being requested to do so by the member for Kalgoorlie, flew up to go and see the incident control centre. I said no. Why did I say no? I said no because there were a lot of people there, the fires were still going and they had an enormous amount of work to do. We did not want the Leader of the Opposition, me or the member for Kalgoorlie in that centre basically stopping people from working. I still made available a briefing and the opportunity to go to the career fire station and talk to the regional office so the members could know what was going on, but, no, they could not go to the incident control centre. What did the member for Kalgoorlie do? He went public and started whingeing about it. He put it on his Facebook site and started whingeing about it. Did the member see the response to his own Facebook post? I will tell him. Here are a few. Here is one from Rob Hollingshead. He wrote —

Why didn't he go to Norseman where all the action was

Oh! That's right they did not want pollies, or their media circus, getting in the way either.

Graeme Clayton wrote —

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

SES have done their best at short notice to show you both around and get your head in the papers and still your not happy. Seriously, stop whinging!

That was another one. It goes on. There is Misty McGinley. These are probably constituents of the member for Kalgoorlie. She wrote —

Everyone at the SES ... was busy. Bloody busy and really don't have time to shake hands with MPs. Let them do their jobs!!

Hennifer Thompson wrote —

Kyran wanted a photo opportunity and is sour he didn't get it?

That is what people really think about politicians who try to assert themselves into emergency services. They see them as try-hards and they see them simply trying to make politics out of it.

Mr S.K. L'Estrange interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Churchlands!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: What the Leader of the Opposition said is going to be put out there to all those people who did their very best for this state. They will be absolutely livid with her.

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Community Services) [11.52 am]: I just want to clarify a few points that have been raised in this debate, because, as has been identified, I had some role in this incident, and certainly my department did. The Department of Communities has responsibility for coordinating incident control centres where there needs to be some evacuation or some community support, emergency relief and the like. All the feedback I have received is that the department did a fantastic job coordinating that effort in what were obviously chaotic and difficult circumstances, not least of which that the nature of the emergency was such that we did not know when it would abate. We did not know how long people were going to be there. There was certainly frustration from members of the public who were holed up in Norseman. I thank the Department of Communities and its senior staff, who do a good job.

The frustration really came when the member for Kalgoorlie, as well-meaning as he may have been, essentially focused on trying to relay information himself, not only about the fires, but what was happening with the road closures, and not referring people to the emergency services website. That was the main concern; that is, he really needed to direct people immediately to get the most up-to-date information that could be available from the emergency services website, rather than trying to coordinate that himself. As a former police officer, the member for Kalgoorlie should have realised that. I think the Minister for Emergency Services has expressed our frustration that the member for Kalgoorlie, and certainly his office, really tried to assert themselves in a political way in trying to service some of these people. That was very frustrating. The member for Kalgoorlie relayed information to me that there was some pressure on him to politicise this issue. To his credit, he did not want to do that, and he was trying to do his best to service people in his community or people he could see were frustrated by the road closure. As I say, as well meaning as that was, it was frustrating to us in community services, and also the government offices and services on the whole, that he was not referring people both to the emergency services website and information or the community services incident control centre to get the support available to them, but rather was trying to relay some of that information. It was unmanageable. His office is not equipped to do that. It did not have the information, did not have the resources, and chaos ensued.

Can I also make clear to the Leader of the Opposition that we got a lot of good feedback because the Department of Communities was providing emergency relief. It does that on a case-by-case basis. It provided food vouchers, fuel vouchers and accommodation vouchers when people needed them. That emergency relief was available and we do that on a case-by-case basis, as is the responsible thing to do. The Leader of the Opposition is not across this detail. She needs to be aware. I draw people's attention to the debate yesterday when she was talking about emergency relief and saying that WA has record levels of homelessness, which is not true. She then also said a number of times in the debate yesterday that 500 000 Western Australian families were being helped by the social services sector. She talked about half a million people each week needing help to put food on the table and that contracts were being cut to services.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: Are you quoting from uncorrected *Hansard*?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, I am referring to the debate. She said that 500 000 Western Australian families were being helped by the social services sector—that is what she said.

Point of Order

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I believe the minister is quoting from uncorrected *Hansard*.

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to put it down and say that I remember the Leader of the Opposition saying on more than one occasion in the debate yesterday that 500 000 families were receiving support from the social services. I thought that was a strange thing for her to say.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr R.S. Love): Minister, are you quoting from *Hansard*?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, I am not. It was my recollection.

Debate Resumed

Ms S.F. McGURK: In fact, according to the 2016 census, there are only 644 000 families in the whole of Western Australia. In fact, the Foodbank figures, which I think the Leader of the Opposition was referring to, say that 500 000 meals were given out each month; it was not families who needed help every week. So get it right, Leader of the Opposition—get it right.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: That is uncorrected *Hansard*.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is the Leader of the Opposition going to correct it? More than one person heard it around this chamber. We all heard it. Is the Leader of the Opposition going to try to correct the *Hansard* now—is she? It will be interesting to hear the audio. It will be very interesting to hear the audio.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, thank you!

Ms S.F. McGURK: With those sorts of mistakes, the Leader of the Opposition should be across that sort of detail. She is constantly trying to play little games in the chamber here, with the Premier supposed to know some obscure, arcane figure from a budget footnote, and the Leader of the Opposition says he is not across the detail, which, of course we know is not true. The Leader of the Opposition needs to be aware of that sort of detail if she is going to play those sorts of games. That was the frustration with the member for Kalgoorlie; that is, he was trying to relay detail about the very difficult, frustrating and, as the Minister for Emergency Services has said, dangerous situation on the Eyre Highway. We worried that not only was there a risk of putting people in harm's way, but also it did not help the situation. It was particularly the member for Kalgoorlie's office. There was an email I was frustrated about from the staff member Nardia Turner, who said —

Kyran has been contacting Govt Departments and Ministers all day trying to get help.

She listed the ministerial email addresses of Fran Logan and Simone McGurk. I have no objection to that; members of the public have every right to them. She also gave out Mark McGowan's email address and I have no objection to that either. What we do object to is that the emergency services numbers were not given, which is what needed to be done. Nardia Turner from the member for Kalgoorlie's electorate office said, "Lastly, my Liberal Party colleagues, who have been in constant contact with my office trying to assist as well", and then she outlines the names Liza Harvey, Zack Kirkup, Steve Thomas, Tony Krsticevic and Libby Mettam as all being in constant contact trying to supply information. I can tell members that if I were in an emergency, I would want the phone number of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, not the phone number of the Leader of the Opposition.

Division

Amendment put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Mr I.C. Blayney) casting his vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (18)

Mr I.C. Blayney
Mr V.A. Catania
Ms M.J. Davies
Mrs L.M. Harvey
Dr D.J. Honey

Mr P.A. Katsambanis
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Mr A. Krsticevic
Mr S.K. L'Estrange
Mr R.S. Love

Mr W.R. Marmion
Ms L. Mettam
Dr M.D. Nahan
Mr D.C. Nalder
Mr K.M. O'Donnell

Mr D.T. Redman
Mr P.J. Rundle
Mrs A.K. Hayden (*Teller*)

Extract from Hansard
[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 13 February 2020]
p547b-567a

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

Noes (39)

Ms L.L. Baker
Dr A.D. Buti
Mr J.N. Carey
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke
Mr R.H. Cook
Ms J. Farrer
Mr M.J. Folkard
Ms J.M. Freeman
Ms E.L. Hamilton
Mr T.J. Healy

Mr M. Hughes
Mr W.J. Johnston
Mr D.J. Kelly
Mr F.M. Logan
Mr M. McGowan
Ms S.F. McGurk
Mr K.J.J. Michel
Mr S.A. Millman
Mr Y. Mubarakai
Mr M.P. Murray

Mrs L.M. O'Malley
Mr P. Papalia
Mr S.J. Price
Mr D.T. Punch
Mr J.R. Quigley
Ms M.M. Quirk
Mrs M.H. Roberts
Ms C.M. Rowe
Ms R. Saffioti
Ms A. Sanderson

Ms J.J. Shaw
Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms S.E. Winton
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr D.R. Michael (*Teller*)

Amendment thus negated.

Consideration Resumed

The ACTING SPEAKER: The member for North West Central.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [12.04 pm]: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! If you are having a conversation, could you take it outside, please.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I rise today to draw the house's attention to recent news reports of a multitude of issues surrounding the Buurabalayji Thalanyji Aboriginal Corporation, or BTAC, which is an Indigenous company, and the oppression suffered by its members—some of whom are in the Speaker's gallery today—at the hands of the company's tyrannical chief executive officer, Matthew Slack, who is being propped up by a board of puppet directors and protected by high-powered Perth lawyer Martin Bennett. Thalanyji are the traditional owners of an area that is in and around Onslow and they are best known for having a native title deal with Chevron for Wheatstone.

After years of countless pleas for assistance by its members, on 10 January 2020, the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, which governs Indigenous companies, finally appointed a special administrator to take control of BTAC. On 31 January 2020, a special administrator released the preliminary findings, which only just scratch the surface of what I classify as the extreme squandering of Indigenous corporation money. ORIC, which put the organisation into administration, has found several potential breaches of the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006, including registering members without directors' approval; registering members without written applications; failing to follow the basic requirements of annual general meetings, such as allowing members to check register details and tabling previous minutes for member approval; failing to hold AGMs within five months after the end of the financial years 2016–17 and 2017–18; failing to conduct all normal business required at the 2016–17 AGM, such as the appointment and remuneration of an auditor; having less than a required minimum number of member directors; failing to nominate and appoint directors in line with corporation rules; failing to obtain signed consent forms for members to act as directors; providing related party benefits as loans without member approval; failing to lodge audited financial statements for the financial year 2017–18 on time despite extension; and directors neglecting to exercise their powers and discharge their duties with care, due diligence, good faith and the best interests of its members. That is why I am raising this pretty serious outcome for the Thalanyji corporation and its people. There have been quite a few media reports about this situation and the neglect of organisations such as ORIC, which has not acted in a way to protect organisations such as Thalanyji.

I have a statement from BTAC members. I want to set out their plight in trying to effect change to ensure that their funds can be protected and the organisation can function in the way that it is meant to function—that is, to look after its members. I have a statement that has been agreed to and signed by many members of Thalanyji. It reads —

We, being the members of Thalanyji Aboriginal Corporation ... who are proud indigenous people of Thalanyji Country, are being oppressed by the CEO of BTAC, Matthew Phillip Slack and the complicit BTAC board of directors.

We state the following in relation to the conduct of Matthew Slack and the directors of BTAC:

1. That BTAC and its CEO are managing BTAC's affairs "for the benefit of the board and CEO and related parties and in a manner which is oppressive, unfairly prejudicial to, or unfairly discriminatory against other members".
2. That BTAC and its CEO have prevented a fair re-election of the board so they can perpetuate these practices.
3. That BTAC has destroyed Ms Trudy Hayes' business and defamed her in publications to members.
4. That various BTAC members, including Ms Hayes, have had their nominations to the board rejected on spurious and improper grounds.

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

5. That BTAC chairman ... approached a number of members who had signed a members' resolution for the election of a new board.
6. That Marlon Hayes signed a statutory declaration where he stated he was paid \$1000 to withdraw his support for the resolution and the documents to withdraw his support was hand delivered to him ... also signed a statutory declaration —

To that effect. The document continues —

7. That BTAC's financial reports detail a number of related party transactions (including writing off more than \$1m as doubtful debts) without obtaining the approval of BTAC members as required.
8. That the 2017 financial report of the BTAC Charitable Trust shows that BTAC owes the charitable trust \$3.7m, which is referred to as a "loan". A possible explanation for this is that BTAC appropriated charitable trust funds for its own purpose and retrospectively accounted for it as a loan.
9. That there was a complete write-off of a loan to Thalanyji Management Pty Ltd, of which Mr Slack is a director.
10. That the BTAC CEO and others have engaged in lavish spending on BTAC corporate credit cards. This includes the CEO staying in the presidential suite at the Shangri-La Hotel in Sydney, Crown Towers in Perth (at \$908 a night) and trips to the US costing tens of thousands of dollars. Many of the CEO's trips did not appear to be work related.
11. That the BTAC CEO has threatened to sue some Thalanyji members for complaining on Facebook about donations made by BTAC to Telethon.
12. That Fusion Training and Security Pty Ltd—which operated out of BTAC office at 9 Havelock St and is majority-owned by BTAC special counsel Matt Hansen—has been engaged for security services to gain a VRO against Trudy Hayes who is 67 years old and frail. But Fusion did not hold a relevant security agent licence in WA at the time. A lawyer from Bennett & Co represented the CEO at the VRO hearing.
13. That the CEO of BTAC claimed to be indigenous to obtain the job as CEO of BTAC and told ABC reporter he was of Noongah Heritage, but there are serious doubts about this.
14. That the CV of the BTAC CEO says he has a Bachelor of Science Aviation from Edith Cowan University—but ECU has no record of this.
15. That the CV of the BTAC CEO states he has Advanced Diploma in Leadership and Business Management from UWA—but UWA does not appear to have any record of this.
16. That the CEO claims to have a Bachelor of Business Management and a Diploma in Electrical Engineering but there are doubts about this.
17. That the CEO of BTAC has been using BTAC money to engage Martin Bennett to threaten members and take them to court,
18. The CEO of BTAC is a compulsive liar.

This sets out the concerns and it has been signed by many of the members of Thalanyji. They are all raising concerns about the propriety of the CEO. They mention the CEO's CV, and how he acquired the job of CEO of Buurabalayji Thalanyji Aboriginal Corporation. As I said, there have been many media reports in *The Australian* about whether his CV is legitimate. I have a copy of his CV if anyone would like to see it.

I quote now from an article by then WA chief reporter at *The Australian*, Andrew Burrell, from April 2019 —

An investigation by *The Australian* has found the resume Mr Slack used to apply for the BTAC job appears to contain a number of untruths.

According to his 2016 resume, he earned a bachelor of science aviation from Perth's Edith Cowan University. His lawyer said last week Mr Slack "was enrolled" at the university, but ECU has no record of Mr Slack graduating with this degree or any other qualification.

The document said he had an advanced diploma in leadership and business management from UWA, but the university had no record of him graduating with this or any qualification. It also noted he was "presently studying" for a bachelor in laws at the University of Southern Queensland. A spokeswoman for USQ said Mr Slack had never graduated from the University and was not a current student.

In his employment history, Mr Slack said he worked for the WA Health Department in senior IT roles in 2010 and 2011, as "executive director" and reporting directly to the director-general. A Health Department spokeswoman said it had no record Mr Slack was ever directly employed there.

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

That was back on 8 April 2019. As I said, I have a copy of Mr Slack's résumé. The cover lists his full name as Matthew Phillip Slack and gives his address and contact details. It also reads —

Defence Clearance: Top Secret

Perhaps the Minister for Tourism might be able to enlighten me as to whether one can have a “top secret” defence clearance?

Mr P. Papalia: You can, but this individual I have great concerns about. Some of the claims he has made with respect to his military career I have concerns about.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is good to hear, because that is why I am raising this today. Everyone should be concerned about this individual, who has potentially—allegedly—fleeced an Aboriginal organisation of millions of dollars. His résumé lists him as having “Defence Clearance: Top Secret” and “Police Clearance: Secret”. Under “Qualifications and Training”, the résumé lists “Bachelors in Law (USQ)”, but as I said, USQ has not heard of him. It also lists “Advanced Diploma in Leadership and Business Management UWA”, but UWA has not heard of him. It has “Bachelor of Science Aviation Edith Cowan University”, but ECU has not heard of him. His CV is pretty impressive, but I can honestly say after the digging around that many have done that this CV is completely false.

I have a letter dated 27 March 2019 that states —

I Frances Hayes —

Frances Hayes is here in the Speaker's gallery —

was the main point of contact with the recruiter Emanuel Gheradi in relation to interviewing and appointing a new CEO of BTAC, in which we ultimately appointed Matthew Slack. I attended both interviews of Matthew Slack, the first being at approx. 1:30 pm on Thursday 18 February 2016 and the second being the following Tuesday.

...

The CV of Matthew that Emanuel emailed me on 15 February 2016, was the same CV that we relied on in both interviews of Matthew. No alternative CV was presented. There is no way we would have allowed Matthew through first interview round or appointed him if he provided an alternative CV, which would have revealed he is a compulsive liar, ...

...

We would have no trust in him.

That letter goes on. That is one of the members of the BTAC board who interviewed Matthew Slack when he applied for the job of CEO.

I will read an email from Emanuel Gherardi, who was a director and part of the company that assisted BTAC in recruiting a CEO. I want to read it out because, as I said, we have seen the CV and a lot of it, if not all of it, has been falsified to get this job. People who are of Aboriginal descent would take some of his claims pretty personally. A Buurabalayji Thalanyji Aboriginal Corporation application of 5 February 2016 states —

Hi

I spoke to Matthew yesterday regarding who his people were. Matthew is the guy we'd discussed that might be a good fit. He's currently working as a CEO, studying Law and is of Aboriginal descent.

He's given me a bit of an explanation below. Not sure what you think?

I'm meeting with him on Monday.

Here is the history that Matthew Slack has provided. It states —

My history is a little odd, I have a strong connection with people from Yawuru (but we cannot really seem to explain the connection) I would have the strongest connection to the Nyoongar people, My grandfather taken from his mother a Nyoongar woman working on a large property in Wagin, we have struggled to find much of a family connection beyond her but my grandfather returned to WA after the war and found two of his relatives and we found she came out from Pinjarra and believes she was a Bindjareb woman but her father was from the Pilbara, the lands I feel most connected to are all around us being the Gnaala Karla Booja (mid west).

Matthew.

If that is not making a claim he is Aboriginal, I do not know what is. I will read out another piece written by Andrew Burrell from *The Australian* of 9 April 2019 in which he reports —

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

There are also grounds to question claims Mr Slack made to recruitment specialist Emanuel Gherardi about his indigenous heritage. In an email sent on February 5, 2016, Mr Gherardi told Ms Hayes he had spoken to Mr Slack about “who his people were”. “He’s ... of Aboriginal descent,” Mr Gherardi wrote.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The article continues —

Wayne Nannup, chief executive of the South-West Land and Sea Council, the main body for the Noongar people, said he had tried to contact Mr Slack to ask him about his heritage, but had not heard back.

“We have researched this and can find no evidence (that he is Noongar),” Mr Nannup said.

It is concerning that Mr Slack has identified himself as being of Aboriginal descent. We have the investigative report by Andrew Burrell, WA chief reporter of *The Australian*. I will read what is of consequence in a lengthy letter he received from Bennett and Co. It states —

Dear Mr Burrell

Matthew Slack – Buurabalayji Thalanyji Aboriginal Corporation ... (BTAC)

...

In his capacity as Chairman of BTAC, Mr Hayes has told you plainly that he interviewed and hired Mr Slack based on Mr Slack’s “understanding of [their] business”. Mr Cyril Hayes told you he was aware of the allegations regarding Mr Slack’s CV. He said that when he had made the decision on behalf of the BTAC to employ Mr Slack:

- 1 none of the qualifications that you ask about were on the version of Mr Slack’s CV that was given during the interview;
- 2 at no time during the employment interview did Mr Slack mention he has indigenous heritage and this was not a consideration to his employment.

It has got me buggered, because from what I have just read out I am pretty sure that Mr Slack clearly outlined that he was of Aboriginal descent. Frances Hayes’ testimony is that Mr Slack’s résumé, of which I have a copy here, was the same as was presented in the interview. Who is telling the truth? Is it the lawyer being paid by Mr Slack to protect him or is it Frances Hayes or the members of Thalanyji who have been able to find out whether Mr Slack’s CV has any element of truth? We all know what happens in this chamber if members mislead the public about CVs—people find out. On this occasion it has happened again and people have found out. Clearly, Mr Slack has misled the people who interviewed him and, ultimately, he has misled the people of Thalanyji.

That is his CV. The organisation has been placed into administration, and the special administrator has released information about the period from 1 July 2017 to 31 December 2019 showing that BTAC had spent \$3.3 million on legal fees—I repeat, \$3.3 million of members’ money was spent on legal fees. The sum of \$1 million was spent on flights alone, and another \$1.2 million was spent on accommodation and meals. We understand that that does not cover the frequent bookings of the presidential suite at the Shangri-La Hotel in Sydney by the CEO, Matthew Slack. It also shows a cost of \$550 000 in security guards and systems for the CEO, Matthew Slack, who the administrator understands at one time had three security guards on active duty in his office. That is what is being audited. That is what the administrator has shown happened over two years. That calculation does not include the credit card use. There were a number of personal expenses claimed including iPads, lingerie, boxes at the football, restaurants, valet parking, and charges that I have been told also includes strip clubs, based on the description on the statement. Money was also spent on expensive accommodation—as I said, the Shangri-La—and Crown hotels. Most of this credit card use occurred over that time. I have been told that the average spend has been between \$15 000 and \$20 000 each month. Remember, this CEO has a base salary of \$250 000. Members can add to that the \$15 000 or \$20 000 of what has been recorded. It is a very complicated situation looking at the Buurabalayji Thalanyji Aboriginal Corporation but we have no vision on the businesses that have been formulated to perhaps be used as vehicles to top up one’s wage or do something else with that money. That is a topic for another day because I do not have enough time to go through it all. There should be an investigation by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission into those companies and there should be a forensic audit into Thalanyji to find out exactly where this money has gone, because it was a fantastic deal that Thalanyji had with the resource companies. It was a fantastic opportunity for its members to do something for themselves, their kids and their kids’ future, and that will now be taken away, unless action is taken.

I am not saying there is any untoward link towards members, but it is concerning when the fund is meant to be for the Thalanyji children. The main purpose of the Thalanyji trust, for which BTAC is a trustee, is to cover the medical expenses of Thalanyji people. Instead, according to the special administrator’s report, this money was squandered by Matthew Slack and BTAC. As a result of some of these issues, a two-year-old who was battling

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

leukaemia in hospital was denied assistance from BTAC, a woman was denied funding to assist with chronic ear problems that required specialist help, and another person was denied funding assistance for chronic eye problems. The list goes on.

This questionable CEO—one could call him a fraudulent CEO—also made donations to political parties. Unfortunately, the Labor Party has been caught up in this. There are media reports that nearly \$60 000 was donated to the Labor Party. The Labor Party may or may not know where this money came from, but it should. Almost \$60 000, in two lots of \$27 550, was given to the Labor Party. People were denied access to health services by this fraudulent CEO. This person likes to hobnob with the rich and famous and political people and to spend money. I would have thought that this was not in the remit of any Aboriginal organisation, and especially Thalanyji, whose remit is to look after its members. I have photographs here of Matthew Slack hobnobbing with the Premier of Western Australia, Hon Mark McGowan. Members can clearly see in this photo that I am holding up that Matthew Slack was trying to build a relationship with the Premier of Western Australia. There is also a photograph of him with Bill Shorten. This is what people get when they donate money to the Labor Party. Another is a photobomb by “Kevin 07” of a picture of Leo Ashburton, a former board member. Another photograph is of Matthew Slack with Hon Pierre Yang, another Labor member. A post on Twitter states —

Thalanyji CEO, Matthew Slack, sat down with the Leader of the Federal Opposition, Bill Shorten, to have a candid discussion about the issues facing the Indigenous community and in particular our Thalanyji People.

This post also contains a photograph of Matthew Slack with Bill Shorten. Another post is headed “‘Working together for a better future’: Labor Party Cabinet Dinner—14th June 2018” and states —

BTAC Directors and Guests were personally invited by Hon. Premier Mark McGowan and Aboriginal Affairs Minister Ben Wyatt, to attend a Labor Cabinet dinner. It was a great opportunity to showcase the Thalanyji Pastoral Company, cultural issues and caring for country.

It goes on. There are more photos of the people in this organisation.

Many people wrote letters to the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations asking for its intervention. There are letters from February 2018 and 19 October 2018. It goes on and on. However, there basically has been no response from ORIC to those members up until now. This could have been stopped years ago. Lawyers have been involved in writing letters about moving motions at board meetings to change the board and sack the CEO. That has fallen on deaf ears. I will go back to the \$3.3 million that we know has been spent on lawyers. There is a letter from Bennett and Co to the board saying that it had done things wrong, it was null and void, and it therefore could not move the motion to sack the CEO. It is great to have the Attorney General here. People have written to the Attorney General to outline their concerns, but there has been limited or no action. There has been no action from the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. There has been no action from the Minister for Regional Development, Hon Alannah MacTiernan. This issue has been brought to the Premier’s attention, but there has been no action. We need action, members. This matter should be referred to the police.

DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton) [12.34 pm]: That was a great presentation by the member for North West Central on a major issue. That is what Parliament is about.

This is the last Premier’s Statement that I will comment on. I will focus on a number of issues and provide a quick summary of some of those outlined by my colleagues in terms of the economic outlook and the government’s response to it. I will focus on education in my electorate and also make a few comments on planning, which is my current shadow responsibility. I add that I am new to this portfolio.

One thing that surprised me in the Premier’s Statement, first of all, was the Premier’s claim to be an economic wunderkind who is tackling an economy that was absolutely struggling. After the decline of the mining boom, the collapse of iron ore prices and the GST rip-off, our economy was hit by the largest cut in revenue and activity of any economy since the Great Depression of the 1930s. I was the Treasurer; I saw it. Under my three-year watch, state revenue declined in absolute terms by over nine per cent. It was the first time a state had experienced a decline in revenue since the Great Depression. Victoria almost did in the 1990s, but Western Australia got hit with the mother of all declines in revenue. The economy was in domestic recession. People were struggling. People were leaving. Population growth went down and we were rapidly coming off an investment boom. We had a struggle to deal with it. We lost the 2017 election because of the economy.

The McGowan government had a landslide victory on the basis of a number of claims. The Premier said that he was going to address the decline and reverse the cuts in a way that would not significantly increase fees, taxes and charges. That is why he won. We regularly hear a rerun of the 2017 election campaign from the Treasurer and others in this place, including the Premier. Well, mate, you were elected three years ago. What have you done? One of the first statements the Premier made was that Western Australia was in the worst recession since the 1930s. The member for Churchlands outlined quite clearly that the Premier played the political cycle rather than the

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

economic cycle. He hit the economy hard, with major increases in fees, taxes and charges—things that he had promised not to do. The government likes to talk about land tax. Has the government cut any of the land tax increases put in by the previous government? No; it maintained them and increased the metropolitan region improvement levy, which is a land tax. There have been payroll tax increases and increases in duties.

Ms R. Saffioti: No, we didn't.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Yes, the government did.

Ms R. Saffioti: No, we didn't.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: The minister should check the budget.

The government also went on with some brain-dead activities. One of the first things the Premier did was to change the regional migration system. Everyone knew that one of the major factors of demand, particularly in housing but also in a range of aspects of our economy, was population growth. This government put a stop to that growth. The government was repeatedly warned that its decision would have an impact on housing, the supply of labour and international student demand, but it did it anyway. It said that it would not have an impact. Do members know what happened? It had a significant adverse impact on the areas that the government had identified were needed to diversify our economy—that is, international students and tourists. This was stupid, but the government was playing the political cycle and not the economic cycle.

The big question at the next election will be not what happened from 2008 to 2017 under the Barnett government—that is history—but what this government has done. If we listen to the Premier's Statement, the government has created a miracle. The Treasurer said he is looking at the data and cannot find a single bit of data that shows other than that the economy is on the up and up. I ask Western Australians, and we will ask Western Australians, "Do you feel it? Do you feel the improvement? Do you see the improvement in jobs? Do you see the improvement in your house values? Do you see the improvement in confidence?" I think the answer, as was the case in the electorate of Darling Range, will be a comprehensive, "No." The government has not done what it promised to do. Hype will not work. The people of this state know what happened, because they are paying the bill for that. They are looking for the jobs. They are suffering the consequences of this government's actions.

This government is very lucky, in the sense that the federal Liberal-National government has bailed it out in unprecedented proportions. Imagine if Minister Morrison, and Turnbull before him, had not bailed this government out—the economy of this state would be in severe decline, and this government would be going out the door in a year's time. One of the first things the Labor government did was rip up the largest contract that was ready to go, Roe 8, with thousands of jobs; members opposite can debate how many. Why?

Mr W.R. Marmion: It had been started.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Yes. We started it. The government just ripped it up. Luckily, the commonwealth allowed it to redirect the money. The government then promised to spend \$5 million on Metronet, when it had no money to spend. It had promised to pay down debt. The commonwealth paid for half of that, so the government was saved again.

We then had the GST redistribution, which the government said when in opposition was not relevant, because the issue was expenses, not revenue. The federal Liberal-National government is pouring money into this state at an unprecedented level. Without those things, this state's economy would be in a mess, and this government would be headed out the door. It would not be able to do what it has promised. The problem is that this government has been treating the households of Western Australia as political pawns. The government will be held accountable for that. The people of Western Australia will not forget that.

I now want to talk about education. That is an area of great importance in my electorate. We have had a great debate about education. In my view, education is the former government's greatest achievement. Yes, we built the stadium, and we did a lot of other good things, which the McGowan government whinged about when in opposition but now takes total credit for, but that is what governments do. I will go through our achievements in education. People will remember that when we came to office in 2008, we had outcomes-based education. That was a disaster. It was not based on outcomes. It was some sort of ideological game that had basically been drummed up by educationalists. We abandoned that, thankfully.

We also had a long-term trend of parents saying they do not trust the public sector and want to send their kids to the private sector. There was continual loss of market share, if you like, from the public sector to the private sector. I do not mind that. In fact, I fully support a dualistic education system. The problem is that people who have educational aspirations for their children but do not have the income to send their children to a private school will be disadvantaged if we do not better fund the public education system. Education is the greatest ladder to success. It is the greatest mechanism by which we can have a coherent society into the future. Investment in public education is absolutely essential, and we did that in droves, with reforms.

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

The first thing we did was massively increase teachers' wages. Teachers in Western Australia were among the lowest paid in the country. Under our government, they became the highest paid in the country, and they still are. The issue is that if we want to draw the best educationalists into our education system, we need to pay them appropriately. We did that, at great cost, for which we were criticised by the then Labor opposition. We also increased substantially the expenditure per capita for students in our public education system, by five, 10 and on some measures 20 per cent higher than the national average. We put money into the education system. We also increased the expenditure on capital works and new schools. We had a growing economy. We had to spend that money. We increased the repair and maintenance budgets. We repaired in particular the older and tired high schools that represent the bulk of students in public secondary education in our state. We invested in those schools, because they are the foundation of our public school system.

We also made reforms. We put in place the student-centred funding model. We supported students with needs. We gave a Gonski. We did not just have people walking around with signs. We put our money where our mouth was. Importantly, we came up with something more revolutionary—which all the other states and the commonwealth are now coming to—and that is independent public schools. We gave schools the power to decide and optimise their characters. That was a roaring success. For the first time in 20 years, we completely reversed the departure of students to private schools. We increased the market share of the public sector. That was a great achievement. That will be our legacy. Yes, people like the stadium, the museum, Yagan Square, Perth Children's Hospital, Fiona Stanley Hospital and Midland Health Campus, but it is the education changes and investments we put in place that will drive the state's future.

During that period, there was quite a lot of investment in my electorate. My electorate has two of the largest and most successful high schools, and therefore feeder primary schools, in this state, Rossmoyne Senior High School and Willetton Senior High School. I also had Lynwood Senior High School, a great little high school, but that is now in the member for Cannington's electorate. I used to be on the board of that school, and I will say more about that later. Willetton Senior High School now has 2 600 kids. Rossmoyne Senior High School has 2 400 kids. When we add that up, that is 5 000 kids. That is a lot of kids. They are fine schools. They have always been rated at the top.

The local Labor Party member during the entire term of the Barnett government was Hon Sue Ellery. Her office is right next to Willetton Senior High School. She knows that school really well. She knows the importance of that school. She spoke up repeatedly about both those schools. In fact, during the last term of the Barnett government, she made 23 statements about the lack of funding for Willetton and Rossmoyne Senior High Schools. The most pointed one was in 2013, when she derided the Barnett government for cuts to those schools. They were not actual cuts; she admitted that. We had put in an efficiency dividend that pulled back expenditure from the forward estimates, because those schools did not grow as fast as we had hoped. We should compare what happened in that period with her time in government. She demanded that we spend additional money on not only Willetton Senior High School, which we had committed to rebuild, but also Rossmoyne and Lynwood Senior High Schools. She criticised us for not going that. Every month, she had her miscellaneous workers' union troops outside my office waving signs saying "Stop Nahan's cuts to schools", or "Rebuild Rossmoyne Senior High School." She did that every month for four years. I do not know who paid them, but they were out there. What did we do in that year? First of all, we committed to rebuild Willetton Senior High School, and we had completed all but stage 3 when we lost government. We put \$11.8 million into rebuilding it. It was a great achievement. As a result, by the way, that school is rated by *The West Australian* as the top school in the state, the first time a public school, other than Perth Modern School of course, has been rated number one, above Christ Church Grammar School and the Jewish schools—above all of them. That was a result of our investment.

What did we do after the expenditure trims that year? We increased funding per student in schools by 3.4 per cent, an increase of \$513 a student. Where were the cuts? There were none. Also in the forward estimates, we increased expenditure by a further \$19.2 billion. We put in place, on a per student basis, five per cent increases per year, and—you know what?—whilst we were in government, we met them. We did the talk and we did the walk on education. What has she done? She came in when she got the opportunity —

Mr P. Papalia: Who is "she"?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I am afraid Hon Sue Ellery is a woman.

She finally got what she wanted. She got re-elected and became the Minister for Education and Training. Then what did she do? Did she put the money where she said she was going to? What happened in the last three budgets, and particularly in the latest budget, which it is the most important because the government is loaded with money? The government said it had to cut in the first two budget years, and it did, but this budget is in surplus—the GST reform is done, the commonwealth has funded the government's Metronet project and iron ore prices are near a record high in Australian dollars. The government has the money. What did she do?

Mr P. Papalia: Who is she?

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

Dr M.D. NAHAN: The Minister for Education, mate. The minister is her shadow; he should know. What did the minister do? She put no new money into the public secondary education system. Expenditure per student growth is zip—not a cent. She inherited forward estimates with large increases. But that is not all.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Let me tell members what she did in what she says is her own electorate—the Riverton electorate. What did she do to the schools there? One of the first moves she made was to stop the rebuild of Willetton high school. She cut \$11.8 million out of it. Do you know what she said about 24 classrooms that were provided for in the last part of the build? She said, like Marie Antoinette, “Give them cake. We’ll give you some new demountables.” That is what she did. For four years she campaigned. Every move I made, she was there campaigning for the rebuild of Willetton high school. When she got a chance to support and do what she promised, she reneged and cut the funding that she had come out before and supported. She supported, significantly, the so-called student-centred funding model and promised to increase the amount of money that went to our schools. She did not do that. The government then reduced funding for big high schools. That meant that for every school with over 1 200 kids, funding per child is reduced by \$1 157. That means that this year \$1.6 million will be removed from Willetton and \$1.4 million will be removed from Rossmoyne Senior High School—\$5 million over the forward estimates. If we put that together with other cuts, \$22 million has been ripped out of schools in her own electorate, which she spent four years saying she was going to spend more on. Why did the government do that?

She also cut \$50 000 from administration grants and tried to cut the gifted and talented program, which is a really important program and has been very successful. Luckily, we stopped that. She also withdrew funding for awards for academic achievement. Come on! Give us a break! These are your kids. Who is she helping? Who is she governing for? After all those years of complaining about our so-called cuts, when we were actually spending record amounts, and supporting and pushing for more capital funding for Lynwood, Rossmoyne and Willetton Senior High Schools, she cut \$11.8 million from Willetton. Who did she help? She, of course, is related to United Voice—that is how she got here. She is number one on the Labor Party's South Metropolitan Region's ticket. The delegates of the Labor Party put her there, but I would suggest that it was the delegates of United Voice. United Voice has been paid off by this government very handsomely. When we were in office, one thing in our favour was that we inherited and continued to have the highest number of educational assistants in schools of any state—between 25 to 40 per cent more than the national average, it depends. We did reduce the number of educational assistants at one time but only in one program. A number of educational assistants had been put into a specific program—basically, peanut allergies. It was then decided that it was not appropriate to have a single person in the school to address that, so they trained everybody in schools and so those positions became redundant and those people no longer had a job. What did we do? We cut some assistants from that project but enhanced the number of education assistants who could work across the schools. We did the right thing. But the new Labor government came to office and put in 300 new education assistants. The justification for that was it was a good idea. The reality is it was a payback to United Voice.

The government also tailored the wages policy of \$1 000 a year to ensure that the miscellaneous workers of United Voice got a two per cent-plus wage increase every year, above inflation and above everyone else. It advantaged them because of their wage rates. The government also hired United Voice to implement a training program for 300 new EAs to ensure that they became union members. It then employed large numbers of United Voice workers throughout the bureaucracy. She paid off the people who actually got her there—that is, number one on the Labor Party's South Metropolitan Region upper house ticket. They are better off. They are all right, Jack! But she abandoned the people of the electorate she alleged and repeatedly says she represents. She has left them high and dry. She has cut funding when she promised to increase it. That, the people of Riverton will never forgive her for—never.

The most cynical of all has been the government's recent exercise in which it has cut the regional migration system so that it impacts on international students, particularly Chinese students who are not coming here anyway in large numbers. The government had to do something, so it cooked up this plan to give select Chinese students special access to elite high schools, and to sell it to them. We do not know how much that is going to cost—I have heard they will be charged between \$15 000 to \$18 000 a year—and it will be just for Chinese people from the People's Republic of China, not Chinese people from Malaysia, Singapore or Indonesia. I do not know why they are doing this just for China, but what it is really doing is selling access to our most successful high schools, for cash. Those schools are full. The numbers that the minister provided to me show that Willetton has 2 600 enrolments this year and its capacity is 2 600. Next year, that is forecast to go above 2 800. It is full. Churchlands is full. Rossmoyne is full. Shenton College is full. But the government is selling access to those schools. This is coming from a person who has spent her life arguing against privatisation, arguing for public education and promising to do it, but what does she do? She is selling access to schools for a price, which I think is higher than it costs to go to most private schools, to select people from overseas.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 576.]

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 13 February 2020]

p547b-567a

Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Mike Nahan

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm