

APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) RECURRENT 2009–10 (SUPPLEMENTARY) BILL 2010
APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) CAPITAL 2009–10 (SUPPLEMENTARY) BILL 2010

Second Reading — Cognate Debate

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON COL HOLT (South West) [5.09 pm]: I was talking about the role members of Parliament play in their electorates as backbenchers. I guess a government backbencher is not that different from an opposition backbencher, although I have not had the pleasure of that experience yet, and according to Hon Ken Travers I probably will not because I am halfway through my career!

Hon Ken Travers: If your career extends, you will; I guarantee that.

Hon COL HOLT: Thank you!

Obviously as a National Party member of Parliament, a lot of my focus is on royalties for regions—surprise, surprise! A lot of the people who come to see National Party members talk about projects that they would like funded through royalties for regions. From my experience, there was not a lot of activity by the previous government in the regions, and a whole range of projects, issues and infrastructure were banked up, ready and waiting for an opportunity to have that investment in regional WA.

One such area that we have come across is residential education colleges. Picking up on a point that Hon Kate Doust talked about, I do not think there was any investment to a great degree in some of those regional colleges, so a lot of students flowed away from the regions into Perth to take up educational opportunities, and I think teachers flowed with them. We are very proud to say that we have invested in a whole heap of residential colleges throughout the regions. I hope that trend continues because I think we all know that when we have students, schools develop.

Hon Kate Doust: It is not just about having that, though; it is how you attract those teachers and retain them.

Hon COL HOLT: I will talk about that. I hope that the trend of investment in residential colleges continues and that we look at regional education as being just as good as metropolitan education. To pick up on the member's point about how we attract and retain teachers in the regions, there has been a great deal of investment by this government in some district allowances. We recognise that living in the regions is expensive and we want to invest in people who live in the regions, so district allowances are an important way of rewarding that dedication to the regions.

I will talk a little about the gifted and talented education program as well, which again follows on from what Hon Kate Doust said. The GATE program is offered only in metropolitan Perth. Gifted and talented children in the regions—I know it is just about to change, Mr President—who want to pursue their academic excellence or dramatic talents in a GATE program have to go to the metropolitan area. In my case, my two boys are very good at art and they wanted to pursue a GATE program in visual arts. The only place they could do that was in Kalamunda and either Applecross or Rossmoyne. Someone might be able to correct me on that.

Hon Kate Doust: Rossmoyne.

Hon COL HOLT: I think it might have been Rossmoyne. A whole series of programs is offered through the education system in metropolitan Perth. Our boys basically live, breathe and drink art, but the only opportunity I had for them to pursue their talents through the GATE program was to put them into Kalamunda Senior High School. When I was in Manjimup not long ago, I ran into a friend of mine who works in the timber industry. I asked her what she and her kids were up to. She told me that her eight-year-old daughter is basically a fantastic artist and showed me some of the art her daughter had done. I was absolutely impressed and she asked, "What do I do now for this child who wants to pursue an education that goes through and works on that talent?" Really, the only answer I had at that time was, "You're going to have to move to metro Perth or find some other ways to nurture her abilities." Therefore, I was very pleased when the Minister for Education announced a GATE program in Bunbury. Although it has a focus on academic outcomes, I was very, very pleased to see that finally a step has been taken that says we can deliver those services in a regional centre. Although Bunbury is obviously a very, very big regional centre and can draw on a large pool of kids, it is important that we have taken this first step and said that we can do it. I hope that in the future we can look at some of those potential residential colleges around Bunbury that might serve as a catchment that draws kids in from maybe Bridgetown or Donnybrook, or maybe a little further to Manjimup, like my friend's daughter, who can stay at the residential college, and we can expand that GATE program to include visual arts, performing arts and music. Therefore, I am very pleased we have taken that step and I hope that we will continue to focus the budget on delivering those sorts of outcomes for our regional kids.

I will also talk about royalties for regions and how really, up to this point, it has focused on some of those bricks-and-mortar solutions. The regions seriously needed that focus. A range of programs have ensured that buildings and services have been brought up to standard so that they can be used for things like country residential colleges or educational delivery points. While we are doing that, we cannot ignore the people capacity in the regions to help deliver those programs as well.

I will briefly talk about another issue that I have come across since working in this role—that is, the Hassell Highway, which, for the benefit of members who may not know, runs from Albany to Jerramungup and on to Esperance. It has a really bad stretch, not far from Albany. It is a really critical piece of infrastructure for that region and if the Southdown project gets up and running, as we suspect it may, there will be a whole heap of pressure on that road from trucks, caravans, kids going to school on buses and day-to-day vehicle traffic. I want to talk about that because in 2001 all the repairs were basically budgeted for and there was to be a focus on that part of the road. With the change of government there was a change of government focus, and I accept that; governments get elected because they have a different focus on what they want to deliver. I think at that time after the change in government there was a definite focus on projects such as the Mandurah railway. Therefore, I can accept that change in focus, which is why I think this change of government —

Hon Adele Farina interjected.

Hon COL HOLT: Muirs Highway is another road that needs a bit of attention, although some parts are getting that. I think that this change of government has brought the focus back on to regional Western Australia. I hope that some of those little things will be back on the radar of the Minister for Transport and the other people who can see that that sort of regional infrastructure will have increased pressure and that they will have the focus to make things happen. I think that is what the royalties for regions program has brought to this government, and I am sure that all the members in this place will agree with that.

I want to talk briefly about the community resource centre network, which again has had some funding injected into it. Community resource centres really are community nodes in the regions. I encourage all members, even if they do not live in the regions, to visit them. I often go to the Walpole and Nannup community resource centres. These centres buzz with activity and are located in fairly small communities of maybe 800 to 1 000 people. These little community nodes are simply amazing centres of activity for the communities, again because there has been a focus on what they can do for their own communities. They operated for a long time on the smell of an oily rag and worked their proverbial off to deliver whatever they could to their communities, and they were well appreciated. I think now with increased investment and an increased focus, they actually deliver and do a lot more for their communities, and we should use them as internodes for government access to our communities because that is a role they can play. We should be appreciative that these centres have stepped up to the mark to deliver some of those services.

I have just a very quick story about one of those community resource centres. I think I have talked about it before in the house, but in case I have not, I will. When I visited the Wellstead CRC I found out about a program and that a speech therapist was actually living in Wellstead. I do not know if members are aware of Wellstead, but it is east of Albany and it probably has about 40 people living there. How many people does Hon Giz Watson reckon live there?

Hon Giz Watson: About 50.

Hon COL HOLT: They have a speech therapist who lives in Wellstead, and she wants to be able to work her trade, if you like. That community resource centre has the ability to connect to other resource centres over the internet, through Skype and a couple of other programs, and she could deliver speech therapy to other remote areas. How good is that? It brings those communities together and uses that natural ability within that community and enables someone to share a valuable skill, even though her community may only have 50 people. In Perth, people can make a booking and jump in the car and drive for 10 minutes to see a speech therapist. That does not happen in regional WA. Another friend in Badgingarra has a child who needs speech therapy. I told her about this story and suggested she go to her local CRC to see if it could connect her in the same way. I will have to catch up and see how that has gone. That is the sort of thing that that focus and that investment can do in some of those regional services.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to temporary orders.