

the general hospitals, as recommended in the Reid report. That is a very sensible proposition to ensure that palliative care services are provided closer to where people live.

We are setting about reforming our health care system and rebuilding it to make sure that services are provided where they are needed and that they are world-class. I have absolute confidence that Professor Linda Kristjanson will provide a plan and a framework to do that with palliative care services. We will make sure that Western Australia can hold its head high when compared with the rest of Australia. We want to make sure that WA has the best services possible. The government is not dictating this matter to the Cancer Council. The Cancer Council is a strong and vibrant organisation that enjoys my 100 per cent support. It is up to the Cancer Council to make these decisions. I also advise the house that I met with the Cancer Council and the Leukaemia Foundation earlier this year to hear their proposals for possible alternative future uses of the Shenton Park site. The groups put forward the idea of offering long-stay accommodation and services to young cancer and leukaemia patients and their families, particularly those from the country, on the cottage hospice site in Shenton Park. Currently, due to the lack of suitable accommodation in Western Australia, both organisations must turn away a number of families requiring accommodation at a very difficult time in their lives. The Cancer Council was unable to take a large number of bookings in 2004. In 2005 the Leukaemia Foundation has turned away five families in March, two in April, and in May was looking at rejecting another three families needing long-term accommodation because a member of their family was suffering from the disease. Based on information provided to me, I was happy to give my in-principle support to the co-location of the patients closer to a tertiary hospital site provided that the proposal aligned with the final clinical services plan and that no other significant barriers occurred. I also advised that I could see no barrier to the Cancer Council, as the lessee of the site, applying to the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to change the purpose for which the site is used. It is my hope that it will continue to be used to provide much-needed support and assistance to the families of those people suffering from cancer.

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACCESS

### *Grievance*

**MR J.N. HYDE (Perth)** [10.01 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development. My residential and business constituents, many of whom are within two kilometres of the centre of Perth, regularly complain that they cannot get broadband and other modern communications services. Western Australia has the highest percentage of self-employed people, many working from home, and our economy is going gang busters, yet people cannot access the latest broadband and digital services. People in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and many pork-barrelled regional eastern states centres can access those services. If, like so many of my constituents, a person is, for example, a consultant working from home designing new engineering works for Pilbara mines or submitting detailed tenders to companies in China, quick broadband is vital. The federal government has not invested in the telecommunications infrastructure to give metropolitan and regional Western Australia equal access, and, more importantly, access equivalent to that which the Asian tiger economies enjoy.

The world's largest and most modern satellite, Thailand's iPSTAR-1, is now capable of delivering broadband at 20 times existing speeds all over Australia, New Zealand and most of India and Asia. The New Zealand government is using iPSTAR to deliver broadband to every school and regional community. Thailand will use iPSTAR to deliver broadband and voice services to 40 000 schools and 7 000 regional communities. The minister's electorate in Kalgoorlie is home to the Thai satellite's Australian portal. Telstra has signed on to iPSTAR to meet its minor universal service obligations and will deliver broadband to remote Western Australian communities at around half the existing cost thanks to Thai technology. iPSTAR-1, also known as Thaicom 4, is owned by the excellent Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's company ShinCorp, and is the result of Thai investment and cutting-edge technology. While the Thais have been investing in technology infrastructure, the Australian government has allowed Telstra to fatten its cash flows and neglect forward investment. The new Telstra boss admits that Australia's telco infrastructure is in the bottom 25 per cent of that of the developed world. He obviously has not been to Western Australia. We are a growing Asian economy and our inner-city telco infrastructure lags behind every major Asian capital city, developed or developing. Western Australia is not Queensland. Fifty per cent of Queenslanders live in the bush and 50 per cent live in Brisbane. That is unlike Western Australia, where many people in the bush are nowhere near a town, let alone a city. Queensland's services are much more decentralised. Seventy-three per cent of Western Australians live in Perth, yet our needs are the most neglected of the capital cities. Our regional and remote citizens are the most federally neglected in the commonwealth.

Unlike the eastern states, very little of Perth's inner city has access to underground cable, broadband or pay TV. Despite the excellent hard work of local Telstra staff, they have to beef up old copper wiring to ADSL level and try to sell it to locals as ADSL broadband. I feel for my constituents working for Telstra and its many subcontractors. They are in a *Star Trek* episode playing Scotty trying to get warp factor 9 out of 1940s wiring! It is nothing like real broadband. So much of Western Australia has basic telephony and the worst pay television service in all of Australasia.

I could be in a little Thai Isaan village like Baung Kan, which has about 300 people, in the sticks near the Mekong River. It is on the road to Chet Sin Nam Tok, with beautiful waterfalls and water buffaloes strolling down the one main street with paddy fields all around, and it is 750 kilometres from Bangkok. I can get up at 5.00 am, tap a few rubber

trees, stroll home, and before breakfast access my Western Australian Parliament e-mails from my WA office at a faster speed than I can when I am in East Perth. In addition, I can get better coverage of Australian Football League games on Thai pay TV near the Mekong River than I can in Perth. Through the Thaicom 3 satellite there is better broadband access and, due to true competition, pay-TV in Asia is much cheaper, with more choice and much higher quality. In Perth the only competition is through the federal government allowing tin-pot start-up telco companies to cherry-pick high-turnover big customers. St Georges Terrace and other pavements have been destroyed with cheap and nasty, uneven access covers. Like many of my constituents, my house still has outside its front fence a little PMG cement cover - it is unobtrusive and even carries copper wires, cockroaches and daddy-long-legs. In the middle of my verge, a large, ugly piece of metal that looks like a barbecue plate that somebody has oxyacetylened off a 44 gallon drum covers a broadband cable to the East Perth transport centre. There is no money in the cheapie start-up telco provider taking on residents, but the commonwealth allows it to destroy our verges without planning approvals and make money from big business without any obligations.

The commonwealth government sell-off of Telstra is a disaster for Western Australia because Perth, in particular, is already far behind the eastern cities and Asia. Queensland gets \$1 billion for broadband but, of course, it will be obsolete within six years and there will be no government money to upgrade it. While the Thais are now on Thaicom 4, their fourth state-of-the-art satellite delivery system, Australia struggles with a couple of tin cans in the sky - our overloaded, aged Optus B1 and C2 satellites, humming and buzzing, dodging space stations and returning shuttles in the stratosphere. Of course, these dinosaurs, which are plodding around in the cheaper part of the atmosphere, are hovering above the eastern states but are inconveniently placed for WA's south west. The Optus satellite hovers so far down in the east horizon that a person in Denmark has to mow down half a native old-growth forest to be able to watch supposed free-to-air TV delivered by satellite, for which regional people have to pay \$100 to Optus.

If the government is dinkum about getting out of telecommunications, it has to allow full competition. The federal minister said last night that a flogged-off Telstra would enable market forces to fund most of Australia's infrastructure needs. "Where there was 'market failure'", she said, "the government would subsidise the service." Market failure! My inner city constituents and most of regional WA are living with this market failure every day.

**MR J.J.M. BOWLER (Murchison-Eyre - Minister for Local Government and Regional Development)** [10.08 am]: I have never been to the Mekong and played with the water buffalo but I played with a few young girls on the Swan River when I was younger!

**Ms J.A. Radisich** interjected.

**Mr J.J.M. BOWLER:** My cousins and sister.

**Ms J.A. Radisich:** That's even worse!

**Mr J.J.M. BOWLER:** Present company excluded, member for upper Swan!

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.W. Andrews):** Order, members! It is all good fun this morning but in six minutes and 21 seconds the minister will look to me to give him extra time. I hate to interrupt everyone's good humour, but we need to return to a very important subject.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** It was his best speech so far!

**Mr J.J.M. BOWLER:** And my worst!

I thank the member for Perth for his grievance. We have talked about the tyranny of distance in Western Australia and the need for more telecommunications infrastructure. I am not only the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development but also a member who represents a seat that takes in 48 per cent of Western Australia. I always think of the problems with telecommunications as being experienced only in the regions and places like my seat. Therefore, when the member for Perth raised this issue with me the other day and said he would be bringing forward this grievance, I was surprised to learn that the central business district of Perth is experiencing many of the same problems that we in the bush are experiencing. I would expect that the member for Bunbury's seat, and the outer areas of the south west, would have problems with telecommunications, but I certainly would not expect that the same problems would be experienced in the central business district of Perth. That has got me thinking -

Several members interjected.

**Mr J.J.M. BOWLER:** Yes, it is a dangerous thing to do, but that has got me thinking, on this rare occasion, about why this is happening. I will tell members my theory. I believe it is all about distance. We talk about the distance between Perth and the bush, Perth and Meekatharra, or Perth and Kalgoorlie, where I live, but what about the distance between Perth and Canberra? The tyranny of distance applies also between Perth and Canberra. That is why Perth has been left behind. The telecommunications system in Australia is eastern states-centric. It will get worse, because the National Party members in Queensland have been making a lot of noise - and good on them. They have stood up for their state, unlike the Liberal senators in Western Australia, and have spoken out.

**Mr G. Snook:** What about your mates?

**Mr J.J.M. BOWLER:** Our senators have been speaking out for the past two or three years. We do not hear anything from the member for Moore's mates. Where is the federal member for Forrest? What has he said about this? He has said absolutely nothing. Where is the federal member for Kalgoorlie, Barry Haase? Barry Haase said 18 months ago that he would not allow the sale of Telstra until standards in his area had been lifted. However, Barry Haase has now decided, after John Howard has tapped him on the shoulder, that standards in the federal seat of Kalgoorlie are good enough. That is absolute rubbish.

**Mr M.W. Trenorden:** What about "Wilson Turkey"? What is he saying?

**Mr J.J.M. BOWLER:** What is he saying? We are deafened by his silence. The federal minister is now saying there will be market failure, and the \$3 billion that has now been proposed will not go anywhere near what will be needed to fix the problem. I wonder what will happen with Telstra. Telstra has said it will spend \$1 billion in the immediate future to upgrade the ADSL system in the central business district in Perth and in other areas of Western Australia. However, what about the next wave of technology? Twenty years ago we did not know about fibre-optic cable. We did not think about that. ADSL will not be the last wave of technology. When the next wave of technology comes along, who will pay for it to go into the bush? I live in the bush. Some members opposite do too. I see them nodding their heads in agreement. Do people in the bush ever see an Optus, 3, Orange or Hutchison van or technician? Never! The only people we ever see in regional Western Australia, or for that matter generally in Perth, are the people from Telstra. Once Telstra has been privatised, it will be just like Optus, 3, Orange or Hutchison. We will never see anyone from Telstra!

The member for Perth raised a very good point about technology in Thailand. As an Australian I am ashamed that we are taking the lead from Thailand. One would think that Thailand, which is generally classed as a third world nation that is evolving into a developed country, would be further behind Australia in the area of telecommunications. I was staggered at the information the member has given me about iPSTAR and what it can do for regional Western Australia and the central business district, which the member represents. However, once again, it is about the tyranny of distance - not so much between Perth and Meekatharra, but between Perth and Canberra. The problem is that we are too far away from Canberra. The federal government has three or four safe seats over here, so it does not need to worry about Western Australia.

Yesterday I was in Narembeen, in the member for Merredin's electorate. The federal government has made an effort in the bush in the past 18 months. That is for one reason only: to appease the people in the bush and in regional Western Australia so that it can prepare for the sale of Telstra. However, once the federal government has sold Telstra, it will not matter if the member for Merredin jumps up and down, because it will no longer need the people of Merredin. It will not care, because Telstra will be a private company. If the member for Merredin jumps up and down and complains about Optus, do members reckon Optus listens to him?

**Mr B.J. Grylls:** Do you hear me complain now?

**Mr J.J.M. BOWLER:** Does the member complain now about Optus?

**Mr B.J. Grylls:** Do you hear me complain now about what you are doing?

**Mr J.J.M. BOWLER:** The member should not complain. I went to Narembeen yesterday, and the member did not even have the decency to ring me and say he was not coming. He just rang the airline, as I was at the airport, waiting for him, to say he was not coming. When I went to the member's electorate, I found out that the Shire of Narembeen has had to pay for its own telecommunications. It has had to spend \$130 000 on a tower so that it can get a mobile service.

**Mr J.N. Hyde:** The Telstra staff in Western Australia are exceptional. They go out of their way. However, Canberra is not listening to them. When Telstra is privatised and has its headquarters in Melbourne or Los Angeles, things will get even worse.

**Mr J.J.M. BOWLER:** It is a sad indictment on the federal opposition parties that they have allowed that to happen at the federal level. They should have done a lot more. The federal colleagues of members opposite should have taken the lead from the Nats in Queensland and jumped up and down.

We now have this \$3 billion. However, it is too late. The federal government is still going to sell Telstra, despite our best efforts. All I can say is that members opposite should make sure they now make a noise to their colleagues to ensure we get our fair share - which we have never done before - of that \$3 billion.

## ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY STANDING COMMITTEE

### *Second Report - Annual Report 2004-05*

**MS J.A. RADISICH (Swan Hills) [10.16 am]:** I present for tabling the second report of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee, entitled "Annual Report 2004-2005".

[See paper 706.]