

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

Second Reading — Cognate Debate

Resumed from 6 April.

HON ED DERMER (North Metropolitan) [11.24 am]: Last night, just before this debate was interrupted according to temporary orders, Hon Simon O'Brien raised a point about trade unions. The relationship between trade unions and these appropriation bills is a little distant. But I did say at the time that I would address that point. There is degree of commonality between trade unions and Parliament, in the sense that both organisations are, at their best, committed to equalising relationships in our community and ensuring the appropriate representation of legitimate interests. I will not go further into trade unions this morning, but I did say last night that I would conclude dealing with that interjection from Hon Simon O'Brien.

Last night I talked about the importance of learning from history to avoid making errors in the future. I talked also about the central nature of appropriations to the work of Parliaments. I started that explanation by talking about the model Parliament that was called by King Edward I in the late thirteenth century. I talked about the success of Edward I in achieving his objectives by learning from the experience of others. I talked about how his father and predecessor, Henry III, had had trouble managing the barons, probably because he was too gentle. I did not get this far last night, but it is very important to say that Edward I learned also from the experience of his grandfather, King John. King John's problem, I think, was that he was overly authoritarian, unlike Henry III, and the barons rebelled against that over-authoritarian reign of King John.

On the wall of the members' corridor just outside this chamber there is a very important document. That is a copy of the Magna Carta—or the Great Charter, to put it in English, as we should under the standing orders. It is no accident that the Magna Carta is on the wall of the members' corridor. As I understand it, the Magna Carta was a treaty that the king had signed to achieve a temporary respite in his ongoing conflict with the barons. But it had the consequence that the king acknowledged that even the king had to obey the law. I think that is a central legacy from the Magna Carta and probably why a copy of the Magna Carta is on the wall in the members' corridor, just a few metres from where I am standing.

Many of the steps that were taken in the evolution of the Westminster system of government were not steps that were taken with that ultimate purpose in mind. They were often steps that were taken in response to a crisis, and the long-term effect of those steps would probably not have been apparent to the people who were making the decisions at the time. But the first very important step—the requirement for the king to obey the law, as specified in the Magna Carta—was taken as a response by the king to the crisis at the time so that he would get some respite in his ongoing conflict with the barons.

It is very important that we understand what appropriation bills are all about. Appropriation bills are about the Parliament, representing the people of the state, giving ministers of the Crown permission to spend money. This relates directly to the model Parliament that was called by Edward I. When we remember why Edward I called that model Parliament, that makes the point. Edward I was, like his grandfather King John, authoritarian. He was a remarkably belligerent king. He pursued vigorous wars against Scotland and Wales, and probably other countries as well, but those two come to mind. He was not stupid by any means. He understood that if he wanted to start a war, it would be a good idea to work out how much money and how many soldiers he had available to him for the prosecution of that war before he started that war. So what he did was call together, I understand in a church, barons from across the kingdom of England and wealthy merchants from cities in which trade provided a source of income to consult with him—to parley with him—in that model Parliament before he started the war. I think the fact that the king was gathering together people in his kingdom who had wealth, to ask them to commit part of their wealth to his purpose of prosecuting a war, is analogous to the appropriation bills that we are dealing with today in the Parliament of Western Australia. It is about the money. The money is that which the executive uses to do things. The relationship between Parliament and the Crown over the centuries was often based on consideration of the money, and the power that comes with the money. The Crown and the Parliament compete, conflict and occasionally cooperate; it is a tense relationship. Over the centuries there are points where that relationship has flared. Central to that struggle between the Crown and the Parliament is the idea of the Crown wanting to assert its independence of the Parliament, but the Crown needing to turn to the Parliament for money, and the Parliament endeavouring to use its control over the money to have some control over the Crown and to mitigate the absolutism that people like King John would have liked to have perpetuated.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Are you toying with the idea of blocking supply?

Hon ED DERMER: Hon Simon O'Brien can be assured that I have a great respect for constitutions and their conventions, and we have no intention at all of blocking supply, and I certainly would not support such a proposal. Therefore, the honourable member can relax on that point!

Another point in the evolution of the Westminster system that demonstrates this relationship was during the reign of Charles I in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. Charles needed money and he would convene the Parliament in order to access money through what was essentially an appropriation. The Parliament would then try to impose its will on the king. The king's answer to that was not to call Parliament, but to endeavour to find money through a novel means, a novel device; it was a device that had some precedent. There was a special shipping tax, ship money, and the king used it as a way to raise money in such a way that he did not need to consult Parliament. The tension reached a point at which the king raised an army against the Parliament. This was in the context of religious differences and all sorts of complexities and it had the very unfortunate outcome of the English Civil War. A terrible outcome for all those concerned, particularly those who lost their lives and loved ones in that dreadful civil war. A similar fate was inflicted upon Charles I when he was tried and executed. That trial was made possible by the army at the time using its power to stop some members of Parliament entering the Parliament to ensure the numbers to set up a trial, which ultimately resulted in the execution of the king. Again, we see a king endeavouring to ignore Parliament by raising money elsewhere, and terrible consequences followed.

I read an interesting book some years ago by a gentleman named Nigel Greenwood. I cannot remember the title of the book, but his thesis was that the American War of Independence was linked to a similar endeavour by a British king to become independent of the Parliament by raising money in the North American colonies, and that king was George III. I have seen documentaries that suggest a different history about the taxes that the British endeavoured to place on the North American colonies, but Mr Greenwood's book entailed the theory that the motivation for those taxes was the king trying to find money to become more independent of the Parliament. Again, a dreadful war followed and the consequence to the Crown was the loss of most of the North American colonies.

If we move along to the reigns of King Edward VII and George V, we come to the time of the Liberal Prime Minister of Britain, Herbert Henry Asquith, whose initial period as Prime Minister was from 1908 to 1916. At this time, in 1909, the British Parliament put forward what was commonly referred to as the People's Budget. It was a budget endeavouring to raise taxes to pay for welfare programs—towards equalising income in Britain in the early twentieth century. It was also to raise money for battleships, which were part of an arms race between Britain and Germany at the time that contributed to the dreadful consequences of 1914 to 1918. Most importantly, the People's Budget of 1909 was a high-taxing budget to provide services to move towards equalising wealth and to ensure that more people in Britain had a fair go and a fair opportunity for a better future. A good friend of mine, who is academically qualified as a historian, privately put the view to me that the reason that there was not a British revolution of the nature of the Russian Revolution of 1917 was the work of the Asquith government and its efforts to redistribute income. In history, these matters are always matters of conjecture; we cannot be sure, but I think it is a very reasonable and considered theory that achieving more equal distribution of income was central to avoiding a bloody revolution. When this People's Budget was put forward in 1909 the Conservative majority in the House of Lords moved to block the budget—to block supply. Two more general elections followed in 1910; Herbert Henry Asquith was still Prime Minister at the end of those elections. He secured the promise of the new king, George V, who succeeded his father Edward VII in 1911, that if necessary, if the House of Lords continued to block the reforming and redistributive initiatives of the Liberal government, the king would appoint Liberal peers to the House of Lords with the purpose of ensuring the passage of these important reforms. Part of that process led to the Parliament Act 1911, which removed most of the powers of the House of Lords. Primarily, the House of Lords' ability to block a bill was replaced by a capacity to delay most bills by a period of up to two years and it was also prevented from blocking financial bills. When a democratic system evolves, it is very difficult to say at what point a democracy is achieved; it is an ongoing process. In my view, the most significant point that showed that the Westminster system had evolved into a democracy was the enactment of the Parliament Act in 1911, which stopped the unelected House of Lords from blocking money bills and doing any more than delaying other bills.

It is interesting that when Westminster systems were inherited in Australia and New Zealand, many important initiatives were taken that contributed to the evolution of democracy such as the development of secret ballots and the extension of voting rights to women. I also think that the preferential voting system was a very important step in the evolution of democracy relative to the first-past-the-post system. I am very pleased to say that preferential voting is often referred to as the Australian system of voting or counting votes, which is very important.

Considering these two bills today is part of this process that defines the relationship between the people, the Parliament and the ministers of the Crown, and how those ministers are given permission through appropriation

bills, by the Parliament, to spend money on behalf of the people. It is interesting to draw analogies and parallels in history. A behavioural psychologist looking at the evolution of the Westminster system may see it as a process of conditioning. We are probably familiar with Pavlov's dog and the behaviourist theory in psychology in which if we take an action and there is a positive or adverse consequence, it is likely to affect our future behaviour. We could look at the history and the evolution of the Westminster system and see that where actions were taken with adverse consequences, such as those taken by Charles I, they were part of that conditioning process. Over the centuries the evolution of the Westminster system has been a process of conditioning against the abuse of power. I think we are very fortunate to be the beneficiaries of that well-conditioned system.

A behavioural psychologist might consider this to be analogous to that psychological conditioning theory. A biologist, which is closer to my own academic training, would draw parallels between the evolution of the Westminster system and the Darwinian evolution of natural selection. The theory is based on the accumulation of advantages achieved by trial and error, which is certainly consistent with the evolution of the Westminster system and the central role of appropriation and the control of the Parliament over appropriation in that system.

My mind is still tuned to history—it is important we learn from it—but I am just going to cross the English Channel and consider French history. When I heard my colleague Hon Ken Travers refer to the Premier's proposal for a new office as "the palace", I was reminded of a visit I was fortunate enough to be able to make in 1986 to a notable palace in Versailles, France. Prior to that visit I had shared the general view that the downfall of the House of Bourbon during the French Revolution was in large part due to its overindulgence and self-indulgence in the opulence of its lifestyle. I suppose that is most clearly identified by contrasting the opulence and indulgence of the Palace of Versailles with the neglect of the French people, which led to the French Revolution. The lady who conducted the tour gave me a very different insight into the role of Louis XIV, the French king who had taken the initiative to turn what had been a hunting lodge in Versailles into his new palace close to, but outside, Paris. She explained that rather than just being self-indulgent, Louis XIV used opulence as a political tool. He thought that by showing the opulence to perhaps a visiting ambassador, he was demonstrating his power and therefore his strength, and that by intimidating a competing state he was advancing his political objectives. I found that very interesting. She gave us an example by showing us a window of the palace, outside which there was a lovely garden, and she said that the King and perhaps the ambassador from the Holy Roman Empire would sit by the window and have a cup of tea or something, and they would look out and see a large garden full of red flowers; then they would come back a short time after and look out of the same window and there would be a garden full of blue flowers because the servants had changed the flowerpots in the garden. That was a way of him demonstrating that he had the capacity and the manpower to achieve, on a large scale, relatively trivial objectives, but his political objective was intimidation by demonstrating his power of command and the power he had over the behaviour of people, to support his political objectives. It was all very interesting.

I was very concerned when I thought about this new office—the one my colleague described as the Premier's palace. I actually interjected at the time—I do not think Hansard picked it up—and said that I hoped that the Premier had not visited Versailles. I would be concerned if the Premier had visited Versailles and was imagining his new office as some symbol of his authority—I am glad he is not listening now; he is in the other chamber—particularly if he had focused on the gardens at Versailles. I cannot imagine what would have happened to the landscaping bill for the new office if he had; the government might have needed a special Treasurer's advance bill to pay for what he might have been planning to spend on it!

It is interesting to draw analogies between politicians past and present, and I would not be surprised if Premier Barnett was happy to identify himself with Louis XIV; the expression "I am the state" has a disturbing resonance that echoes across the centuries, for example. But I do not think too many parallels can be drawn between the Premier and Louis XIV because I remember the Premier when he was Leader of the Opposition for the longer period, not the very short one that preceded his success in the election that led to him being Premier, and his difficulties in managing his barons in the Liberal party room; I cannot imagine that Louis XIV would have had anywhere near the amount of trouble dealing with those around him. It is an incomplete comparison between the Premier and Louis XIV, but nevertheless I think it is an important one.

In learning from history, in learning about money, and in learning about spending it, we learn about how ultimately, via our electoral system—via this Westminster democratic system that we were lucky enough to inherit—the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the opposition Whip in the Legislative Council, the Deputy President and whoever else might be in Parliament, are ultimately accountable to our employers when they review our contracts at each election. That is the way it should be and the way it is. I have a bit of a dilemma as an opposition member because part of me is highly competitive, which leads me to not offer sound and free advice to my colleagues and competitors across the chamber.

Hon Simon O'Brien: But you have a gratuitous element running through you, and I am sure you will!

Hon ED DERMER: No, no, there is no gratuitous element; it is duty that leads me to implore my colleagues opposite to learn from history, and not to repeat mistakes.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Forgive me; it was an uncharitable remark!

Hon ED DERMER: It was, but I am a very forgiving man, so that is fine!

It is very important to learn from history. Even a political operator with the capability of Louis XIV built a weakness into his very effective political power structure, which was that a person had to be as clever and capable and determined as Louis XIV to manage it. Unlike the Westminster system, which was evolving across the English Channel and was able to survive the various crises that developed through its history, the system developed by Louis XIV only worked under the guidance of a natural political operator like Louis XIV. By the time of his successors—namely, Louis XV and Louis XVI—it just did not work. Louis XVI—I learnt this on the tour that I had the pleasure of enjoying in 1986—was a king who was probably not that interested in being a political operator; he had a particular interest in science, and there was a room in the palace where he conducted scientific experiments with Benjamin Franklin of all people. I think the poor blighter was just unable to manage the machine that Louis XIV had developed as a grand political operator, and when a financial crisis loomed in the reign of Louis XVI the whole thing unravelled and it cost Louis XVI and his wife their lives, and it cost, sadly, many, many people their lives, and paved the way for Napoleon Bonaparte and the dreadful wars that followed. So having a political system that depends on one man to manage it has an obvious flaw—that is, if that one man is no longer there, the system collapses. I think a very strong analogy can be drawn between the system of Louis XIV, which depended on one man, and the way that the Western Australian government operates now. Hon Colin Barnett is obviously a very capable political operator, but not quite in the same class as Louis XIV.

Hon Liz Behjat: Louis XIV was a Protestant; I do not think the Premier would consider doing that.

Hon ED DERMER: I would be delighted to follow up whatever Hon Liz Behjat might like to raise, but I have limited time and I am not sure I would receive the generosity of my colleagues of an extension of time.

In the same way that the weakness of Bourbon monarchy in France was that it depended too much on one powerful man, a parallel can be drawn with the Barnett government in Western Australia today.

Another important lesson—this relates to more recent history—is that when governments are accountable to the people, as they are in the system of democracy that we have been fortunate enough to inherit, nothing loses the people's vote more quickly than does waste; that is, waste of the limited money that we as a Parliament choose to appropriate to allow the ministers to spend to provide services. I really enjoy listening to the music that emanates from the belltower. They are in the habit of playing *Finlandia* on the bells, which is a lovely tune. I can hear it from my office, which is, fortunately, placed on the eastern side of the building. When played, it is enough to induce tears. *Finlandia* by Sibelius is a magic piece of work. I really enjoy it. But in the lead up to the 2001 election, a very large number of the citizens of Western Australia, the people who ultimately employ members of Parliament, viewed the belltower as a horrific waste of money. It was a very small proportion of the appropriation Parliament provided to the ministers at that time, but politically it became a matter of very large significance. I think it lost the Court government a very large number of votes.

Hon Simon O'Brien: And you are looking for a belltower, aren't you?

Hon ED DERMER: I do not think that we have to look at all. It could be argued that there was some public good from the belltower. As a citizen, I really like the belltower and I like to listen in my office to *Finlandia* being played. However, that certainly was not enough to induce me to vote for Richard Court, although many Western Australians were induced to vote against him because they viewed the belltower to be a waste of money. This is my dilemma: am I doing the right thing in pointing this out, and what would happen if it were not pointed out to the Premier, his fellow ministers and their colleagues? I often wonder how Henry Asquith would feel about the now Liberal Party in Australia using the same name as the British Liberal Party of the early twentieth century that did so much good. It is one of those little ironies; but now I am distracting myself. Do I advise the Premier and his fellow ministers to not waste money on developing fine new offices when there is such an obvious need in the schools, the hospitals, the police stations and in so many other service areas? I think it will cost him an enormous number of votes. There are many areas in which the money Parliament entrusts to ministers of the Crown to spend on behalf of the people could be better spent than on developing elaborate offices for ministers.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Where will we accommodate our public servants?

Hon ED DERMER: Public servants, ministers and their staff can be satisfactorily accommodated without going over the top. Ultimately, the electors of Western Australia, our employers, will assess what is over the top. I believe that the proposal put forward for a new office for the Premier —

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm: “Colin I”. I am sorry for interrupting, member.

Hon ED DERMER: When the member says “Colin I”, he presupposes a “Colin II”. I talked about King John earlier. There has never been a King John II. I do not think that reflects on Hon Jon Ford, there in the chair. Although the name is spelt differently, the crown fits quite well, Hon Jon Ford. However, now I am distracted. One reason there has never been a King John II is that King John is well recognised for doing a bad job. I doubt that there will be a Colin II.

Be that as it may, very simply, we pass appropriation bills and trust that the Premier and other ministers of the Crown will spend the money wisely. If the people, our employers, assess that money has been spent in a self-indulgent way, those ministers of the Crown will pay the price at the next election. I expect a new composition of parties in the Legislative Assembly and corresponding advice to Her Majesty’s representative to appoint a new Premier after the next election will follow.

Hon Simon O’Brien: I wonder who that Premier will be!

Hon ED DERMER: I look forward to the day when I see Hon Eric Ripper in a modest Premier’s office doing very well in the state.

Hon Simon O’Brien: It might be Eric; Eric I.

Hon ED DERMER: It is important not to mix up heads of government and heads of state. I would have thought Hon Simon O’Brien would have a grip on that by now. However, I live to be disappointed.

If the government spends money opulently in a self-indulgent way and does not learn from recent history, that suffered by Richard Court will be similarly suffered by Colin Barnett. Why am I giving advice that may lead to a longer period of tenure for Colin Barnett and his ministers? I give it because we have to do our best in this Parliament to achieve the best that we can for Western Australians today. In the two and a quarter years, or however long it is to the next election; it is probably closer to two years now, we have to —

Hon Simon O’Brien: It is less than two years.

Hon ED DERMER: It is in the order of two years, which is a long time for the people of Western Australia to suffer. Therefore, I am using the consideration of an appropriation bill as an opportunity to make very clear that if this money is spent in a way that the people of Western Australia view to be self-indulgent, the government will suffer the consequences at the next election. I remember when Jeff Kennett was first elected Premier of Victoria. He initiated a program of extensive service cutbacks, blaming the previous Labor administration for the necessity of that program. At the time, his argument was probably believed by many Victorians. However, he then made a very serious error; he decided to spend some of the limited money available to Victorian ministers to provide allowances for parliamentary secretaries in the Victorian Liberal government. I have seen how hard our parliamentary secretaries can work and I understand the reasons for their allowances. Although more immediate for John Hewson at the next federal election, the consequences for the Liberal Party in Victoria were negative. People viewed special allowances for parliamentary secretaries as an indulgence. Once a government is perceived to have indulged, even if that indulgence is a fairly modest proportion of the total budget, that perception looms large in the minds of our employers because they see it as waste and self-indulgence, and consequently political support will be lost. I attribute Jeff Kennett’s ultimate downfall to his decision to strip away resources from the Auditor General’s office in Victoria. People widely understand the importance of the Auditor General’s role in scrutinising the trust given to ministers of the Crown to spend money on behalf of the citizens. I think Mr Kennett’s endeavours to strip resources from the Auditor General contributed to his ultimate fall in an election.

It is very important, at a time when the Parliament is asked to consider appropriation bills, that we think very thoroughly about what an appropriation bill is. It is very informative and instructive to think about how we have such a device as an appropriation bill; how it is central to the role of the Parliament and its relationship with the ministers as a means whereby ministers of the Crown are given permission to spend taxpayers’ money; and how in our highly evolved system of government we are very much and very appropriately accountable to the will of the people who will review our particular employment contracts at the next election in slightly less than two years. I hope that all of this consideration will lead the Barnett government to be prudent, to avoid waste, to avoid self-indulgence, to honour the trust that Parliament gives the government when it passes an appropriation bill, and to spend that money wisely and to the advantage of the Western Australians who, ultimately, will review the position of all members and ministers in Parliament at the next election.

HON LINDA SAVAGE (East Metropolitan) [11.59 am]: I take the opportunity during the debate on the appropriation bills to speak firstly about the Western Australian Council of Social Service forum that I attended last Friday. The forum, entitled “Ways to make a difference”, on emerging issues for 2011 was attended by more

than 100 people. Many of the presentations are very relevant to any discussion of bills of this type. I am sure that Treasury officials are aware of this information, and I hope that ministers also are aware of it as we approach budget time. A number of speakers spoke last Friday afternoon, but I would like to speak specifically about the presentations given by Ms Irina Cattalini and Ms Nicky Cusworth. Ms Cattalini spoke in her capacity as the director of social policy, although since Monday this week she has taken on the position as CEO of WACOSS. I would like to congratulate her on that appointment. This is also an opportunity to record the enormous contribution made by Sue Ash, the retiring CEO of WACOSS, as the CEO of the peak non-government body. I, too, thank her for the assistance she has given me. In her professional capacity as the CEO of WACOSS, she embodied the values of that sector, which WACOSS describes as a belief that the mark of a civilised society is the support and help it gives to those most in need.

As some members will know, the community sector that WACOSS represents has more than 300 members and 800 organisations that work in a very diverse range of areas, including mental health, drug and alcohol services, health services, child care and protection, housing, homelessness, disability services, aged and community care, Indigenous affairs, services for victims of violence and abuse, and consumer advocacy. These issues are raised over and again in this Parliament. The government has a fundamental role in policy making on these issues when it can intervene and assist. Obviously, in the time available to me, I can provide only an overview of the presentations. Although some of what was said will be very familiar to members, there was other information, some of which came as a bit of a shock to me. This information will have an enormous impact on budgets, and hopefully will be used in the budget process. It is also timely to speak about this forum, given that the government has an expectation and, indeed, a policy position, as outlined in the “Putting the Public First” report and in statements made by the Premier and other ministers, of looking more to the non-government sector to deliver services.

Ms Cattalini painted a picture in her presentation of the growing and ageing population. Of course, only recently we debated a motion on the ageing population. In particular, she said that by 2030 the number of Australians living with a severe disability will increase to 2.3 million. This is both because of the ageing population—of course, as people get older, they begin to develop a number of medical conditions, illnesses and disabilities, including severe ones—and a sheer consequence of the growing population. Our state was described as a booming economy. I understand that although it may be a prosperous economy, it may technically be an economy that has been in recession. Despite that, it is true to say that this is a stable and prosperous state. In that context, I was staggered to hear that the current rate of youth unemployment in Western Australia is 21.7 per cent. I did a double take when that figure was given; in fact, others at my table, including the CEO of Wanslea Family Services, also did a double take, looked at each other and then had it clarified. I asked whether I had heard correctly. It was confirmed by the copy of the PowerPoint presentation that was provided to everyone who attended the forum. It shows a very significant increase in youth unemployment. I note, though, that the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia has said recently that we have real labour shortages. In describing the social landscape, Ms Cattalini made the following comments —

Changes in the age, skills, ability, diversity and size of the Western Australian population are increasingly meaning that traditional informal social and family support structures are not adequate to the task of meeting the community’s needs. Increasingly services will need to be provided through formal structural service systems—which need to be planned, funded, regulated and delivered.

She painted a picture of how Western Australians are currently travelling. Obviously, I will not speak about everything, but one of the issues she spoke about was the cost of living. She said that, along with the increasing cost of housing and utility rates, complex mental health, drug and alcohol, and criminal justice issues are really driving the demand for services provided by non-government organisations. She provided a very interesting slide that was, in a sense, a stress test of how Western Australians were coping with the increase in utility charges. I found this slide particularly interesting. She referred to the 2009–10 financial year, when 86 812 customers, or 9.8 per cent, were granted additional time to pay their electricity bills. She said that this was an increase of 15 516 customers, or 8.1 per cent, from the previous financial year. Ms Cattalini said that the figure is now more than 100 000 households.

Of course, the issue of housing also formed part of her presentation. Reference was made to the cost of the average house in relation to the average income. Despite a slight decrease, rents are beginning to increase relative to income, with the average rental being around \$400 per week. Of course, the ability of people to house themselves in decent housing and to have a decent income go hand in hand. A lot of anticipation was expressed about the release of the state affordable housing strategy, which I understand was due for release in 2010.

I was very interested to read a presentation titled “It could be you: females single older and homeless”, released in October 2010. It found that increasing numbers of older women are entering the first-time homeless population. In fact, a woman over 45 years of age and single has an increased risk of becoming homeless. I have already mentioned the staggering rate of youth unemployment. Added to that is the figure for youth

homelessness in Western Australia—that is, children and young people aged between 12 and 24 years—which is apparently the second highest figure for homelessness in the state.

I did not see other members of this chamber at the forum on Friday, but no doubt they can access this information and the excellent PowerPoint presentations that were provided. Figures and an analysis were provided at that forum on the projected and growing number of people with a mental illness and the growing number in the prison muster. The increasing number in the prison muster affects not just the person who is incarcerated, but for every person who is incarcerated there are flow-on effects for a household. When no income is coming in and no-one is available to directly care for the children of a prisoner, there is a greater likelihood of re-offending and re-incarceration. These effects on families can be ongoing and long term, and in a way can spread out like the effect of a pebble in a pond. The growing numbers in those two areas alone—mental ill health and the prison muster—are an enormous challenge for policymakers. Of course, the smart thinking experts, those working at the coalface and even some economists know that we will have the most effect if we start at the very beginning and spend far more money in the early years of a person's life, rather than deal with these issues once they are entrenched when we know the success rate is very poor.

Emerging issues, which was the theme of the forum, indicated that the demand for services is increasing. The response to the needs that were identified was described as service needs. There is no doubt, as we move to consider these appropriation bills for money already spent, that these service needs should be at the forefront of the minds of decision makers. I will read what was described as service needs in response to the brief picture I painted of the landscape —

This emerging issue highlights the growth in demand for services in response to the following:

- The breakdown/erosion of traditional social/family support structures and community networks
- The growing incidence of mental health and connectivity with drug related illness
- Unemployment, in particular for people with disabilities, mental health, long term unemployed and high youth unemployment
- Housing stress and increases in essential living costs ...

Another presentation last Friday afternoon was provided by Nicky Cusworth, who is now at the Department of State Development. I expect she is well known to many members from her former position at Treasury. Her presentation was very interesting. As I said, I did not see other members of Parliament at the forum, but I urge members to get a copy of this presentation, as it covers a wide range of aspects that come together to create the economic and social environment that we find ourselves in.

Nicky Cusworth did use the B-word—the boom word. In fact her slides used the B-word. However, she felt the need to qualify the word slightly as it has now moved into a category that not everybody feels they should be using. She spoke about how the multi-speed economy in the state is significantly exacerbating the gap between high and low-income earners and creating enormous challenges—for government, obviously, in policymaking—particularly in the community sector. That is reflected, and has been reflected in the last two to three years, in the increasing number of people presenting to and seeking assistance from non-government agencies.

I have previously spoken about the South East Metropolitan Emergency Relief forum that I attend. It meets every two to three months and is coordinated by Shirley Glover of the Gosnells Community Legal Centre. She works in the community legal sector. I have known her for more than 20 years because of the work that I have done, and obviously the Gosnells information service is a very long-established service. When I started to attend these meetings, therefore, I obviously knew Shirley because she ran them but, as I previously explained, the group that meets brings together people from church organisations, the Salvation Army and any number of government and non-government services. It is really an opportunity for people to exchange information about the issues they are facing and to help people understand how they might act more effectively. I have previously said in this place that the people in the group are seeing an increasing number of people, particularly about their utility bills. As I said before, one thing they have observed for the first time is full-time working people on lower incomes than the current average Australian income struggling to pay their utility costs, such as the education assistants who were, when I last spoke, waiting on a pay claim from the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission. Of course, if they were paying off a mortgage or rent—as of course most were—that was the first priority for their income. These low-income but full-time working people were, therefore, asking for assistance. Members may have seen that stress reflected in people visiting opportunity shops, for example, and buying warm clothing or presenting at organisations such as the Salvation Army or church organisations and asking for blankets. They are beginning to ask agencies to provide them with items that will offset cutbacks to their utility usage, although they are families who are fully employed and have an income.

There was another very interesting slide from Nicky Cusworth that I referred to earlier when I spoke about youth unemployment. She said that a labour shortage of 210 000 workers is anticipated by 2020. That mismatch between the extremely high youth unemployment rate and the demand for workers says something about the policy settings and the need for funds to be reconsidered and redirected. Hopefully, the budget that we are waiting on will look squarely at that problem.

The presentation also addressed what sort of structural change was required to ensure that economic prosperity was shared more widely. The slides provided a number of very interesting measures that show how strong the economy is and the reasons behind it. In particular, the presentation referred to the role of China and to a lesser extent India. Following on from that, Nicky Cusworth pointed out who really is benefiting from this boom and she divided the beneficiaries into three groups. Group 1 is those with a direct connection to the resources sector and associated industries. The next slide was headed “Missing out” and looked at groups 2 and 3. Group 2 is those working in industries with no direct connection to the resources sector. Group 3 is the people who are most vulnerable and miss out on the most—that is, people who live on fixed or vulnerable incomes, including casual workers, Centrelink beneficiaries and self-funded retirees. In my work over the last 20 years I have had particular involvement with people living on Centrelink payments, which are, as members know—modest is not the right word—of a size that makes it very, very difficult for people at times to live on, particularly with the increasing cost of living. The presentation went on to discuss these three groups.

Nicky Cusworth said that group 1 will benefit because those people are most directly exposed to the benefits, if those benefits and those developments are realised. She described group 2 as trying to stay connected. She said that this group faced mortgage stress, and the warning signs for people in group 2 are the changes that come about when, for example, they lose their job or their circumstances change because of the significant rental or mortgage costs. Of course, the most vulnerable group is group 3. Nicky Cusworth said many of the people in group 3 are indirectly being harmed by the economic situation that we find ourselves in. Group 3 is the group that the non-government sector intersects with most. The government’s policy appears to look increasingly to the non-government sector to provide services to this group. Nicky Cusworth said in her presentation that she thought anywhere up to 40 per cent of the Western Australian community, which is not much less than half of the community, could be in groups 2 and 3; that is, they are not really benefiting from or extremely vulnerable to our current situation. It is not surprising that the persistently disadvantaged are the hardest hit. From what I have said and from what members know, the number of persistently disadvantaged people is increasing, and those people are seeking assistance from the non-government sector. Although the government has stated that it wants not-for-profit organisations to have a greater role in service delivery, as yet no additional resources have been provided directly to that sector, particularly to ensure equitable salaries and fair contract fees for delivering those services. There was an extremely high expectation that this budget would begin to translate the statements that were made into some sort of reality. Given that the number of people seeking services and falling into that category is definitely on the increase, it is tremendously important that the rhetoric is matched by real funding.

As we discuss these appropriation bills I think it is timely to raise again the issue of universal child health checks. On 23 February I asked the minister representing the Minister for Health a question in response to the Auditor General’s report of December 2010, titled “Universal Child Health Checks. That report found that many children are missing out on key health checks. The report found that only 30 per cent of children were having the 18-month check. I asked the Minister for Health whether he agreed that many children are missing out on health checks; whether any new resources had been allocated to the \$61 million child and adolescent health budget since that report; and whether there was any specific plan of action to address the fact that many children are missing out on the key health checks. The minister representing the Minister for Health gave an honest answer—one that I am very disappointed in, but an honest answer nonetheless—that there is no specific plan of action and no additional funds have been allocated since the Auditor General’s report in December last year.

I have said it several times—I know I sound a bit like a broken record—but it is essential that there are funds in this budget to address the chronic shortage of child health nurses. Three reports to this Parliament have said that. I keep referring to these three reports that were produced since the Barnett government came to office. Cross-party committees wrote these reports and there was unanimous agreement on this issue; all three committees said that there is already a shortage of more than 100 child health nurses and similar shortages of community health nurses for older age groups. Yet the minister representing the Minister for Health answered my questions by saying there was no plan and no additional funds. I am doing everything I can to raise this issue. I am speaking to everyone I can about it, particularly members of the government and ministers whose portfolios these responsibilities fall under, to urge the government to provide significant new funds. It says a lot about us if we cannot provide the very basic seven health checks.

Although I will not speak about it at length now, at some time I will speak about what I have learned by looking at the role of child health nurses now compared with the role child health nurses played when my three children

were seen by the local child health nurse. I will perhaps bring into the Parliament the very little, thin books my first two children had, which contained the appointments and the seven key checks to be done before starting school. Those books seem like simple things, but they contained essential measurements and provided an opportunity to see what was happening with the health of the child. No doubt Hon Robyn McSweeney also has the books. In those days the books were pink for girls and blue for boys. With my third child they had moved on to neutral yellow. Today the books are purple and much bigger, and call on the child health nurse to look out for much more not only with the baby and the infant, but also with the family situation. Much bigger book—much less service. How ironic is that? Even though we know how crucial those early childhood years are and even though we now have the bigger book, we have fewer basic services. All this money has been spent trying to remediate and address the problems. We need to put money into building the bedrock of human development—that is, the scaffolding and the services for vulnerable children, in particular, in high-risk situations, or for children who need assistance for whatever reason. We need this for all children, as my children experienced. Many things arise unexpectedly that any new parent does not know anything about. The need for assistance with speech development is one of those things. The role that the child health nurse plays is absolutely crucial.

There is much that the government could do, not just by realigning policy, but by making it possible, as the Auditor General's report points out, which I will speak about another time, for children and parents to more easily access the services that exist, and add far more to those services. These issues are part of a broader picture. There has been some comment in the past few days on the new national legislation that covers child care. When I had my first child 25 years ago, obviously, childcare services were available, which I used. An increasing number of children are in child care in the early years. Women have to work and women are being urged to work. For all the reasons that women are in the workplace during those early childhood years, we should have the best teachers and professionals in that sector. It is wonderful to have a great education when children are in high school, but we know that what happens to a child in those early years is very crucial and determining. We should do everything we can to support and professionalise that sector. That is what the move in childcare legislation is doing.

I notice that Hon Robyn McSweeney made the point that she felt that many of the standards that are being rolled out across the country have already been achieved in Western Australia. Certainly in the childcare centres that I have been to there is a real commitment and a real understanding that they are providing the environment, the stimulation and a way of interacting that will affect children all their lives. As a mother who has had one child in child care, though not full time, I know what taking a child to day care is like. A mother flies out of the house in the morning, hoping she has not forgotten things, goes in with the child at 7.30 or 8.00 in the morning, hands her precious child over and then picks up that child at 5.00 in the afternoon. I did that with my last child two days a week for two or three years. I was relying on the childcare service to provide a level of service, professionalism and input. I did not realise how crucial that was at the time, even though my mother had been a primary school teacher and always spoke about what the early years meant, saying that they were the determining years.

In considering the legislation when it comes before this house, as it no doubt will as part of COAG, the focus should be on what it is trying to do. We should not be distracted by what the regulations are said to say about celebrating Easter. In fact, I know they do not say what people have been alleging, because I have read them. We should help to build in a positive way on something that is most important for our society.

I am hoping that when the budget is brought down, I do not find, as I have in response to virtually every question that has been asked every time the issue of early childhood years has been discussed in the media, a reference to the \$49.7 million that was in last year's budget to address waiting lists over four years. I know about that. That figure was even used this week in response to concerns about child health nurses. That money will address the problem we have with the waiting lists. As I have said previously, if members read the Auditor General's report—I urge members to read it—they will see that it says that the fact that children miss out on the key health checks may well be contributing to the growing waiting lists, because by the time a child gets referred by child development services, the child's problem is more entrenched. I spoke about that a few days ago. If anyone is getting mixed up with this \$49.57 million, or \$50 million, depending on who talks about it, that is rolled out every time we talk about an infant, I urge them to look at what the Auditor General said.

Interestingly, Ms Cusworth during her presentation referred to a book that I have also referred to in Parliament, as I think others have, called *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. She referred to it when speaking about the adverse effect that a widening gap and inequality have on many of us, not just those who are at the bottom of it—those on very low incomes, those who are missing out. Economists are now recognising that that widening inequality adversely affects us all. This book, which I repeat is well worth members looking at, has been very well received across the political spectrum, except by those who are at what we would probably call the very extremes of the political spectrum. It is quite widely quoted—it is an English book—in the press in Australia and America. It is an interesting book because the initial question that the

authors, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, were answering was: why does a person's health get worse the lower down the socioeconomic level they are either born into or find themselves in? Perhaps members may be aware that occasionally we see those health-by-postcode surveys. That was the initial question that these researchers asked themselves. In attempting to answer that question, they examined the decades of research which have been carried out worldwide from the 1950s and which is now available. It has the benefit of being longitudinal—that is, it was carried out over a long period. The research was all from highly reputable sources. It was peer-reviewed research. The added factor, which is why we can have a book such as this, is essentially the internet. People now have access to research from across the globe that they can actually look at and collate. The authors of this book did that. It makes absolutely fascinating reading, particularly for people who are interested in things such as incarceration rates and what the best peer-reviewed research over a long period across the world shows. I do not suppose it is surprising when we consider incarceration rates that race was an issue. Obviously, socioeconomic circumstances and mental illnesses were also issues. One finding that perhaps not all members would be aware of was the very high correlation between incarceration and children who grow up in fatherless homes. It is very important for us to have that sort of information so that we can assist households not just in the ways that we already know, but also in other ways.

The authors started by asking themselves one particular question, but then they started to pull together all the research. If members look at the book, they will see that it is divided into chapters about different areas. However, the overall conclusion was that everyone fares better in a more equal society. In a way, I suppose that seems to be commonsense really. It is intuitive. One has only to think about why we had the French Revolution. There is a point at which inequity will force people to act. If we look at what is happening in the Middle East now, we see that there is usually a tipping point at which things begin to unravel. The research of these authors shows that in some western countries where the inequities have become greater—that has been a feature of particularly the last 10 to 20 years—there has been a corresponding increase in crime rates and antisocial behaviour. Mental illness is another one that they refer to. Whether we accept all their conclusions, this is very, very important work, and of course it is work that most of us would never have the time to undertake.

It is interesting that Nicky Cusworth, as an economist, referred to the book and its conclusions as having an impact on all of us. In fact, she said in the presentation —

- Equal societies always do better on most social parameter measures
- Greater the income discrepancy, Greater likelihood of: —

This is what comes from *The Spirit Level* —

increased mental illness
increased drug and alcohol abuse,
obesity and teenage pregnancy ...
life expectancy is shorter
children's educational performance and literacy scores are worse.

Interestingly, dealing with shorter life expectancy, I have no doubt that many members have heard the comment that the children of this generation may well not have as great a life expectancy as their parents. That is because of their diet and because of the illnesses which this new generation is facing and which we did not face to the same degree—for example, diabetes. Diabetes type 1 and diabetes type 2 are both on the increase, but diabetes type 2, which relates to lifestyle, was previously virtually unheard of in children and young people. Even diseases that are brought on by the effects of alcohol, such as cirrhosis of the liver, are being seen in increasingly younger people. As Nicky Cusworth pointed out when referring to *The Spirit Level*, it is not just that it might ultimately make life expectancy somewhat less; it is just as much the burden that it puts on the health system, not just when someone is suffering at the very end of their life, but from very early in someone's life. That is the added cost that comes with a child who is overweight and then develops health problems related to that. Of course, the best evidence now seems to be leaning towards the fact that lifestyle and food in the very early years will in the long term be the determinant of someone's weight. In their early years, children are completely vulnerable to what their parents give them. Therefore, when we hear disparaging comments—I heard one just recently—about a mother giving her child Coca-Cola in the bottle, we know that that behaviour is laying down issues to do with that child's teeth and weight for the long term. As easy as it is to say that that is just a mother who is not doing what she should, our role as members and policymakers is to find every possible way to intervene. That intervening may just be by having a child health nurse—particularly if we move, as I hope we will in the future, to the more intensive visiting schemes that other states and other countries are introducing—who will be able, by building a relationship with the family, to play a role in changing the outcome for that child's life.

In the budget papers, with the myriad ways and programs through which money is spent, it is very difficult to ascertain exactly what is spent on children in the early years as a discrete figure. Some work has been done in

this area. In the next year, I am hoping to find a way to understand what that investment is. The work that has been done in other countries shows that the amount of money that is spent in the early years is very little relative to the impact that it has, whereas the bulk of the money, as is the case with the health budget and the corrective services budget, is spent at the end when the ability to make a difference is relatively limited and in some cases the outcomes are very, very poor.

I found the Western Australian Council of Social Service forum extremely useful, as I have found the forums that I have attended previously. It provided an extremely useful overview of what is happening. As I said, over 100 people were in attendance, listening, as I was, to some things that were unexpected, such as with the issues of youth unemployment and homelessness. They are issues that should be the core concern of government in developing policy.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [12.47 pm]: I will make some comments on the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Recurrent 2009–10 (Supplementary) Bill 2010 and the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Capital 2009–10 (Supplementary) Bill 2010, which we are debating cognately. These are bills that we debate each year, and they deal with the Parliament authorising expenditure which had not been planned for and which is in excess of money granted through the budget —

[Interruption.]

Hon SUE ELLERY: Should I panic?

Hon Robyn McSweeney: No, I don't think they can get in!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Michael Mischin): I have absolutely no idea what that was.

Hon SUE ELLERY: No. I did not feel the earth move, but it sounded like it did.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Maybe it is just haunted.

Hon SUE ELLERY: The legislation before us reflects recurrent expenditure excesses, as we are told in the explanatory memorandum, for new items created during 2009–10, and expenditure overruns as a result of policy decisions or unavoidable cost increases against existing items during the course of 2009–10. The minister has tabled for our edification a schedule or a table for the two bills that lists by agency the items for which additional funds are sought, and then the offsets where money has been saved, and that is very useful.

This government has so far taken two different approaches in providing information for the Parliament to make its judgement about what we are being asked to authorise. The first time we dealt with these bills under this government, we were given the opportunity in committee to ask questions about the specifics under each of the item headings in these documents. We were not given that opportunity the second time, and the response from government was that we would need to direct parliamentary questions to the specific minister. I ask the minister responsible, who I note is absent from the chamber on urgent parliamentary business, if he could perhaps indicate in his response how we can get answers to questions about some of the matters listed in that schedule. It would be helpful if we were provided with a one-sentence or two-sentence description, which I am sure exists, of what some of those matters go to. For example, under child protection in both the recurrent and capital accounts we are asked to authorise an additional \$39.4 million, which is a not insignificant amount of money. Both the Department for Child Protection and the Disability Services Commission are asking for additional funds for superannuation, and it would be useful to have an explanation as to what was unplanned for or unforeseen about the superannuation contributions of a government agency. I would ask the minister if he is able to provide that information by way of a line or two—just a sentence—to describe what those items actually mean.

The other way to do that is much more cumbersome for the house, but it is to, in committee, ask for information about each of those matters line-by-line; once we see the descriptor, some of them may be perfectly obvious and we will not have to ask questions about them in committee. If we are unable to get that information beforehand, it would be useful for the minister, perhaps in his second reading response, to indicate how we might get that information. As I have just indicated, there are certainly some items under the Department for Child Protection and the Disability Services Commission that I would like more information about so that I can satisfy myself that what we are being asked to approve is reasonable and meets the definitions of the bills, which is that they are for the appropriation of money for things, if we like, that were unforeseen and were not able to be budgeted for. Some things are obvious, such as programs that were delayed in their rollout, which is where some of the offset funds would come from, and there are other things for which the costs have increased or decreased. One of the items that generated less money than anticipated under child protection was the sale of assets, which I suspect was as a result of the state of the real estate market. It would be useful to know whether that was what it was or whether it was that the department had taken some things off the market and decided not to sell them. That is an important expenditure because the sale of those assets was going to fund the expansion of the residential care program, so that will have had an important impact on that program and it would be useful to know what led to

the Department for Child Protection not being able to realise that anticipated money. As to the superannuation one, among others, it seems hard to understand on the face of it how a government agency could not plan for superannuation. There has to be some logical explanation for it and it would be reasonable for it to be provided.

I now wish to touch on the state of economy at the time that the 2009–10 budget was being framed. Some of my comments will relate to the material provided at the Western Australian Council of Social Service forum held last Friday that Hon Linda Savage talked about. That was the third emerging issues forum, during which WACOSS provides the sector with a global picture of Western Australia, encompassing the political climate, the economic climate, the social climate, where the pressure points are, and the policy agenda of the government of the day, both federal and state. It is a useful forum for the sector because many people who attend that forum—this was the first one I did not attend—are out every day leading their organisations and delivering the services on the ground. They may get the opportunity to skim through the media and take in what they hear on the radio or television, but they do not get the opportunity to have a detailed briefing on the issues of the day, the economy of the day and what the trends or projections are, and the emerging issues forum gives them the opportunity to do that. The purpose of the emerging issues forum is to provide the sector with the opportunity of being informed about things that it just does not get the time to catch up on or analyse during the day-to-day running and management of a non-government organisation. I commend WACOSS and Sue Ash, who initiated the forums.

The emerging issues forum held on Friday was about the state now—that is, the political, social, financial, and economic environment in 2011—but some of the trend material provided included statistics and indicators that showed how things had changed over time, indeed during the period 2008–09 when the 2009–10 budget was being considered, and indeed what happened in 2009–10. That material can be drawn upon now to ask what should have been in that budget that was not, and what predictors were available to government at the time it put together the 2009–10 budget. I will rely on some of that material.

A scary point that Hon Linda Savage referred to when she was talking about that document was the assessment of an officer from the Department of State Development that around 40 per cent of Western Australians might be deemed to be not benefiting from the boom. That is a pretty scary figure; it is a big number of people. Essentially, the point made about that information was that anybody who is not directly engaged in the resource sector or one of its supporting industries can be seen to be not benefiting from it, and therefore the pressures being generated in no small part by, for example, increases in household energy costs and water costs are really hurting 40 per cent of Western Australians. That is a huge number of people, and it is a figure that no government can afford to ignore.

Given that these are bills about figures and that the WACOSS information was about the state of figures as well, I looked at another set of figures—the number of marginal seats—to remind myself of the state of play. Ten marginal seats are held by the government by a margin of under five per cent, and five of those are held by under two per cent. When 40 per cent of Western Australians have been identified by the Department of State Development as not only not benefiting from the boom but also being under real pressure, with regard to those 10 marginal seats under five per cent—particularly those five marginal seats under two per cent—somebody had better be paying attention to that figure of 40 per cent. The government cannot hold those seats unless it does something about that, because it is a big figure. I was shocked. The Labor Party has been talking for some time about the effects of particularly the increases in household bills, and it has been talking for some time about how this government needs to learn the lesson that our government did not. I have said before in this house that one of the reasons we lost the election in 2008 was because Western Australians did not feel that they were benefiting from the boom. If the Department of State Development is telling the government that, in 2011, 40 per cent of Western Australians are not benefiting from the current economic benefits of the resources industry, is the Liberal Party going to go down exactly the same path? I hope that happens politically for the Labor Party, but I think we owe Western Australians more, and if an officer of the government is providing that information to members of WACOSS, then we have to assume that information has been provided to government. The test will come in about four weeks when the budget is handed down, because I think there is a mood among that 40 per cent of Western Australians that to some extent this government is being judged to be harsh and callous on a range of measures, and perhaps I will canvass those measures in due course.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is the case that I made the earth move!

Hon Kate Doust: Not for me you didn't.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I did it for everyone! When I was on my feet before the lunch break there were windows rattling. It appears from media reports that there was a tremor of some kind measuring 2 on the Richter scale, centred mostly around Mandurah and the southern suburbs, so there we go.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Jon Ford): Are you claiming responsibility?

Hon Norman Moore: What an extraordinary speech you were making

Hon SUE ELLERY: I say never underestimate the power of a redhead! I reckon there would be some support on the other side for that proposition!

Several members interjected.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I was trying to make a serious contribution before the lunch break. I was talking about the figures from the WA Council of Social Service forum. The estimates of the officer from the Department of State Development who provided the presentation indicated that currently about 40 per cent of Western Australians are not benefiting from the boom. These are the people who are not directly engaged in the resource industry or in industries such as construction that directly support the resource industry. These people are really feeling the pinch caused in no small part by the increase in household fees and charges, particularly for electricity, gas and water. I wanted to make some comments about some of the figures from the indicators around 2009–10. Then I wanted to touch on a couple of issues I have portfolio responsibility for. I had asked the minister if he might provide a line or two in his reply to the second reading debate about the tables he generously tabled at the beginning of the debate.

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes. I am happy to ask line by line in the committee process, but I will not need to ask questions about some of them if I understand more what those matters are. The minister might be able to say, “Yes, I can give you this information”, or “No, you’ll need to ask that in committee.”

Hon Simon O'Brien: You raised this before when I was temporarily out of the chamber on urgent business. If you want to indicate any particular items in the course of your remarks now, I will be delighted to respond to them.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Thank you very much. In particular I had flagged that in the recurrent bill for both Disability Services and Child Protection, items are described as “Gold State superannuation employer contributions”. It seems unusual to me that those matters cannot be foreseen. I would like an explanation for why they are in a bill to address unplanned excesses. In Child Protection there is \$39.4 million worth of additional new policy items. That is a large amount for an agency the size of the Department for Child Protection, and I would like some more detail around that. For example, one of the matters in the capital bill is that less money was realised through the sale of assets and more money was required to be appropriated for expanding the residential-care program. It may be that less money was generated through the sale of assets because of the real estate market. It also might be that some properties were taken off the market and used for something else. I do not know, but I would appreciate some information about that in particular.

I want to canvass a few matters in my comments and I will start with the economic indicators. I was commenting on the papers that were made available out of the WACOSS emerging issues forum. Those presentations were about the state of Western Australia in 2011—right now. They also tracked some trends, so by way of that material they provided us with information about what was known to government at the time the 2009–10 budget was being put together and what occurred during 2009–10. Unemployment, which was pretty much at an all-time low in about 2007, started to increase reasonably rapidly in 2008 and again in 2009–10. Even when it started to increase rapidly, Western Australia’s unemployment rate was significantly below that of the rest of the nation. That is something to be pleased about. But those unemployment rates started to increase about that time. Hon Linda Savage drew to the attention of the house that youth unemployment in particular is now at 21.7 per cent. What is really shocking about that figure is that it is a jump from 2008 of about eight per cent.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: I think the figure, although not good enough, is 16 per cent.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am happy to be corrected, but I will drag that out.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: I am sorry to interrupt.

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is all right. I will drag it out by the time I finish my remarks. The point I was making is that there was a very significant increase in the youth unemployment rate between February 2008 and February 2010—a jump of about seven per cent. That is extraordinary. Much has been made—it is legitimate to make the point—in the current community debate, for example, about local jobs for Western Australians. In that debate much has been made about the decrease in the number of apprenticeships. That is an important number. There are 3 600 fewer apprenticeships in place now than there were a small number of years ago. It is not just about apprenticeships or about a four-year structured training program, which is what apprenticeships are, and they are very important because people walk away with a qualification that sets them up for life, so I do not underestimate apprenticeships at all. But what is not, it seems to me, as easily measured, but just as devastating in its impact if we do not get it right, is other sorts of training: training for a shorter period for people who have no skills, who are not job ready but who need some skills so that they can at least get into the category of jobs for

which they are not required to hold a trade certificate but which, equally, can generate a reasonable income for them.

It is a concern to me that Kwinana, which is in the South Metropolitan Region, has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment. What is most galling is that the Kwinana strip provides a fantastic opportunity for people to work in when it is operating at its best. It is extraordinary that the highest number of youth unemployment is in an area with such a highly productive industrial strip. It is disappointing that this government's approach in 2009–10, and even now, provides no examples of what it is doing to ensure that those kids will ever be able to do a three or four-year structured training program, depending on which industry they are in. With some training and support, whether it is through a traineeship or another program, they could acquire the kinds of skills that would back up the trade jobs that are needed in places like the Kwinana strip and elsewhere. There needs to be a serious investment in that type of training. The metropolitan industrial strip, which is what Kwinana is, should not have the worst rate of youth unemployment. Unfortunately, the 2009–10 budget did not do anything about that when the youth unemployment rate was jumping at such an alarming rate. Fremantle, which is also in my electorate—the South Metropolitan Region—has a high unemployment rate too. It is quite concerning when the industrial strip of Kwinana and the second-biggest metropolitan city have such high unemployment rates. The government ought to do something about that.

I have already touched on some cost pressures and I will now touch on the cost-of-living pressures. The consumer price index shows that the pressure points for families in Western Australian and Australia-wide are housing, health and education. In Western Australia, the cost-of-living pressures are added to by the increase in charges for essential household services such as electricity, gas and water. The second group Hon Linda Savage and the Department of State Development identified are working people who are not directly engaged in the mining and resources sector or in the industries that support them. The first group that was identified is those who are directly engaged in that sector; the second group is those who are not engaged in that sector but who are employed; and the third group is those who are reliant on fixed incomes, such as self-funded retirees and people on Centrelink benefits. Nicki Cusworth reports that the second and third groups represent the 40 per cent of Western Australians who are not benefiting from the boom. We need to do more to acknowledge that we must protect those people because that number is way too high. Some people on fixed incomes, but by no means all of them, lead complicated and sometimes very messy lives; a lot of issues impact on them. There is no doubt that that cohort is sometimes difficult to protect. Nevertheless, the measure of a civilised society is how we protect those who are least able to look after themselves. We are looking not just at those people. Government members should take no comfort in assuming that that is the same category of people who are always hard to help; it is not. In addition to that category of people whom we must help are those who have worked for their whole lives and who are living on fixed incomes through their own savings or superannuation funds, those who are living on a Centrelink pension, and those who are still in the workforce and are raising a family but are really struggling to meet those costs.

The average level of debt has increased considerably since 2008. Today, the average level of debt is between five and seven times a person's income. It is increasingly difficult for people to get access to finance. Recent reports have used cute language and suggest that many people in Western Australia are not "financially fit". A week or so ago reference was made in this place to the increasing number of applicants to the Supreme Court for mortgage fire sales because people are unable to pay their mortgages. The delinquency rate for Perth and the South West Region—those who have not honoured their debts—has increased considerably since September 2009. The Western Australian Council of Social Service reports that the 30-plus days arrears rate in the south west of Western Australia is the second-worst performing region in Australia, with the rate sitting at around 2.8 per cent. Western Australia has five of the 20 worst-performing postcodes in Australia for people whose debt is in arrears by 30-plus days. Those suburbs are Mandurah, Casuarina, Marangaroo, Gosnells and Swan View. We must do a lot more for those hot spots and target our efforts to ensure that those people are protected from some of the financial pressures that are being generated by this government.

In 2009–10, which is the period this appropriation bill covers, electricity prices increased by 15 per cent on 1 July 2009; by 7.5 per cent on 1 April 2010; and on the day after the end of the 2009–10 financial year—1 July 2010—there was a further 10 per cent increase. That came on top of a 10 per cent increase on 1 April 2009. When those increases are added up, it is close to a 50 per cent increase in the residential electricity tariff since 1 April 2009. That is a huge impost on people. That is, in part, why I think the mood is shifting in Western Australia and why Western Australians are increasingly seeing this government as a hard government that is not ensuring that everyone benefits from our prosperity.

I think Hon Linda Savage referred to the number of people who are requesting additional time to pay their bills. In 2009–10, which is the period covered by these appropriation bills, some 86 000 Western Australians needed additional time to pay their bills. That figure is more than 100 000 in 2011. If the 80 000 Western Australians who needed additional time to pay their bills are added to the number of people who are seeking assistance from

the hardship utility grant scheme, we start to see that a very high number of people in Western Australia are struggling to pay for essential services. They were not struggling to pay for a plasma or an LCD flat screen television, they were not struggling to pay for a swimming pool, they were not struggling to pay for the luxuries—they were struggling to pay for their essential services. That is why such an angry chord was struck when late last year the Premier decided to describe air conditioning as a luxury. This was the same Premier who in the winter the previous year had suggested that he would not have any difficulty living on the fixed income that pensioners live on, and that if people were cold and could not afford to turn on their heaters, they should put on an extra jumper or put a blanket over their knees. In winter the Premier told Western Australians that they just needed to put on another blanket and in summer he told them that air conditioning is a luxury. He put up the cost of essential services by nearly 50 per cent. The government will pay the price for that.

Before the lunch break I touched on the fact that this is a bill about numbers. I looked at some other numbers—that is, the number of marginally held government seats. There are 10 seats with a margin of less than five per cent and five seats with a margin of less than two per cent. Of the 10 seats with a margin of under five per cent, nine are Liberal-held seats. The government cannot afford to not protect people from these kinds of financial stresses, because if it does not protect them, it will pay the same price that we did in 2008 when Western Australians decided that we were not ensuring that they got the benefit of the boom. The government has got that advice, I presume, from Nicky Cusworth and others from the Department of State Development. The budget that we will see in about a month's time had better send some very strong messages to the Western Australian community that the government has listened and is doing something to protect people from those increases.

I refer to the increases in gas prices during 2009–10. On top of what had happened on 1 July 2008 under the previous government, when we had announced that future electricity price increases would be phased in, there was a 10 per cent increase in the price of gas on 1 April 2009, a 7.5 per cent increase on 1 April 2010 and then a further 10 per cent increase on 1 July 2010. At the same time that the government was increasing those numbers, the disconnection rate for Alinta increased for the second year in a row. A table on hardship indicators has been provided. It measures the percentage of residential customers on an instalment plan with Horizon Power, Synergy and Alinta; the percentage of residential customers granted additional time to pay their bills from Horizon Power and Synergy; and the number of disconnections from Horizon Power, Synergy and Alinta. There has been some publicity in recent weeks about the Water Corporation taking people to court for not paying their bills. When the hardship utility grant scheme was first introduced, it was not applicable to people who were having difficulty paying their water bills, because the Water Corporation took the view that it never disconnected people so it should not be part of that program. HUGS was designed to assist people who were identified as being at risk of disconnection. The Water Corporation argued, and reasonably so, that it did not need to be part of that program because it never disconnected people. I think it is still the case that HUGS does not apply to Water Corporation bills. The Water Corporation does not disconnect people, but it does take them to court. The measure we need to apply to people who are struggling to pay their Water Corporation bills is not the number of disconnections but the number of people who are being taken to court. All the key indicators show that over the years 2008–09 and 2009–10, hardship has increased for people. People are starting to express the view that WA should be able to do better and that this government has its priorities wrong.

I will very quickly touch on the issue of homelessness. Attention was drawn to Youth Homelessness Matters Day yesterday. Some of us were wearing black wristbands to recognise that. Unfortunately, WA has one of the highest rates in the nation for homeless young people; that is, of 12 to 24-year-olds. That is measured in a number of ways. It includes young people who are alone, have no family or support systems and are homeless. Another way of measuring it is to include the young people who accompany women—mothers in particular—seeking refuge in women's refuges. Every night in Western Australia, women and children of varying ages are turned away from women's refuges because there are no beds available for them. That happens every night. If they are organised and get the help they need, they will be provided with emergency accommodation through the Department for Child Protection and Crisis Care. They will be given a motel room, a caravan or whatever temporary accommodation the Department for Child Protection can find for them. Those numbers are not getting better. WA has the second highest number of homeless young people. That number should be going down; it should not be getting higher.

The point has been made that not everyone in WA is benefiting from the boom. Wealth is not being generated equally across our community. Despite the side of politics on which I sit, I do not think that it will ever be possible to share the benefits of the wealth of the nation or the state equally amongst its citizens. However, I think we owe it to the citizens of Western Australia to provide a much stronger safety net than this government is providing, and to provide a lot more protection to those people who are not able to protect themselves. I have already described for the house the notion that up to 40 per cent of the WA community could be in either group 2 or group 3 as outlined in the information provided by the Department of State Development to the WACOSS emerging issues forum. The first group is made up of those people who are benefiting from the boom because

they work directly in the resources sector. The second group includes those people who are in the workforce but who are not directly or indirectly involved in the resources sector. The third group is those people who are on a fixed income. The income levels we are talking about for that group include those who get less than \$500 a week. That would be people on fixed incomes. The single unemployment benefit is about \$450. The second quintile of income that is captured in that third group of the WA community that is not benefiting from the boom is earnings of less than \$760 a week. The point has also been made that if we add that low income to a lack of stable and affordable accommodation, it starts to compound the issues for people and it makes it harder for those people. They have no capacity to absorb any increases. They cannot adjust their spending because they are spending literally just on the essentials. They have no capacity to save for a bill that will come in a month's time because they are living from payment to payment. We need to look more carefully at what this government is doing to help people. Much of what this government is doing is leading to the kind of financial stress that people are under.

We need to do more to train our young people, and not just for apprenticeships. We should not just assume that overseas or interstate workers are all we need to fix our labour shortages. We know that Kwinana has the highest youth unemployment rates. That is a pool of young people whom we should pick up and do something about. The point I made in reference to some of the information that came out of the Western Australian Council of Social Service forum is that we have a multispeed economy and the gap, in fact, is growing between high and low incomes. We need to address the challenges of how we ensure that we protect those people who cannot be employed directly in the resource sector. We are looking to the next budget, the one that is due in the next four or so weeks, to address those issues.

I now turn from the broader economic scenario to a couple of areas in my shadow portfolio. I will begin by canvassing issues around disability services. I think that we are at an important point in the debate about disability services in Australia, in part because of the release of the Productivity Commission's draft report on the care and welfare of people with disabilities. I will start by referring to a couple of newspaper articles. An article in *The Australian*—I do not have the date but it was probably six or seven weeks ago—was about two people whom I have got to know reasonably well. Sometimes in this job we get to meet amazing people doing amazing things. We can have one conversation with somebody and out of that some good things can come. People will know, because I have talked about this before as has Hon Brian Ellis, that some time last year, probably about this time last year, I was invited—as was the government, as I recall, but the government was not represented—to a function at Government House to celebrate scientific research that had led to some really significant breakthroughs in the treatment of Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a category of disability that affects young boys. That night I met for the first time a woman called Lesley Murphy and her son Conor. I also met the scientists who were doing the research on an absolute shoestring but having amazing breakthroughs. Byron Kakulas was also at that function and we recognised the early work that he had done that was celebrated through Telethon back when I used to have sleepovers, stay up all night watching Telethon and sleep in a sleeping bag in the lounge room and, as a 10-year-old in Perth, think that was the bee's knees of excitement, 30-something years ago—nearly 40 years ago, actually! Anyway, it was a brief function and I was back in the house in time to make a member's statement. At the function I was directed to look at the *Catalyst* program that described the type of genetic patch that scientists were working on to break the cycle of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. I downloaded the *Catalyst* program, had a look at it and came into the chamber and made my member's statement. At the end of my statement, Hon Brian Ellis came over to me and said that his family had been affected by that disease as well and that if I thought there was something we could do about it, he would be happy to work with me. The result was that Hon Brian Ellis, Hon Nick Goiran and I had a briefing with researchers Steve Wilton and Sue Fletcher in their incredibly cramped research facility at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. We had a conversation about what they needed. This group of people is doing groundbreaking research. The meal for us was prepared by Sue, a highly qualified professional, and Lesley Murphy, and they gave their presentation. A couple of issues arose from that. One issue was that we were at real risk of that research going overseas because they did not have the money to perform the human trials in Western Australia. Hon Nick Goiran and Hon Brian Ellis undertook to raise the matter with the Minister for Health and they did. It took a while for it to happen, but the Minister for Health had a light-bulb moment and realised, not so long ago, that the *Catalyst* program is really amazing—it is potentially Nobel Prize-winning research—and made some research funding available. That is fantastic and happened maybe two months ago.

The other part to that story is that Lesley and her family and Conor were getting to the point that the effect of the disease was such that Conor needed more assistance but, of course, he was an adult and wanting to live his own life. Conor is studying and the family wanted to make arrangements for him to live as independent a life as he could but they could not access any finance for that. At various points between that function and now, I have had the opportunity to catch up with not only the researchers but also Lesley and Conor. Most recently, probably about a month ago, Lesley invited me to her place in Fremantle for dinner with her, Conor and a friend of Lesley's. We had a great night. Lesley is —

Hon Kate Doust: A fantastic cook.

Hon SUE ELLERY: — a very good cook and she is not averse to a glass of wine either, so we had a great night. Lesley and Conor feature in that article in *The Australian* and I want to read some of it to the house. The article, written by Sue O'Reilly, is headed "Myopic government penny-pinching comes at great cost to disabled: A plea for more help for the chronically injured and their carers is finally being heard". The article begins by describing a young man in Sydney who has sustained severe spinal injuries in a car accident and another who was speared headfirst into a sandbank while surfing. The article states —

... they'd never thought for one moment they could become disabled. Neither has a clue about Australia's disability care and support system and how it works. Now their futures depend on it.

The first man can look forward to intensive rehabilitation services. Already, a wheelchair and hoist are being organised so he can go home, along with all necessary home modifications, transport and home help services.

All this is being provided speedily and free of charge because NSW, since 2006, has had a no-fault lifetime care and support scheme for anyone left permanently disabled because of a motor vehicle accident, funded by a levy on NSW drivers.

This man's post-accident care and rehabilitation will be expensive but he will be back home within weeks and almost certainly back at work within 12 months.

The second young man, the surfer, faces an entirely different future. His hospital treatment is covered by Medicare but he has no automatic entitlement to any of the equipment and services he's going to need to return home.

While a hospital social worker tries to find somewhere else for him to go, he will needlessly remain in an acute care bed for many weeks after the other young man has been discharged.

Eventually, he will have to be moved to an aged-care nursing home because that's the only option. He won't get the intensive, ongoing rehabilitation therapy he needs, and his family faces a long fight with various government agencies for equipment and services so he can move back home.

...

All across Australia, it's the same dismal story for anyone not covered by a transport accident or workers compensation scheme.

In Perth, Lesley Murphy spent two futile years applying to Western Australia's Disability Services Commission for help with caring for her son Conor ... who has the degenerative muscle-wasting disability Duchenne's muscular dystrophy and needs intensive round-the-clock assistance.

Last November, after her application was again rejected, again without explanation, Murphy did the only thing she could think of. She sat down and wrote to every one of WA's 102 state MPs, describing in graphic detail what life was like for her family and begging for help. "The level of despair that has resulted in being refused funding yet again is beyond description," she wrote.

Apart from a support worker funded to take Conor to university for seven hours each weekday, Murphy told MPs, her family was on its own for the remaining 133 hours of each week. "My husband and I work 17 hours a day during the week and 24 hours a day [in effect] at weekends, with no holiday pay, relief or workers compensation," she wrote.

"We provide 133 hours of free care a week, in effect operating an unlicensed, unregulated and unfunded nursing home on behalf of the state and federal governments. As the staff in the 'Murphy Nursing Home', the ideas of Fair Work Australia are laughable in relation to our workplace conditions.

"All this time, I am dealing with the grief of knowing my son is dying and there isn't a damn thing I can do about it. Added to that despair is the conviction no-one cares. The whole process of being forced to beg for help to care for my son is totally demeaning. I don't even want to think about what this process is doing to his emotional health and wellbeing, and please also bear in mind he probably has only a few more years to live anyway."

To Murphy's surprise, MPs from across WA contacted her to express their concern, and soon after the WA government managed to find emergency funding of \$16 000 for the family, which is used to employ six people to be with Conor from Friday afternoon until mid-afternoon on Sunday.

She says the help has transformed the family's lives. But the funding is only for four months.

Obviously, something is profoundly wrong with a disability support system in which a fortunate few get all the help and support they need to maximise their future independence and ability to work, the

majority get bits here and there, more or less at random, and many get nothing. The long-term costs of myopic government penny-pinching are astronomic.

Lack of basic supports prevent tens of thousands of people with disabilities and carers from working and paying taxes, families break down under the strain, and people with disability and chronic mental illness are shockingly over-represented in jails and homeless shelters.

Yet, to date, the state of disability care and support services has been a backwater issue in Australian public life. Politicians have done nothing for years but fiddle at the edges, and disability has never rated as an election issue at state or federal level.

That is about half of the article. It goes on to describe the scenario that led to the commissioning of the Productivity Commission's draft report, which was due to be released the week after this article was published. The Productivity Commission has released its draft report. I want to make the following comments: I am a bit perturbed and disturbed by some of what I see and what I have picked up from the state government's response to that draft report. I want to talk a little bit about that.

From my point of view, we must ensure that there is, number one, a greater pool of funds to draw from and, number two, a more equitable system, which means that wherever someone lives in Australia they can get access to a universal level of funding to help them live with their disability. Those are the key outcomes that I want to see. Quite frankly, I do not have a fixed view about what the final model should look like; I actually do not care. I want a model that works, and I want a model that is equitable. I know that there is some concern at high levels in the sector in Western Australia that the Productivity Commission draft report did not reflect as well as it should have what we have been doing in WA; that is, there is a view that the draft report did not pay due respect to what is being done in WA.

WA has for many years led the nation in the provision of individualised funding to people with disabilities. It is the case that our standards, our quality and our engagement have been at the forefront of the delivery of services in Australia. Governments of both persuasions have lifted the amount of funding available to provide services to people with disabilities. If members read the report—I am not sure that many people actually have; it is a very thick document—they would know that it acknowledges that. In fact, there is a specific section in the report that does a comparison of the different state jurisdictions, particularly with respect to individualised funding. It acknowledges that WA leads the field. But it is far from the truth to pretend that the WA system is therefore perfect, because it is not. It is the case in the 2009–10 final round of funding for accommodation services—that includes intensive family support and the broader accommodation services; the period of the bills we are talking about—that 84 per cent of people who sought assistance for accommodation support either for themselves or for a member of their family did not get it. Something like 78 people out of 450-odd people who applied did not get funding. The percentage of people, averaged over the three funding rounds for that year, who applied for funding and did not get it was 64 per cent. Despite the fact that we lead the nation and we ought to be recognised—I certainly recognise that the Disability Services Commission and the sector in WA are leading the nation—when only 84 per cent of people in a single funding round and 64 per cent of people across a year get accommodation support when they are saying they are desperate for it, that is not a perfect system. That is not even a good system.

I am urging the government, and I am urging those people who are driving the policy debate in how WA responds to the Productivity Commission draft report, to let go of some of the concern that WA does not get paid due respect in this draft report. Firstly, if members actually read the report, they would know that we are recognised for what we do. Secondly, we ought never to be complacent. There are absolutely no grounds to be complacent when 84 per cent of people seeking urgent assistance in accommodation cannot get it. I am asking people to let that bit go. Let us come at this from the perspective of how we can identify to the Productivity Commission the bits of this draft report we think will work well and the bits we think will not work so well, and offer our suggestions on how we can make them better. Let us tackle it from how we can make this work rather than tackle it from the perspective of, "Well, you did not really pay enough respect to how good we are" and "We think it can't work, therefore let us throw the baby out with the bathwater."

I also really do not want this to become an argument that this is a Canberra grab to take over Western Australian money or that this is Canberra trying to take things away from Western Australia. I absolutely would find it offensive if this debate were to sink to that level, because when we scratch the surface there is the capacity for this to be a really significant breakthrough in social policy in this country. The timing was such that it was an election issue in Victoria and it was an election issue in New South Wales. Both sides of politics in Victoria and New South Wales committed to ensuring a positive attitude to coming up with a national scheme to address this. Both sides of politics federally have got a positive attitude to addressing outcomes. The Productivity Commission draft report has proposed two schemes. One is related to that kind of trauma caused by accident—the insurance-based scheme which it proposes to be run by the states. The other is a national scheme whereby it

proposes that services would be delivered by the commonwealth. It is that bit that I think is causing the angst in some circles of the Western Australian government.

Hon Helen Morton: It is not about who supplies it or where the funding comes from. It is the fact that there are two systems. The member has not actually addressed that issue around cause and diagnosis, because depending on how you get your injury, you are either going to fall into this scheme or to that scheme, and so it is just continuing a problem around cause and diagnosis rather than solving that issue.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Let us talk about that then. As I said when I began my comments about this, I do not have a fixed view about what the model should be. But where I want us to start in looking at the draft report is, one, let us not be precious about protecting our own —

Hon Helen Morton: I just assure the member that that is actually not what is happening. The very things that the member asked for—that we look at the positives, we look at the things that will not work so well and then we come up with an alternative approach to make it all work—is exactly the approach being taken by the WA government.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am pleased to hear the minister say that, because the message I am hearing and that is being given to senior people in this sector by senior people in government is not that. That is what I am concerned about.

Hon Helen Morton: I add that I addressed a round table forum for people in the disability services sector only last week, and that was the message I gave them. I do not know whether that is something that Hon Sue Ellery heard prior to that, and a little further back, but things have moved on and that has certainly been the case for the last three or so weeks.

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is good, and I know that the minister offered that information in good faith and I take it that way. However, the minister should understand that I am actively engaged in the disability sector. I talk to people in the Western Australian disability sector every day about what the commission and the minister are saying to them, and what they are saying to each other. I am not making these comments based on what happened when the draft report was first released. There is a danger that perhaps what the minister is saying and what others are saying is not the same, so a word to the wise: just watch that!

Nevertheless, the point I was making is that this is a draft report, so we do not need to get our knickers in a knot that this is going to be imposed on us whether or not we like it. It is draft report that has been circulated for comment so that we can identify exactly the sorts of things to make this work in Western Australia. I really want there to be a positive response to that. I asked a question on this of the minister yesterday, because I really think it is important that the voice of those people who do not have an organised voice is heard. How the minister gives effect to that and ensures that the voice of those 300-odd people in that funding round to whom I referred earlier and who did not get funding—the ones who are exhausted and at their wit's end—is heard is a pretty important issue to be resolved.

The model the new Victorian government adopted was to set up an expert committee to provide it with advice on how the government could make it work for Victoria. Again, I do not have a fixed view that that is the answer and that that is absolutely the only way we can go forward. I think that half of the way to generate a positive outcome has to do with the attitude that the minister takes. Is the minister going into it with the attitude of, “Let us make this work”, or is she going into it saying, “Let us score some political points here; let us protect some patches and turn it into another political debate about resources between Canberra and WA”? I really will despair if that happens. I have made my comments about that. I still remain hopeful that something positive will come out of this.

I really want it to be the case that here in Western Australia we do not accept that 84 per cent of people who are in desperate need of funding and who are not getting it is a reasonable standard. It is not. It is not perfect. It is not even good; it is bad. We need to do much more about that.

The other issue that I wanted to touch on was the policy that was announced on Tuesday by the Minister for Housing about the crackdown on Homeswest tenants who exhibit antisocial and violent behaviour and who are disruptive to their neighbours. This is a difficult issue to handle. It is appropriate that Homeswest applies the policy in such a way that people who are disruptive to their neighbours are dealt with firmly. There is no question about that. Every member will have had people coming into their electorate office on this issue. I am dealing with a case right now in Hamilton Hill where a constituent of mine lives next door to a Homeswest property. He lives in a property that he owns. The property next door is a Homeswest tenancy in the name of a young mum, who frequently has members of her family come and stay. Sometimes they sleep on the trampoline out the front and sometimes in the rose garden, and all sorts of disruptions are caused at all times of the day and night. I want to give this example because it shows how Homeswest has not applied the policy. My constituent

has for five months been dealing with and making complaints to the relevant local Homeswest office. He was pleased that at some point—I think it was the two and a half month point—Homeswest came out to his property, did an inspection and accepted his argument about the unruly and disruptive behaviour that was going on. That behaviour was fixed; and it improved for about 48 hours. Over that five-month period he was encouraged to lodge complaints with the police, which he did. He was encouraged to keep ringing and emailing. At no point, until the five-month point, was he told that there was a formal complaint form that he could fill in and that that would generate the next level of response from Homeswest. This guy had been in regular contact with Homeswest for five months before he came to me. He came to me because he said that Homeswest had told him, only after five months of complaining, that what he should have done was fill in this particular form. Even then, the form was not particularly helpful in recording all the information that needed to be recorded. Part of the dilemma is that Homeswest, quite reasonably, says it needs evidence, and the best evidence it can get is a police report, so it asks the complainant to report the behaviour to the police. When my constituent does that, and he is listening at his door when the police come, the police tell his neighbour that he has been complaining about X, Y and Z. The next day the relatives of the tenant are threatening him! It is a vexed question, and I wish the Minister for Housing well in how he gets his department to implement the policy, because it was not implementing the policy consistently before, and I do not know what he is going to do to make changes to ensure that it implements properly the new toughened version of it.

Of course, there is a flow-on effect of evicting people from Homeswest housing; that is, where are those people going to live, particularly if they have children? They will end up at the door of the Department for Child Protection looking for crisis accommodation in a caravan or a motel room. If they have a mental health issue or a drug and alcohol issue, we are just shifting the problem from one agency to another. My point is that if all the government does is toughen the policy guidelines for eviction and it does not do something about providing support services and addressing the issues that cause these problems in the first place, all it will do is shift the problem from one government agency to another government agency. The next set of complaints will be from the people in the caravan park or the motel where Child Protection has put them, and these places will say that they will not take any more Child Protection clients because they are too disruptive to the rest of their guests. If all the government does is get these people out of a Homeswest house, without putting in place the services to address the messy and complicated issues that some of these people have in their lives, then it will shift the problem from one part of government to another part of government. The government will have to pick up this problem at some point. There needs to be more happening than just announcing that the government is getting tough on the eviction policy.

The other area that I wanted to touch upon is Redress WA. This is one area in which the 2009–10 appropriation bills could have shown us that this government has done something to address the issue that the Premier himself identified as being a policy action that was a bit too tough. I remind members that the Barnett government cut the maximum payment available to Redress WA applicants from \$80 000 to \$45 000, and added another six months to the period within which the scheme would be paid out. When members opposite came into government, the scheme was to be paid out by December 2010. This government reduced the maximum payment by nearly half and said that it would take an additional six months to make the payments. The group of people whom this affects have already been betrayed by the state government—not by this state government and not by my former state government, but by the state government of Western Australia—in the course of their lives. These are people who were abused as children while in the care of the state. I mean no disrespect to these people when I describe this group to others as having ongoing issues with similar characteristics to those of some Vietnam veterans. Members will understand what I mean if they have dealt with Vietnam veterans struggling with the difficulties they faced as a result of the trauma they went through in the Vietnam War, and how we as a nation treated them when they came home. It is the wrong group of people to make such a significant policy change to because they are already incredibly distrustful of government and they already feel betrayed by government. To do this to them is to perpetrate in their minds a second betrayal; it is to perpetrate a second abuse. They are a terribly damaged group of people. Frankly, this government has treated them absolutely appallingly. I was really pleased when I saw that interview with the Premier in which he said, “You know what—I think on that issue we were a bit too tough.” I thought that was a sign he would do something about it. I thought, “If he thinks something was a bit too tough—he is a man of his word and he is a man of action—maybe we will see him do something to address this”, but unfortunately to date the government has not.

The majority of Redress WA applicants are aged between 50 and 70 years. It is not a growing cohort; in fact it is a dying cohort. More than 60 per cent of applicants are aged over 50. Half of all applicants were children from Aboriginal communities. Thirteen per cent were former child migrants; and 37 per cent were other children in state care. Approximately half of all applicants, according to Redress WA’s category of eligibility payments, will receive between \$5 000 and \$13 000. Approximately 90 per cent of Redress applicants still live in WA. At least 2 000 of them are in regional WA.

There are four levels of payment. Level 1 is for moderate abuse and neglect. As at February this year, 369 payments had been made. That is the lowest level of payment, at \$5 000. That is about 32 payments being made a month. At level 2, which is serious abuse and/or neglect with some ongoing symptoms, 974 applicants had been paid \$13 000 at February this year. That is about 84 payments a month. Level 3 is severe abuse and ongoing symptoms. As at February, 533 payments had been made. That is about 66 a month. At level 4, which is the highest payment of \$45 000, for very severe abuse and neglect with ongoing symptoms, at February this year, 351 payments had been made. That is about 44 a month. There are fewer than three months to go in the scheme. An awful lot of assessments and payments still have to be made.

I have spoken in the house before about the kind of contact I am getting now from Redress people telling me that phones are still not being answered; they leave messages but they do not get calls returned. People say, "I'll get back to you in two days", but they do not. Applicants still receive phone calls to say, "We're just letting you know we're about to complete your assessment. Once it's completed, in about four weeks, you'll get a letter and that will be your offer of payment." So the applicants' hopes rise. They contact the department in four weeks to be told, "You shouldn't have been told that." Members will recall that I read the circumstances of Michelle Stubbs to the house a few months ago, in which she had such an experience. She detailed the dates and times of calls that were made and not returned. Last week, I received a letter from a man named Peter King. It is addressed to Stephanie Withers, executive director of Redress WA, and copies were provided to the Minister for Child Protection and to me. It reads —

Dear Stephanie,

I write this letter to state my feelings regarding my dealings with Redress WA.

April 29th 2009, I received a letter, bearing your name, acknowledging the receipt of my application to Redress WA.

November 17th 2010, I received a letter, again bearing your name, stating that applications were being reviewed for assessment prior to June 30th 2011. It also acknowledged information that was with my application but not requesting any further information.

January 14th 2011, I received a telephone call to arrange a telephone interview in regards to my application. This was arranged for January 17th 2011. The telephone call came in and the conversation lasted nearly an hour, and I must at this point state that whilst it was a very stressful and emotionally draining experience the young lady involved was at all times exceptionally supportive and conciliatory. At the end of the conversation the young lady stated "That within two to four weeks" I should hear something.

That was 14 January —

February 14th 2011, I rang the office to enquire what the status of the application was as it was past the 4 weeks advised in the telephone conversation. I was told it was "With legal" and the young lady should not have told me the time frame she had as it took time to verify details and research information. An offer would be made in due course.

February 28th 2011, I rang the 1800 number enquiring about the progress of my application and was told curtly that "It's with legal. Call back in another month". Naturally I took offence at this and not wishing to experience the same attitude again I contacted Minister McSweeney's office in the hope of getting some assistance. The next day I received a phone call from Redress and after relating the previous days experience received an apology for the treatment I received in that phone call and was advised that my application was "With Legal" however I would not have to wait a month to receive the offer.

That was 28 February —

March 28th 2011, I rang the 1800 number and was advised "it's being assessed" and no further details were available. Interestingly I have been waiting a month since the last contact.

At this point I wish to state that I am sorry I started this process. It has caused me great emotional distress and has caused bouts of depression not as severe but of a longer duration than any I have experienced before. I was diagnosed with depression over twenty years ago and was advised by my psychologist that in all probability I had been suffering from depression since about the age of ten years old. This being during the period in which I was in care and despite many departmental psychologists and examinations was never diagnosed. To date, after the numerous phone calls instigated by me, I have yet to receive any contact instigated by Redress. This is so much like my time with the department. Isolated, ignored and left feeling as though you hope I just go away and leave you alone. I do not feel

that there will be any redress for me. To me redress would be quick acknowledgement and constant contact advising what was being done and a time frame.

I do not blame you personally for the treatment I have received from Redress WA however I feel you must be made aware of the emotional havoc this process is having me. The only glimmer of hope I have and the one thing that keeps me going in this process, is that at the end, I intend to purchase something that will give me pleasure for years, to in some small way make amends for the years of maltreatment and neglect I suffered at the hands of the department and for the sexual abuse I suffered whilst in their care.

A copy of this letter will be sent to Minister McSweeney and Opposition Member Ellery.

Sincerely yours,

Peter King

I contacted Mr King to speak to him about what had happened. I told him that unfortunately he is not the only person who had shared that kind of experience of phone calls not being returned. I asked whether he would mind me using his letter in my comments. This is what he came back to me with —

Thank you Sue, for your response.

There is no need to phone me as I give you my permission and blessing to read my letter including my name and suburb to parliament when you are able.

He lives in Yokine —

I have received a response from Redress that simply states that I am able to return my acceptance by e-mail but it does not acknowledge any of the points I raised in my letter nor does it take into account that I have yet to receive an offer.

As of today I have contacted my GP to get another referral to a psychologist for Medicare funded counselling and have also arranged an appointment with my psychologist. The scary part for me is that until now self harm has never been a consideration. Now I find myself being so careful not to allow myself to get into a situation that it could be a possibility. I can not even recall a time whilst in care when I have felt this vulnerable and fragile.

Peter King.

He very eloquently illustrates the point I was trying to make about how we treat people. I fundamentally disagree with the government's decision to cut the maximum payment. I think that was immoral, and the government will stand condemned for doing it. However, putting that to one side, because of the way these people have been treated previously, the way that we treat them now is terribly important. People who have not been through what they have been through might think that a government department not returning a phone call is not a very big deal, and would just try calling again in a few days. For these people, this is part of a pattern, and it confirms in their minds that government is not to be trusted and that there is nobody looking after their interests. If the government thinks that its decision to cut the maximum payment was the right thing to do, it will ultimately be judged on that decision. I cannot tell members how much correspondence of the type I have just read I have in my office. Frankly, I cannot read them all in this chamber because I do not think that some of those people are as mentally healthy as Peter King. I do not want those people to be traumatised by thinking that my raising their issues in Parliament will somehow fix their problems, so I do not bring the majority of those letters here. Those people are not well enough for me to expose their stories in that way. I treat very seriously the trust they have put in me because I do not want to do anything to damage them further.

When the government refuses to answer a phone call and makes people call a number that is answered by machine, or tells people that they will get X amount in two or three weeks, then three months down the track, when they still do not have anything, tells them that they should not have been told to expect that, it is seriously damaging these people. Maybe the government thinks that, politically, it cannot reverse its decision to cut the maximum payment cap, but I think it could probably do something about answering the phone. I think it could probably do something about treating these people with a bit more respect than it has to date. Those are the things I think the government could change. I think the government should change its decision on lifting the cap, but it is up to the government whether it chooses to do that. But I think it could answer the phone and give these people a human voice to listen to, not an answering machine. It could respond to their letters on time and avoid a situation in which someone like Peter King starts to talk about self harm. I think the government could avoid that kind of circumstance.

Hon Nick Goiran: Will you at least concede that the amounts allocated in the budget by the former government were inadequate to cover the level of claims that were ultimately submitted?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No, I will not, because I know the decision that we made at the time was made on the best possible information available to us. Both Treasury and an actuary checked our numbers. I also know that our government's decision was that, on the best possible advice, it was the amount of money that we thought we needed, but that if we needed more, we would provide it. I know that because I was involved in the decision process, and that is a fact, so I will not concede that at all. Even if we had got to the point where the best advice to us was wrong, our commitment was that we would increase the funds if that was what we needed to do. With that, I will conclude my contribution to the cognate debate on the appropriations bills.

HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.13 pm]: I am pleased to make some comments on the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Recurrent 2009–10 (Supplementary) Bill 2010 and the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Capital 2009–10 (Supplementary) Bill 2010, which we have been debating this week. I am going to talk about a subject which is part of my portfolio and which has received particular attention this week—science and innovation. As members may have picked up on this week, there have been some changes to the Technology and Industry Advisory Council. Since the change of government in 2008, we have seen a steady decline in the government's level of financial support and commitment to science and innovation as a viable and sustainable industry in Western Australia. We have had three Ministers for Science and Innovation over two and a half years. The first minister, Hon Troy Buswell, saw his stewardship of this portfolio as an opportunity to deliver on his three per cent efficiency dividend, and he slashed and burned a range of projects and divested a number of people of their jobs. There have been changes at Bentley Technology Park, and the role and function of the Innovation Centre has been reduced. I dare say that, at some point in time, the government will announce its closure, and we will lose that very important incubator in the area of science and innovation. Mr Buswell was then moved on, through his own fault, and a new minister took over, Hon Bill Marmion. At the time he took over, we had been waiting, waiting, waiting for the science review that had been commissioned by Troy Buswell to be tabled. He had said that the government was committed to science and innovation and that it would come up with things, but we were still waiting for that review. The review was finally tabled and the interim council was established. There were some very interesting and eminent people on that council. The idea was that they would form a framework, vision and plan for the government to move forward. One of the last things Bill Marmion did before he lost that portfolio in December was to finally announce the members of the TIAC board. It is a bit confusing, because when this government came to power, it removed some of the bodies that were already in place. It got rid of the Premier's Science Council, which was established by former Premier Dr Geoff Gallop. It also got rid of the chairman and the board of TIAC, but I will come back to that, because I note that this week, on Tuesday, the 2009–10 TIAC board annual report was tabled. It is quite interesting for that report to be tabled now, when that particular body did not function during that period—it did not meet and it did not have anybody participating. I am not really too sure how a report could have been pulled together to cover a 12-month period during which nothing actually happened.

The TIAC board was announced in December, and some fantastic people were appointed to it. There is Chief Scientist Lyn Beazley, who as we know does a fabulous job as an advocate for science and innovation in our state. She certainly works very hard, and I know that a number of members will have seen Lyn at a range of functions, always with her camera! She is an extremely positive ambassador for science and for our state. Lyn's role is very important. As I have said in past speeches, I think the role of Chief Scientist should be further enhanced and possibly made a bit more independent and given more capacity to make decisions about allocation of funding, but I will talk a bit more about that.

There is also a range of people from industry and academia, including Mr Colin Beckett from Chevron Australia, who is the general manager of the greater Gorgon area; and Dr Mal Bryce, who is the chair of iVEC and a former Deputy Premier of this state. Mal is a very passionate advocate for the IT area. There is also Professor Shaun Collin, who is a Western Australian research fellow; Professor Barry Marshall, our own state Nobel laureate; Mr John Poynton, executive chairman of Azure Capital; Dr Beverley Ronalds, group executive for CSIRO Energy Group; Dr Jim Ross, chairman of Earth Science Western Australia; Mr Brian Bradley and Mr Charles Morgan. I cannot read Mr Charles Morgan's details out because about a week ago Mr Morgan decided he had had enough; he was frustrated with the way this government was addressing these issues, and he resigned. In a conversation I had with Mr Morgan, I learned that he had tendered his resignation and, when I spoke to him last Wednesday night, about a week and a half after he had done that, he had not even received an acknowledgement from the minister to say, "Thank you very much for your correspondence; we acknowledge your resignation." By Friday, 1 April, any trace of Mr Morgan had been removed from the departmental web site. It was as though he had never existed. He was not listed as a former chair nor was his name on the documents on the web site that related to the work he had been doing. I think that is an atrocity. It is a dreadful way for the government to manage these things, and it is an appalling way for the minister to deal with people.

It had taken the government two and a half years to come up with a research paper about how we can advance science and innovation in the state, only to drag its feet to ultimately get the peak advisory body established and then discover that the members cannot establish the body they want, so they have to go back and frame it along the lines of the body they had abolished.

After Hon Bill Marmion made his announcement about the new board, we got a new minister, Hon John Day, so science and innovation got tagged onto the rest of his portfolios. I note that, until this week, Hon John Day had not put out a single press release on this portfolio. In fact, it was only this week that he put out a press release—a very positive one I must say—congratulating a couple of students who are going to Washington as part of their prize for the BioGENEius Challenge project. That is the only thing he has done. He has not even come out and explained why the chair of his peak advisory council has resigned. All he could say to the media this week was that the government could probably do more. I agree with him. I think the government could do a lot more.

That was on Monday; then in Tuesday's *The Australian*, an eminent member of that board, Barry Marshall, the Nobel laureate, spoke about his frustration while on the board. Given these people are extremely busy and their time is very tight and it would be very difficult for them to find time to attend these meetings, there would be a lot of frustration. They are taking the time to turn up to meetings and put together a plan—the Technology and Industry Advisory Council has put a plan together—and I do not know whether the government has looked at it or given it consideration. We saw yesterday that Mr John Poynton, another member of that board, has also resigned. He, too, has expressed his frustration as one of the reasons for that. Two down, seven to go. We would think that the minister would come out and say, "We are going to try to address this." But he has not. I understand he is not available today, but at some point the minister responsible must make a decision about whether the government is dinkum about and committed to advancing science and innovation in this state. Given how busy he is, I do not believe this minister has the time or the opportunity to engage in this area. I have talked about this in the past—for example, when Troy Buswell was the responsible minister—and how we need a dedicated minister and a dedicated department. We do not have that. In fact, the department has been carved up. I think Hon Simon O'Brien has responsibility for the part of science and innovation housed in Commerce; other parts are scattered elsewhere, and the minister who is responsible is in a totally separate area. I think it will be very difficult for the government to engage with people in these areas.

The third board meeting since this body was established in December was held on Tuesday. Given the chair had just resigned and comments were being made in the media by other board members about their frustration, one would have thought that the minister might see his way clear to attending that board meeting and having a discussion with his key advisors in this area, the people who can give him direction. No, not Minister Day; he sent his chief of staff to the meeting. After that meeting, Mr John Poynton resigned. Quite frankly, the fact that the minister sent a staffer speaks volumes about his level of commitment to engaging with those people, listening to them and taking on board their offerings about where we can go in the future with this very important area. Minister Day should be very embarrassed, and I would not be too surprised if more people did not follow the paths of Mr Charles Morgan and Mr John Poynton and resign.

We really need these types of people on these boards. We need that mix of views and experience. Some excellent people are on that board. I was looking forward to their coming up with a solid plan. Although we are a state that has, historically, been focused on the mining and resources sector, which is a vital area for us and one that we should encourage, we need to build upon that industry—I hate to use the "boom" word; we all get embarrassed about that—build upon the boom, plan for the future, and look at developing other industries that feed the mining and resources industry, so they can work together and we can gain from that. We should have science and innovation as an independent, fully viable and sustainable industry.

As I have said before, we have some amazing people in our state in a range of fields in this area. The WA Information Technology and Telecommunications Awards will be held this Friday night, and several hundred people will attend that function. It is always quite astounding to see at that function the level of talent, imagination and creativity that exists in our state, and the types of projects that people come up with and the dollars that they generate from their ideas and their businesses. Sadly, though, because the state is not providing enough commitment, incentive and support, a lot of those people, ideas and money are going offshore. If the government were genuine about wanting a plan and a vision for the future, it would be doing whatever it could to support those people so that we can hold them here and we can grow better as a state with those very talented people. It is really interesting to see from year to year how those individuals grow, because, more often than not, every couple of years the same people come up with a more advanced version of their product. It is fascinating to see that and to hear their success stories. Last year a young fellow, who I think was only 20 or 21 years of age, came up with an Apple iPhone application, I think it was. He had been signed up by Apple in America for full-time employment before he had even finished his study because he came up with such a good concept.

Hopefully, that young fellow is set for life, but what a shame that we are losing these talented people and their future ideas.

Hon Helen Bullock: We do have talent but we do not have an industry to support that talent. It is a shame.

Hon KATE DOUST: That is right; we do not. It has been a real eye-opener this week to see the lack of response from the government about this problem. The government has gone to all this trouble to establish this board, albeit it took a long time. It obviously provides some monetary support to enable the board to meet. The board has put the effort into pulling together a document entitled “From Strength to Strength”, which is available on the web site. It sets out the board’s list of recommendations to the state government about what it could do in the area of science and innovation. I must say that there are some very good recommendations in that document. Given the calibre of the people on the board, one would expect a fairly solid document. They have looked at our key areas of industry and how we can build upon them and expand them to pick up opportunities. That is what this is about. It is about looking to the future and looking at the opportunities we want for our young people.

I spoke recently at a women’s science conference held here in Perth. A couple of hundred young women attended that conference, including a range of students who are still at school, young women who are working in the mining and resources sector as engineers, geologists or chemists, and other young women working in medical research. It was a quite diverse group of young women, some of whom had been working in the industry for a long time. They talked about not having support and they are concerned that if we do not develop structures in Western Australia, we will lose people offshore because there will be nothing to keep them here. A colleague of mine told me about a good friend of hers who is a Rhodes scholar and has worked at some very eminent places overseas for the past 20 years. She is back in Perth but she is here just for her family because the infrastructure for her job is in Melbourne. Western Australia is a great place to be but we must make sure that we can keep people here by providing them with good jobs. We must also make sure they are well-funded and that the government continues to invest in the future. Members have only to look at what is happening in other countries. I am sure that the Technology and Industry Advisory Council would have got around to making those sorts of recommendations. It would be interesting to see whether the government has a plan to put in place a program to provide support for and assistance to young people who want to engage in this area. I understand that the Singaporean government plans to provide funding for students to study through to the PhD level in a number of countries. The funding will be provided on the basis that at the completion of study the young students go back to Singapore to live and work for a certain time so that the government gets the benefit of the students’ work. That is an example of some very smart thinking on the part of the Singaporean government to retain its talented people and to put them to work.

TIAC has come up with a plan, but I do not know whether the minister will engage with TIAC or do anything about its plan. The minister cannot even front his own advisory council and talk to it about what it is doing and what its plans are for the future. This council has been in place since December. Hon John Day has been the minister since about the time this announcement was made. It is now 7 April. TIAC has had three meetings in that time. One would have thought that the minister would have found some time in his diary to meet with those very important people at least once, or to have arranged a meeting. The minister has met Mr Charles Morgan only once in that time. It has been reported in the media that Mr Morgan was frustrated that the minister was never available to talk to him about what the board was doing and what its concerns were. These people are not only specialists in their field, whether it is business or academia, but also are prepared to invest in this area. Over the past year, Mr Morgan has invested \$1 million of his own money in medical research, which is no small ask. He donated his own chair’s fee and doubled it, and he established the new Innovator of the Year Award, which amounts to about \$25 000. He is prepared to put his money where his mouth is and deliver on his commitments. He has shown by his actions that he is passionate about science and innovation. He sees the big picture for the state and understands the potential and importance of science and innovation, yet he has been ignored. It is because of his frustration at this government’s disinclination to address these issues or to have a vision that he has walked away from TIAC, which is a real shame. We need people with that sort of energy and enthusiasm to drive these types of projects.

When I was a member of the State Training Board briefly, before I became a member of Parliament, John Rothwell was appointed as chair of that board. Whatever people might think of his work practices, he was a very successful businessman and had a lot of energy and passion for training at that time. It was interesting to see how people with that type of enthusiasm are prepared to drive projects. That is what people on this board were prepared to do as well. It is a real shame that because we have a minister who is lazy and is not interested, we have lost someone with that type of energy and enthusiasm. I will look with great interest at and ask questions over the next few weeks about what the minister will do to replace Mr Morgan and Mr Poynton. I do not know how many takers the minister will get for those positions if people already know about the minister’s lack of interest in that area. That lack of interest is to the detriment of the state’s future. I hope that the Premier takes

note of the two resignations from TIAC this week and will take an interest in the matter himself. The Premier considers himself to be a person with grand vision. I note that he talked this week about canals or pipes. Whenever he talks about pipes, something else must be going on because pipes are a good diversion for the Premier. I hope he takes this on board and rearranges the deckchairs. I hope that the Premier is serious about advancing the cause of science and innovation.

Recently a very important guest from China visited Western Australia. The Premier was reported in the media to have said yesterday—I do not know his exact words—that he wanted to improve the collaboration between Western Australia and China in the area of science and innovation. The difficulty is that that can be done only when we have our own house in order and we have our own plan. The Premier was asked a question in the other place today about the TIAC resignations this week and about the government's views on science and innovation. I understand that part of his response was that the scientific community supports the government. I do not know where he gets that from. The feedback I have received from a number of people is that state-based funding for scientific research has dried up and that academic institutions are concerned about the impact that will have because it will create issues for the federal funding they receive. The information technology sector has been so disappointed at the lack of consultation it has had with the respective ministers it has had to deal with that the industry has decided to get on with its business and not worry about government engagement. There is frustration among the scientific community.

We all support and hope we will win the contract for the big-ticket items such as the Square Kilometre Array, but that project is largely being driven by the federal government. I do not believe that the new state government has provided any new dollars for that project. It has received federal funding and is predominantly driven by the office of the federal Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. The government cancelled the state broadband project, yet the government wants the federal government's national broadband network to go ahead. Bill Marmion stood up at an event in Gingin and said, "Roll it out to Geraldton!" However, when we asked him a question about it a week later, he gave a weasel-word answer about his views on broadband. There is a conflict there. The government must start to think strategically about these areas and include them in its plans. We cannot rely on just one industry.

I listened very carefully to the matters Hon Sue Ellery raised about some people not necessarily gaining any benefit from the boom and about its effects not flowing back into the community. We need to think about that in the area of science and innovation. Although we are in a good place and although we hope that we will have a sustained period of growth in the mining sector, we want to see some of that growth translate into support for and sustenance of newer industries. Members with children need only talk to them to know what they are interested in. The sort of work our children will go into is substantially different from the type of work that we might have thought about going into when we were teenagers.

Hon Simon O'Brien: There is an expression one hears now that for the children who are at school today, two-thirds of the jobs they are going to do in the future have not been invented. That is the sort of expression we hear canvassed. We live in challenging times, particularly for the younger generation.

Hon KATE DOUST: I think the minister is right. I look at my own three children. My daughter is doing geology at university and she loves it. That is not a career I thought she would go into. She is hoping to get a job in the mining sector at the end of this year, which will make her the fifth generation of the family to work in the mining sector in Kalgoorlie, which is a nice closing of the circle. I am not really too sure where my second daughter will go. It is not like my father's generation, who had one job, or even my generation, who have two or three jobs over their career; these children may have several different occupations throughout their working life. My son, who is only 13, is doing a game design unit at school.

Hon Sue Ellery: He could make a lot of money

Hon KATE DOUST: He could make a lot of money. He told me that he had created a game that even his teacher did not know how to do. The minister is right; it is evolving. It is evolving so quickly and so differently from what we expected. I think the minister is right in that the types of work that people do, the manner in which they do it and the technology they use are constantly changing. That reinforces what I am trying to say today: unless we invest in the potential for these areas now, we will not realise those opportunities in WA; we will lose them to the eastern states. I have talked about this before. Queensland has been very smart and very good at encouraging other players in terms of financial collaboration. Government, industry and private donations work together to deliver dollars for science and innovation projects, be it in medical research, information technology, agriculture, mining or energy. They have developed a clear plan about how to pull in the dollars, and not just from government, so that Queensland can be the smart state. In New South Wales and Victoria, serious dollars have been allocated in the past to elevate science and innovation to a high level. Those states understand that this is an important thing to do, whatever the chosen area in which they specialise. That is the thing for WA to do.

We need to identify niche areas in which we can excel and into which we can put dollars. We need to plan for the future. The Technology and Industry Advisory Council has identified some areas on which we could work.

The budget allocation for science and innovation is in decline. In 2008–09, about \$56 million was allocated for grants and subsidies—it was not always spent in some cases. The forward estimates for 2013–14 show that the government is planning on putting in only \$3.2 million. I do not know what that will fund, but I do not think it will fund much. If I were working in that area, I would feel pretty disgruntled and disillusioned and I might be looking for other employment or opportunities for my research in another state or country. That is the real risk we will take if the government is not prepared to acknowledge the importance of the TIAC board and the people involved in it, and does not listen to them or invest in these areas. Picking up on the point made by Hon Simon O'Brien—it is absolutely relevant—we have to plan for the future because we do not know what lies ahead. We do not know the nature of the work that people will be doing in one or two generations.

We need only look at the types of research work being done in Western Australia. Peter Klinken and his team at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital are doing some amazing work in gene technology and DNA, and in medical research for drug testing. I did not know that that institute has one of the largest drug-testing facilities in this part of the world. I understand that they like to attract young male backpackers as their guinea pigs. I am not sure whether that just means that they are expendable! They are now getting contracts from other parts of the world to run these programs. That brings dollars into Western Australia. A new facility is about to start there. I recently asked a question about this new medical research facility and the government talked about how it had invested \$50 million in it. We have to remind the government that it did not put in that money; the money was put in by the former Labor government. The government has been very fortunate in that a number of the plans and projects put in place and funded by the previous government are now coming to fruition. It cannot rely on that.

The government has to take on board the recommendations from TIAC and start thinking about the future and about how much money is required to build on the boom. How are we going to make ourselves ready for the future? How are we going to make sure that we have the types of work available at a local level to retain young people? I hope that the government makes a commitment when the budget is tabled in the next few weeks, because my real fear, and I think it is the fear of those working in the industry, is that there will be further cutbacks in this area. I have spoken to a number of people who used to work in a government department and who are no longer there; they left to work in industry or universities. They talked about the frustration they felt. They left working for the state government in this very important area because they did not see a future there. They do not believe that this government is prepared to acknowledge the opportunities that exist. With the talented people we have in this state, we should be the jump point into Asia. People should be coming to us for our ideas and talented people rather than us exporting our smart people and smart ideas to other places, which then gain the benefits.

I received a document from the University of Western Australia this week called *Highlights 2010/11*. This document highlights the range of activities in science and innovation that are being conducted in just one university in Western Australia. I am sure that the level of activity, very interesting outcomes and formal acknowledgments cited in this document are being replicated at not just Curtin University of Technology, but also Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University and Notre Dame University. It is a very impressive list of people and acknowledgements in these areas. I do not know whether Minister O'Brien is interested in a document like this, but it gives us some idea about where we could be in the future, as long as we can sustain the types of people who are here. Amazing research is being done at UWA in agriculture and aquaculture. It has a fantastic science and arts department, which merges science and the arts. I am not too sure about the artwork of the mice with the ears, but art is in the eye of the beholder. There is also the gold research group in the physics department and the medical research teams. It is just an incredible place to visit. Curtin is the same. It has the Chemistry Centre (WA), the water research people, and the fellow I have talked about before who is doing coal-to-liquid research. We have these talented people here. The government needs to make sure that we can hold onto them. We need to make sure that the government puts in more than \$3.2 million to sustain them.

I received the *State of the Future* document from the Department of Commerce this week, in which Minister Day talked about the wonderful TIAC board and listed all the members. Sadly, he lost two of them; therefore, by the time this hit letterboxes this week, two of those members would have quit, which would have been quite disappointing. The minister is behind the times. Somebody needs to tell Minister Day that he needs to get with the program. I do not know whether it is because he is so busy he does not have time to engage with this portfolio. I do not know whether anyone on the other side has a passion for and interest in this area. I know that Hon Helen Morton used to go to a lot of events when she was the parliamentary secretary and I know that she is interested in this area. Maybe that is the key: maybe the government needs to allocate this portfolio to another minister or to a parliamentary secretary who might have some time to drive these things along and to pick up on the issues. I am not giving Hon Donna Faragher some work; do not look worried!

Hon Donna Faragher: Sorry, I came in when you were talking and I am not quite sure what you are referring to.

Hon KATE DOUST: Science and innovation.

Hon Donna Faragher: Right, a very important area.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Jon Ford): That is okay, because the member is talking to me, not to you.

Hon Donna Faragher: Sorry, Mr Deputy President.

Hon KATE DOUST: Sorry, Mr Deputy President, I —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I thought we might be having a breakout of conversation then.

Hon KATE DOUST: No, I just got distracted. Hon Donna Faragher distracted me!

Hon Donna Faragher: In a positive way.

Hon KATE DOUST: In a very positive way, thank you. I have not even got to my notes yet—to my speaking points.

Another issue that has come up that this government needs to focus on is Scitech.

A government member: We're just passing notes.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Never mind them.

Hon KATE DOUST: I will just ignore them.

Scitech is a very, very important place in our state and it has a very important place in the hearts of both parents and children in our state. In 2013, Scitech's funding will cease and its lease will cease. We have been asking questions over time about what the government will do. I know that we had an answer to a question last week that the government is looking into it. Time marches on very swiftly in this world and I know how difficult it is to find appropriate places. Scitech is important because it encourages not only very young people—very, very young people; preschoolers in fact—to engage with science, to be excited about it and to think about it as an opportunity as they go through school and on to further study, but also other people in our community to engage with science. It would be a real shame if we lost that facility. I know that Scitech struggles sometimes to allow enough people into its building, so I think it would be a bit of forward thinking on the part of the government if it looked to have a purpose-built facility for Scitech, a facility that could plan for the future. In December on my way back from a trip to India with Hon Liz Behjat and Hon Adele Farina, we had a few hours' stopover in Singapore so I dragged them around the Science Council of Singapore and we had a fabulous morning.

Hon Liz Behjat: We weren't dragged.

Hon KATE DOUST: They went very willingly. We had a fabulous morning and it was really interesting to look at how the Singapore government had addressed its Science Council, which is a significant tourist attraction. The Science Council is on a fairly extensive plot of land and the building has many different arms and sides to it, so the council can house different collections and move them around. It also has a facility to run school class sessions on site. I do not know whether our Scitech has that capacity. I thought it would be fantastic to have a purpose-built place where schools could bring students on site for a particular area of science and run a class there, be it chemistry, maths, geology, human biology or whatever. Would it not be a great thing for students to experience that in the Scitech environment? Scitech has been quite adventurous lately and offers after-hours science parties to encourage older people to attend. I think that it is being creative in trying to encourage people to engage with science. I do not know who in this place has been to Scitech. I do not know whether Hon Norman Moore has been to Scitech. Hon Nick Goiran and Hon Ken Travers would have been to Scitech.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon KATE DOUST: Members who have been to Scitech will appreciate how important it is and what a great, fun place it is. It is a fun way to learn. Our population is growing and we want to encourage people down the path of science because if we encourage people to engage with science, particularly during their school years, we can cultivate those skills that we need to support our mining and resources sector. Scitech offers an interesting way to hook them in, if we like. If the government is serious about it, rather than housing Scitech in West Perth, which I do not believe it will be able to do after 2013, it would be a really positive thing if government found a site where it could have a purpose-built facility that could plan for expansion in the future. Before all this talk developed of a football stadium going up at Burswood, I often thought that the plot of land next to the State Tennis Centre would have been a great location for a future Scitech because it is so close to a train station and roads. It has easy access.

Hon Peter Collier: It's a good place for a stadium.

Hon KATE DOUST: Now it looks as though it will be a stadium instead, so I can cross that one off the list.

Hon Ken Travers: There goes your powerlines at Geraldton then, because you won't be able to afford them if you build the stadium over there!

Hon KATE DOUST: That is another issue so let us talk about that later.

I know there was a period when a proposal before government was to look at Sunset Hospital as a potential site for Scitech, but I understand that also is no longer an option. Time is running out for government to make a decision about what happens with Scitech. I know that the government will do whatever it can to keep Scitech going because I think the loss of a facility such as that would be a real loss to the community and families.

Hon Ken Travers: There's not a serious threat, though, is there?

Hon KATE DOUST: Its funding finishes in 2014 and its lease expires in 2013. As I understand, the lease has already been extended as far as Harvey Norman is prepared to go because it wants to redevelop the site, unless that has changed in the past few months. Therefore, I think that the government really needs to get a move on with this. Given what we have seen in the past week with the lack of engagement by Hon John Day on other science-related matters, I am very concerned about how he will engage with as substantial a project as housing Scitech into the future.

Hon Ken Travers: So they've crushed the parents with power bills and now they're going to crush the kiddies by taking away Scitech!

Hon KATE DOUST: The member might suggest that!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! We were doing very well until then.

Hon KATE DOUST: I know; I think the member is being flippant.

Given that this week members of the peak advisory body quit through frustration, something has to give. I do not know whether anyone sitting on the other side will step up and say that we must do something about this situation. We must acknowledge the importance of science and innovation, we must engage with the industry and academia, we must plan for the future and we must acknowledge those opportunities, because otherwise we will miss out and all that we will be known for is simply mining and resources. That is not such a bad thing, but what hope is there for those people in our state who do not end up working in that area? What hope is there for those people whom we would like to have working in all the other businesses, industries and areas of science that are needed to support the resource sector? Look at Minister Collier's portfolio. If we do not have people of energy—I did not say training, I said energy—who are being educated and encouraged to engage in the area of science, how can we possibly be creative in the area of renewable energy? How can we develop the interest and skills in that area? Even Minister Collier would acknowledge that that is a very important area in his portfolio. We need to plan how we will integrate renewable energy into current energy sources for supply. There are many different aspects to science and innovation. I imagine that even Hon Norman Moore, with his very important portfolios, is very keen to ensure that we train enough engineers, geologists, chemists and all the other people we need to work in the mining sector. We should train the highly skilled people we need, rather than simply import them. There are jobs to be created. I think government has to plan now. We cannot just leave it. I think we got caught out before the last boom. I do not think we planned far enough ahead, and I do not think we looked at the big picture and at what industries we have to support so that we can be sustainable as a state. We need to think about change and where we are going. The government needs to think about this. I certainly think about it.

One area I think is very important, and Hon Colin Holt might agree with me on this, that we need to focus on is education. How do we provide support to young kids, particularly in rural and regional areas, who I think sometimes miss out on having dedicated science and maths teachers? How do we ensure that children in those rural and regional areas have the same access to highly skilled and dedicated teachers in those fields, so that those children can be energised and can develop their interest in these areas so they can make broader decisions about their futures and elect to find the type of work we would want them to have to keep them in the state and not leave? I met with some people at the University of Western Australia a couple of years ago, and they said to me that in that particular year there had been only three dedicated maths teachers finish at the university. They had all been picked up by the private sector, as one would expect. Who is teaching maths and science in the bush? What qualifications and support do those teachers in the bush have?

Hon Peter Collier: It is the social studies teachers.

Hon KATE DOUST: I have girlfriends who teach in the bush, and they do not always teach in the areas in which they are qualified, so I think the Minister for Energy is right. That is a real shame. The minister and I both come from the country. My parents left and brought us down to the city for high school. It was a shame that we

had to leave, but we might not have got the same benefits there. That is a real issue for the future. I hope that the National Party will start thinking about what needs to be done to ensure that dedicated specialist teachers can be encouraged to live in the bush and to stay in the country regions, so that those children can be encouraged to elect to take those types of subjects. This is an area that the state government also needs to address. It needs to think about what type of support is given to those teachers and what to do to encourage them. I know that Hon Ljiljana Ravlich was a teacher in the country, so she might be better qualified than me to talk about her experiences and what sort of things attract people to the country. That is an important area. I would not like to see one group of students miss out on or be denied one set of opportunities when we could be encouraging them and opening up other avenues and opportunities for them as well as for us.

It has been quite interesting to see the events that have unfolded in these last weeks with the resignations from the Technology and Industry Advisory Council, because it gives us the opportunity to talk about science and innovation. It is not always something that is talked about in the broader community. I do not think that people really appreciate the opportunities that exist for both individuals and our state, not just the returns from research—we have certainly had some very positive returns there—and in dollars, but returns in opportunity for the future and our capacity to evolve in the future and grow so that we are not restricted to one type of primary work in this state and that we are capable of doing other things and of growing people into other avenues of work. This is about forward planning in the long term. I really think we are missing that opportunity. It is not just about putting the dollars in.

In dealing with these particular bills, it is about what is missing here. I know that when I look at the second reading speeches for both of these bills, they refer to these bills allocating funding where no appropriations were made during the year. What is really missing in both of these bills is an allocation for the area of science and innovation. That allocation was certainly not made appropriately in the budget last year, and the government has ignored it in these bills as well. This area needs not just a top-up, but serious dollars coming into it. That can be done not just with money directly from government, but through partnerships. I hope there is someone in government who has the imagination, drive and vision to work out how to do that and who can engage with those key players across industry and across the academic world so that we can set up structures and frameworks and establish plans and some forward thinking. I do not think that Hon John Day has demonstrated this week that he is that person. Unless the government is going to 'fess up and be honest and say that it is not interested at all, it should remove him from that position and put in somebody who can actually deliver and come up with a plan and persuade the Premier to put the dollars in. In fact, if the government were really serious, the Premier would take on this portfolio. The Premier should drive it. If the Premier really wanted to engage with countries like China and build up collaboration with China in the area of science and innovation, the Premier would be the driving force. We all know that the Premier sees himself as a can-do man, a man of ideas and vision, so he should take this up because maybe he is the only person in cabinet who has this capacity.

Hon Ed Dermer: It is worth remembering that Geoff Gallop held the portfolio when he was Premier.

Hon KATE DOUST: I was coming to that point. Geoff Gallop did take this seriously. He established the Premier's Science Council and the Premier's Research Fellowship Program—which are no longer provided for. He established a range of funding, including the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research that we have been looking at. Earlier Hon Sue Ellery talked about Duchenne muscular dystrophy. I have met with those people as well, and they are doing incredible work, as Hon Sue Ellery said, on the smell of an oily rag. It is programs like that that should be funded. There are a range of programs that are doing cutting edge work with no funding. There are people working in their own time, simply because they are passionate about this area and they can see the benefit to the community and the state. They are working for free because there is no funding or support. That is a real shame, because the state is missing an opportunity. They are developing ideas and products that can be of benefit to the community and that can be put out into the market and the benefits can be returned. There is a lot of amazing work here. We need to have somebody in this state who is keen, who is passionate, who understands the value of science and innovation and who is actually prepared to go out and engage with the players in industry, and who is prepared to take on board what they want to see and who is prepared to argue in cabinet to get the dollars. I know that science and innovation is probably not seen to be as sexy as some of the areas of work that people have, but it is just as important as the other portfolios and should be funded appropriately so that we can deliver for our community.

I have talked about Israel before, and also the role of the Chief Scientist. As I said earlier, Professor Lyn Beazley is an excellent Chief Scientist. I believe that it would be great to give her role more prominence and to give her greater decision-making capacity. I know she has issues that she is really concerned about. One of those issues is the fact that we have not passed any more legislation in this area. One of the very important pieces of legislation relates to bioprospecting. The government finally flagged that it might do something about it, but we have not seen any more.

For the period of the Barnett government, we have seen cutbacks in funding, the removal of peak advisory bodies and the resignation of senior industry players from those advisory bodies. We have seen no legislation. We have seen lost opportunities, and we have seen a reduction in the capacity of the state to gain benefit from this area. I just want to talk about lost opportunities today. That is what we have seen this week in this area, and that is a real disappointment. I do not know whether the government is going to pick up on that and actually address these issues. If it does address these issues, there are many other portfolios that will benefit from this one particular area, because it is a vital and very interesting area of work to engage in. We should be doing whatever we can to support the people we have here in our state.

Another area where support is needed is the Gravity Discovery Centre. I raise this issue because we are coming up to budget time and I look forward to seeing whether the government has put money in. I see that no money was listed in the appropriation bills, but additional money was provided for the gravity centre in the period of these bills. Perhaps when we get to the committee stage we might tease that out. I know additional moneys were provided after the budget, but I could not find anything listed in this bill, so I am not too sure. Hon Simon O'Brien might want to go and find out about that or ask Hon Bill Marmion from where he pulled the extra dough for the gravity centre.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Maybe we haven't paid for it yet! I'm just joking.

Hon KATE DOUST: I am sure that his constituents at the University of Western Australia would have been banging on his door if they did not get their bills paid or could not keep their doors open.

Hon Simon O'Brien: You will find everything is in order.

Hon KATE DOUST: Good. I look forward to this year's budget to see whether the government continues to fund the Gravity Discovery Centre at Gingin. It is a very important place, not just for allowing young people and families to observe the night sky but also as a research facility. It is a very important research facility in our state that will also provide backup to the Square Kilometre Array project. There are a range of scientific endeavours in our state. We could probably go through a long list to find out what is continuing and what has fallen away. I look forward to being able to do that when we actually get the budget papers in a few weeks.

I am not going to talk about my other shadow portfolio of energy today. I think enough members have talked about this government's appalling record on providing infrastructure for the future. It was disappointing that in the energy document the government released recently renewables were not canvassed as extensively as industry would have liked. I think that probably comes back to the Premier's own view on renewables, not the minister's.

People have been hard hit and punished by the excessive increases in power bills. I will not talk about the outrageous dividends that have been paid back to government or the fact that we think that electricity charges are really extra taxes that the government is recouping from people who are having to tighten their belts. I will not talk about those things, because I really do not have enough time. I might come back and talk about those another day. All I wanted to say in my speech today was that it is very disappointing that this government shows no intention to commit to science and innovation in the future, has not demonstrated a vision and has put in place a minister who is not interested in this area and has no interest in engaging with the key players who will drive this very vital area forward.

HON COL HOLT (South West) [4.14 pm]: I just want to say a few words on the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Recurrent 2009–10 (Supplementary) Bill 2010 and the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Capital 2009–10 (Supplementary) Bill 2010. I will not keep the house too long. I really want to talk from the perspective of a backbencher at the midterm point.

Hon Ken Travers: Halfway through your career then!

Hon COL HOLT: That is it, mate; thank you. The member might have worn me down by the end of another two years, and he could well be right.

From a government backbencher's point of view, I could maybe give some of my reflections on what I have discovered about government and potentially some of the outcomes of the budget that perhaps I have not got as much ability as ministers to control. However, I am sure they welcome any input that I can provide to any policy situation or budget spends. Like most members in the chamber who work within their regions, I know it is about interacting with the constituency. There are plenty of issues out there, plenty of projects and plenty of things that people want the government to invest in.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to temporary orders.

[Continued on page 2592.]

Sitting suspended from 4.15 to 4.30 pm