

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 7 May on the following motion moved by Mrs G.J. Godfrey —

That the following Address-in-Reply to His Excellency's speech be agreed to —

To his Excellency the Honourable Mr Malcolm James McCusker, Governor of the State of Western Australia.

May it please your Excellency —

We, the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of the state of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our most Gracious Sovereign, and to thank your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to address to Parliament.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys) [12.34 pm]: Firstly, I would like to congratulate all the new members on both sides of the house who were elected to the Parliament on 9 March. May I also congratulate all the returning members who were successful in that same election. Congratulations also, Mr Speaker, to you on your important new office.

I believe the Liberal Party was blessed with many outstanding candidates. Some were successful and, unfortunately, some just missed out. Many of us, including me, achieved very large increases in our majorities. I at present hold virtually 70 per cent of the vote. I would love to think that the reason for this is because I am generally well liked within my electorate. I certainly hope I am well liked among the majority of my constituents. However, I will not delude myself and I urge other Liberals not to delude themselves either. We won seats that would normally be considered reasonably safe Labor seats. Although we had good candidates, I believe we owe the victory to one person, and that person, of course, is our Prime Minister. It is my belief that the Prime Minister and her government are very unpopular with not just the people of Western Australia but the whole of Australia and we will see a similar outcome in September with the federal election.

One of the main reasons the Prime Minister is so unpopular is that she was not truthful in her promises to the Australian people during the last federal election when she promised there would be no carbon tax under her government. People do not like being deceived. The challenge facing the re-elected government of WA is how it will maintain the trust and faith of people who voted Liberal or National and honour its election promises in the knowledge that in doing so it will increase the state debt even more.

The outcome of this election was very reminiscent of the 1996 state election when the Liberals won a majority in their own right. They decided to continue governing with the National Party, as we are now. However, in the short space of four years the Liberal Party was roundly defeated. As the old saying goes, a week is a long time in politics. Can I say that four years can be a lifetime and that may be the case for some members. A former Liberal member of this chamber pointed out to me recently that Cicero said in 55 BC —

The budget should be balanced, the treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled, assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed lest Rome become bankrupt, the mobs should be forced to work and not depend on government for subsistence.

It seems we have not learned much over the past 2 068 years—nor indeed has the Italian government; nor have many other European governments for that matter.

Our state debt gives me very serious concerns and may well also play a significant part in the outcome of the next state election. Unless dealt with by way of a concerted effort, state debt will have a detrimental effect on our children and our grandchildren. It is a fact that debts are very rarely ever repaid by the governments that create them; they are nearly always repaid by future governments. This was the case in the federal arena during the Howard and Costello years in government, when they paid off all the previous Labor government's debt and put us in the black. Let me quote Hon Joe Hockey, shadow Treasurer, on the subject of government debt —

For net debt, since Labor came to power Australia went from \$44.8 billion in the black for 2007–2008 to net debt for the last financial year coming in at \$147 billion.

Labor will be paying \$7 billion this year in interest on this net debt—roughly the cost of fully funding the Gonski education reforms or the Commonwealth's contribution to a National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Labor's gross debt—subject to the debt cap—currently sits at over a quarter of a trillion dollars, coming in at \$262 billion ...

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

At a state level, the Court Liberal government inherited a \$10 billion debt from the previous Labor government, which it reduced to \$4.5 billion and, to its credit, the subsequent Labor government continued the Court government legacy and reduced debt further, albeit to a modest \$3.6 billion. In just four years, we as a government have increased that to a record \$18 billion, and that is due to increase to nearly \$25 billion over the next year or so. When the election promises are added, state debt could reach close to \$30 billion. In fact, my prediction is that without drastic action, state debt could end up between \$30 billion and \$35 billion within the next four years. The reason for this is that experience over the past 20 years has shown that infrastructure projects have mostly come in well over budget. We seem to be going against the usual trend of conservative governments that pay off Labor government debts. It concerns me deeply that we will lose our AAA credit rating in the near future. That will put even more pressure on us because we would then be paying a higher interest rate than we enjoy at the moment, not to mention the associated loss of confidence. Credit ratings agency Moody's already has us on a negative ratings outlook and has warned that we will remain in that position until we resolve to narrow our deficit and reduce the pace of debt accumulation. To that end, I predict that this year's budget will be one of the most austere budgets in decades. In fact, I believe this will be the trend for every budget until the next election.

There are many questions that we all need to ask ourselves: are we spending funds on what we need or simply what we want? Are we spending funds in areas that will give us a return on our investments? We have an abundance of resource commodities that have, until now, helped protect us from the financial disasters experienced by the rest of the world. However, we are not immune to those disasters and they do have an effect on our economy. Some would have us believe that all is rosy but anyone who follows the global financial crisis knows that recently in Cyprus at least 40 per cent of people's bank accounts have been stolen—sorry, taxed—if they had over €100 000 in them. That is known as the Cyprus haircut. An increasing number of European countries are desperately holding their hands out in need of a bailout and will become victims of their own nation's haircuts. In a sign of how desperate for funds our federal government is becoming, it is now acquiring the bank accounts of individuals if they have not been used for three years, to the point at which the banking industry is now advising people to make token transactions on their accounts just to stop the federal government from raiding people's nest eggs. That has actually happened to me.

The GFC hit us all in 2007. Some were more adversely affected than others but nonetheless it is obvious to anyone who sees with clear eyes that the heart of the problem lies with accruing too much debt. I find it strange that although the public seems to have caught on and is reining in its spending and people are paying off their mortgages, just as small and big businesses are paying off their debts, governments seem to be doing the opposite and are racking up unwanted fresh debts on the people's behalf. The people are setting an example to their governments, and both state and federal governments need to take heed. I feel that the worldwide events over the next four years could bring about such negative flow-on effects to the Western Australian economy that, when combined with all the debt we are piling up, we would have trouble paying our costs and interest bills and meeting all our other commitments without having to take drastic steps that the public would find very unpalatable. Is Western Australia going to experience what the newly elected Queensland Liberal-National government unleashed on its unsuspecting public last year when it announced that thousands of public servants' jobs would be axed? Aside from forced redundancies, should the WA public prepare for reductions to services and the sale of government assets as well as further increases in household fees and charges? It is startling to think that a state such as Western Australia, which has enjoyed immense economic prosperity in the past few years, should have to face such drastic and vicious economic measures, measures that would certainly hurt thousands of Western Australian families, many of whom are already struggling with the cost of living in a city that is ranked among the most expensive in the world. Rather than inflict punitive measures on the working public, I would hope that the government would first look at what savings can be made by reining in any unnecessary or unessential capital expenditure. There is an old saying that I have lived by in not only my personal life, but also my working life as a business owner: never go shopping with an empty purse. I fear that too many governments do exactly that.

I am asked from time to time how it is that we have surpluses every year and yet the debt has grown fivefold. The answer in essence lies in the fact that we are really talking about only operating surpluses, not real fiscal surpluses. Major capital expenditure items are not expensed in our budget. We do not raise enough revenue to fund them, so we just keep borrowing. Although companies may conduct their accounting on these principles, they usually invest in assets that produce a justifiable economic return. The same cannot be said for many state investments, such as museums and stadiums; in fact, we create further operating expenditure to maintain these types of assets. Moreover, when we receive grants for capital programs, such as the infamous school halls program, we tend to count the grant as an operating revenue, but do not count the cost of building as an operating expenditure. The average member of the public, and indeed many politicians, do not understand these types of accounting tricks, so it falls upon the government of the day to govern for the long-term good, well beyond the

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

electoral cycle. It also falls upon the media to scrutinise us properly and not to give us credit for running a surplus when we have really borrowed another few billion dollars. Some people have argued that the state should take on debt during the good economic times in order to take advantage of the opportunities; at the same time, others argue that we need to overspend in the bad times, as the federal government did during the GFC. In other words, we have state and federal governments racking up debts for precisely opposite reasons. In the minds of some, there is never an appropriate time to break even or run surpluses. Unfortunately, that is the thinking that has led to European countries finding themselves with 25 per cent-plus unemployment, and in some cases over 50 per cent youth unemployment, with no money left in the kitty to deal with that tragedy.

On that note, I would also like to touch on the principles we need to consider for a viable state-based future fund. They are extremely useful, but can work or be worthwhile only if there are no huge debts to service. Peter Costello said recently that future funds can be effective only if there are large budget surpluses and we are virtually debt free. If we have a large enough amount in a future fund, we can easily live off the return without touching the capital. The Western Australian Future Fund lacks any real substance. This cannot change until we start producing operating surpluses; but, firstly, we need to get out of debt. With such a large debt hanging over our heads in this state, and one which is forecast to increase, perhaps it is time to rethink our commitment to the fund. I appreciate the fact that my position on state debt will cause some angst among some of my Liberal parliamentary colleagues, but I also happen to know that many of them agree with me.

Mr Speaker, I also accept that I caused some controversy running for the esteemed office that you now hold. I only say in my defence that I ran for another parliamentary term on the understanding that I would be supported in filling that role. As the wheels of politics turned, this was not to be the case, and I certainly accept that. I will not, however, accept the current and growing debt position; it troubles my conscience as well as my fundamental belief in good housekeeping. This is a matter of speaking now or forever holding one's peace.

As the re-elected member for Hillarys, I faithfully promise the people of my electorate that I will continue to think of their futures as well as those of their families. I have been very privileged to have represented the people in the electorate of Hillarys for the Liberal Party over the last 20 years. I, like many others, came into Parliament to try to make a difference. The area that concerned me most was law and order, but it was not until becoming the police minister that I could really make a difference in that area. I am very proud that under my watch the state's crime level fell by around 10 per cent. I believe this was in part because of legislation that I was able to introduce so that police and the courts were able to deal more effectively with criminals and with those individuals who carry out antisocial activities. It gave me enormous satisfaction to make it a mandatory sentence for anyone who creates bodily harm or grievous bodily harm against our fantastic police officers.

I am also proud of legislation concerning the public sex offender register, as well as legislation concerning the misuse of drugs, which dealt with the manufacture, sale and supply of drugs to or around children. I also took great delight in personally performing the first crushing of a hoon's car. Over the last few years, hoons have not only made life unbearable for many people, but also created great danger on our roads. Another achievement that I am very proud of is introducing into Parliament legislation that ensures all revenue from speed and red-light camera infringements goes into the road trauma trust account for funding road safety initiatives. It was very pleasing to see a decrease in the number of both road deaths and serious injuries during this time. The protection of innocent people, whether they be our children, our motorists or our law enforcement personnel, has always been a priority for me; but the main point is that protecting our citizens is the government's first duty, and it is an area in which this state government has been extremely effective, without the need for large and questionable spending commitments.

How necessary are some of the major commitments we are making in areas of far less importance than law and order? Do we get an effective outcome for every problem simply by throwing money at it? Instead of mortgaging the future of Western Australians, could we not get back to core Liberal values by supporting free enterprise to do more of the things that government is trying to do? Could we not support the family unit to do more of the things in which the government may now have taken too big a role?

I do not know what the next four years have in store for me, but I give this commitment to the people of Hillarys and, indeed, to the wider community of Western Australia: I will continue to work very hard to do all I can to enhance their lives and to maintain an honest dialogue with them. Finally, I pray that we will always have the courage to tell the truth.

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park) [12.50 pm]: I also rise to speak to the Governor's address, following on from an outstanding speech by the member for Hillarys. He offered some timely words about state debt—words that have been said at some length by members on this side of the house, so it is now good to know that the lone Liberal has raised his voice on that side of the chamber to express his concern about the running of the state's finances over the last four and a half years. He quite rightly gave credit to the former Labor government for

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

reducing debt and managing to get things done without increasing debt to unsustainable levels that, the member for Hillarys has just pointed out, offend his Liberal principles. I hope that other Liberals sitting in this place will pay attention to the member for Hillarys because ultimately, as the member for Hillarys said, it is our children and our grandchildren who are going to pay for the debt that the government is taking on right now. As the member for Hillarys said, governments that take on debt very rarely pay it off. I found the member for Hillarys' speech very accurate and very incisive. I dare say that all members, particularly new members in this chamber, should read the member's speech when Hansard is finished with it.

I rise to give my short Address-in-Reply contribution to the Governor's address and, Mr Speaker, I also congratulate you, as other members already have, on your election as Speaker of the house—bearing in mind that a significant number of Labor Party members voted for the member for Hillarys, because we think the member for Hillarys is a wonderful member of Parliament! Clearly, Mr Speaker, when you think about it, because it was a reasonably close vote, it was really the opposition that ensured your rise to the Speaker's chair in the end! I hope that when you are making decisions about the behaviour of various members of Parliament, that fact will be foremost in your mind, especially when you are making calls during question time!

I also acknowledge all the new members who have been elected to this Parliament, and I wish them all the best in their parliamentary careers. I hope that they find it an enjoyable and satisfying job, however long they happen to be in it.

I also want to reflect on the idea that the Premier has been putting around about this “new” government, as though the member for Cottesloe has suddenly, like a fairy, appeared on the scene—pop! We have not seen him before, he is new to us! This is a new government with new agendas—that is, a new government that can walk away from some of the more embarrassing things from its previous term. I think that is why the Premier has gone to some lengths to talk about the “new” government, rather than a continuation of the Barnett government. I am confident that members of the Western Australian electorate will not really take much notice of that attempt.

It took up some time during question time yesterday, so I will reflect quickly on the government's performance thus far, particularly in respect of the dismissal, the sacking, of the former Commissioner of Corrective Services. To be frank, that was an embarrassing, cowardly performance by this government. It is clear that no-one really knows how the Public Sector Commissioner got it into his head that he had to sack the Commissioner of Corrective Services. No-one is 100 per cent sure how Mr Wauchope suddenly decided that he needed to get rid of the commissioner. The minister certainly had nothing to do with it. The minister did not even have the good grace, or do the professional thing, to meet with the commissioner, despite being in the job for some four weeks before the decision was made. No-one really knows how Mr Wauchope, sitting in his office, decided it was time to sack the commissioner. Mr Wauchope has obviously gone rogue. I dare say that it will only be a matter of time before other directors general are silently but efficiently shot during the next few months by a Public Sector Commissioner gone rogue.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: The ministers will find out about it afterwards.

Mr B.S. WYATT: The ministers will find out about it well afterwards. The ministers have no involvement with the directors general of their departments, whether they maintain their role or whether they are moved on by a Public Sector Commissioner gone rogue.

It has been an interesting not quite two months since the election of the new Barnett government. During that time ministers seem to have simply disappeared. Ordinarily, we would have thought that we would see ministers out and about explaining decisions and trying to persuade the electorate of particular public policy decisions that have been announced. What we have seen in those short two months is a “no comment” government. I thought I would have a look at how many times in fewer than two months we have had ministers respond to important issues of the day by simply declining to comment. First, I will start with the Minister for Corrective Services because, quite simply, he has been the greatest offender. He has been the greatest offender because, ultimately, he was too busy avoiding meeting the commissioner while somebody else apparently told the Public Sector Commissioner it was time for the commissioner to go. On 28 March, we have the corrective services minister's first offence regarding juveniles in Hakea Prison, on which the minister declined to comment. On 2 April, the minister declined to comment as part of an article headed “Bid to quash Hakea transfer”. On 4 April there was an article published headed “Kids in jail ‘paraded like zoo animals’”. The corrective services minister declined to comment. On 9 April, with respect to a Supreme Court review that had taken place, the minister declined to comment or have anything to do with that. “Sydney lawyer wants action for juveniles” was the heading of an article published on 10 April. Again, the corrective services minister declined to comment. An article headed “Jail work drags chain” was published on 28 April. The corrective services minister declined to comment. An

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

article published in *The West Australian* on 30 April, headed “Minister and sacked jails chief never met” stated —

After refusing to be interviewed about Mr Johnson’s removal on Friday, Mr Francis was forced to answer questions on his way into a Cabinet meeting yesterday.

Finally, after declining to comment for weeks on end about significant issues, the minister was captured by the journalist on his way to a cabinet meeting. No doubt that is probably where he found out that his commissioner had been sacked. Still, we are yet to find out reasons why that commissioner no longer has his position as a member of the public service. It is not good enough. If a minister is going to dismiss a senior member of our public service, he needs to have reasons and he needs to have the confidence and at least the courage to address him, meet with him and explain to the people of Western Australia why that decision was taken.

I want to make some comments about Browse. A lot has already been said about Browse so I will just make a few comments about it. That was a fine example of the heavy-handed interference by the Premier simply driving a project away. Ultimately, a process was in place that was going to deliver an outcome in a location that everybody would have ultimately been satisfied with, including those various environmental groups that, in the end ultimately, and I think a bit mischievously, decided it was time there be no development in the Kimberley.

I want to make some brief comments about Christine Milne, the leader of the federal Australian Greens party. She put out a media statement rejoicing the fact that an on-site liquefied natural gas plant was no longer going to be built at James Price Point. The problem that the senator has is that she does not pose any solutions. What is next for the Aboriginal people in the Kimberley? The article that was written by Peter Yu outlined that exact issue. What is next? This is the problem we have when Aboriginal economic development is linked to a particular industrial outcome. When that industrial outcome falls over for whatever reason, Aboriginal people are literally left holding the baby and working out what happens next, and a community is incredibly divided because the process that was in place was simply ignored and trampled over by the Premier of the day. So the Kimberley people sit there now, wondering what is going to happen in light of the fact that so much of government decision and investment in the Kimberley was built around a successful decision for an onshore gas plant at James Price Point.

I will read a quote, hopefully to bring to Senator Milne’s mind where Aboriginal people sit today compared with perhaps the times when she would like them to sit. I will quote from Marcia Langton, who gave last year’s Boyer Lectures, an excellent series of lectures. She made this point in her very first lecture —

But on the left, and among those opinion leaders who hang on to the idea of the ‘new noble savage’, Aboriginal poverty is invisible, masked by their ‘wilderness’ ideology. They describe the Aboriginal situation through a romantic lens. Their unspoken expectation is that no Aboriginal group should become engaged in any economic development.

Later on in that same speech she says —

By the late 1980s, Indigenous policy and much public commentary in Australia was based on a paradigm which cast Aboriginal people as victims of a brutal colonial legacy, as residents of remote regions where they strove to maintain the vestiges of a traditional way of life, an endeavour in which they needed the support of government through income assistance schemes and other policies that would help them to stay on their traditional lands. Over the following two decades this paradigm came under increasing attack, ...

The question I will put to Senator Milne, whom I have never met, but in the event that I do, is: what is her paradigm? What happens now with Aboriginal economic development? Clearly, the senator does not want to see any mining or energy-related development associated with Aboriginal lands but, interestingly, she offers no alternative. I do not accept for a minute that bland references to ecotourism will be anywhere near sufficient to deal with the economic development challenges that Western Australian Aboriginal people face, particularly in some of those remote locations.

I have a few things to say in my 30 minutes today. Just before I came to Parliament this morning, I went to a very significant signing of a memorandum of agreement, which I found out about only yesterday—it was embargoed, so I was very pleased that I could get there—between Curtin University and Colgate University in the United States regarding the Carrolup art. Many people may know the history of the Carrolup art. I want to read from a document prepared by Curtin University. It states —

Carrolup Native School and Settlement, now known as Marribank, is situated 30 kilometres out of Katanning Western Australia. In 1915 the Settlement was established by the Australian Government to provide education and training for Aboriginal children in accordance with the aims of the assimilation

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

policies under the Aborigines Act of 1905. The Settlement closed in 1922 and its residents were transferred to the Moore River Settlement. In 1940, the Settlement was reopened as a farm training school.

During that time, many of those children did art that became incredibly famous simply for the fact that it left Western Australia and was found at Colgate University in storage. There has been a 10-year development of the relationship with the Noongar people, in particular Angus Wallam, the Aboriginal elder who was at the ceremony today, and Ezzard Flowers. Today Colgate University signed a memorandum of agreement to return the Carrolup art to Western Australia and the Noongar community. It will be stored by Curtin University and then toured throughout regional Western Australia and shown at John Curtin Gallery. Some 119 pieces of Carrolup art will be returned to Western Australia. Anyone who knows a little about art or Aboriginal affairs will know that that was indeed a very significant signing this morning. I would like to congratulate those representatives of Colgate University who came out to sign that agreement this morning and who clearly have developed a very strong relationship, as was shown by Angus Wallam in his speech this morning.

I would now like to move to my electorate. It is not often I get the chance to talk specifically about issues in my electorate. I thank the electorate again for re-electing me at the general election some two months ago. I also thank my staff. We all are here thanks to our outstanding staff and volunteers. I acknowledge Alison Cook, my electorate officer, who is currently on maternity leave. On 6 December last year, Jake Cook was born, and he is no doubt proving himself to be a worthy brother to his sister, Willow.

Much was made yesterday about crime. What I would like to speak about in respect of my electorate of Victoria Park is education. Victoria Park is an inner-city electorate that is undergoing a dramatic increase in population density. When I lived in Lathlain 20 years ago, I lived on a quarter-acre block. The vast majority of properties in Lathlain at that time were quarter-acre blocks. Those blocks have now all been subdivided, and what was once a quarter-acre block now has two or three properties on it. That has been replicated in all the suburbs in my electorate.

That means that in a very short period of time there has been a dramatic increase in the student population in my schools. For example, since 2009, at Victoria Park Primary School there has been a 50.7 per cent increase in student population, and at Lathlain Primary School there has a 34.1 per cent increase in student population. Between 2009 and 2012, at East Victoria Park Primary School there was a 25 per cent increase in student population. But in 2013, there was a decrease, because East Victoria Park Primary School was no longer the overflow school, and students were transferred out of East Victoria Park Primary School, mainly into Millen Primary School, which has now become my overflow school. That means that since 2009, Millen Primary School has had a 65.5 per cent increase in student population.

Mr J.E. McGrath: It is a very good school.

Mr B.S. WYATT: It is a very good school, yes.

Mr J.E. McGrath: It used to be in my electorate.

Mr B.S. WYATT: Since 2009, Kensington Primary School has had a 10 per cent increase in student population, and Bentley Primary School, the other primary school that I have in my electorate, has had a 14 per cent increase in student population. So there have been significant increases in student population in a very short time in all my primary schools.

One of the issues that I have, as other members of Parliament no doubt have—probably the member for South Perth has a similar issue, because we cover similar ground—is that the school infrastructure is now decaying. Victoria Park Primary School, which is at the end of my street, is landlocked and it can no longer expand anywhere, really. It is an old school—over 100 years old. What I think needs to happen in Victoria Park in my electorate is in respect of Millen Primary school; and I do appreciate the member for South Perth's interjection that it is a very good school. Millen Primary School is located on very old grounds. As I have just outlined, since 2009 there has been a 65 per cent increase in the student population at that school. A small amount of money has been spent at Millen Primary School on maintenance. However, it is time for a new school to be built on the Millen grounds. The reason I have picked Millen out of all my schools, when other schools would have just as worthy an argument, is because it is the overflow school, and also because the Department of Education owns a large area of land around that school that is currently a playground facility. That means that there is the capacity to build a new school at that location without affecting the education of the students at that school. A new school certainly needs to be constructed at that location. That would have a dramatic impact on the other schools in my electorate, which have seen an increase in student population, in addition to the increase in the number of overflow kids coming into Millen Primary School.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

Mr B.S. WYATT: The other point I would like to make is in respect of secondary education. Every one of the primary schools in my electorate is excellent. I have great principals. I have active P&Cs. I have engaged parents. Therefore, as a result, we have great kids coming out of these schools. A number of years ago, the Leader of the Opposition described our primary schools as the jewel in the crown of our education system. I think that is right.

Mr M. McGowan: You have a good memory!

Mr B.S. WYATT: I remember everything, Leader of the Opposition!

Mr T.K. Waldron: Selectively!

Mr B.S. WYATT: I remember everything that is helpful to me!

But one of the things that has been raised with me regularly since I was elected in 2006 is a sense of dissatisfaction with the secondary education options in my area, which also includes the member for South Perth's area—not so much the member for Belmont's area, but possibly. Certainly, my patch also incorporates the member for South Perth's patch in respect of the education zones. The sense of some parents is that they are not so sure that Kent Street Senior High School or Como Secondary College is right for their children. That has been for various reasons; they all have their reasons as to why that is. Just last week—this is not a rare occurrence—another couple moved from the electorate of Victoria Park to get into the catchment of Churchlands Senior High School. This couple has a very young baby, and they want to make sure that their child is in a catchment for a high school that they feel comfortable taking their child to. So, it is not the primary schools; there is a sense of discomfort about the choice of high schools that they have available. I want to make this point: I am in no way reflecting on the staff at either Como, member for South Perth, or Kent Street. That is not the point I am trying to make here. They are excellent staff.

I will tell members what I am about to do. I have prepared a discussion paper that I will send out over the next week to all my school parents and citizens associations and to all my school principals, and there will probably be some in the member for South Perth's electorate; I will also give him a copy of the discussion paper. I want my electorate to enter into a discussion about what they want. How do we develop in my area, which, as I said, is not just the electorate of Victoria Park? Educational zones are not bound by our electorate zones. How do we create in my area that Shenton College of the south east corridor? How do we create a Churchlands Senior High School? I note the member for South Perth nodding his head at those hypothetical questions I am floating.

There are a number of choices, and one of those choices that has been pursued by various principals of both Como and Kent Street over the years would be to effectively create one school out of Como and Kent Street. I know that is controversial. As soon as it is said that two become one, it inevitably means that one school disappears. However, the number of students going into both Kent Street and Como is no longer sufficient to attract the resources for the courses that we want to run and certainly does not fill up those schools. Looking at the My School website, Kent Street's numbers are increasing. Como has had some trouble; its numbers have been decreasing. Both schools still offer great alternatives, but there is now a concern, I think, in the broader community in my electorate—maybe the member for South Perth shares the same concern—about the choices they have available. So, I think it is time to look at that option. Maybe it is time that we merge and create one school that can take up to a couple of thousand students and attract the necessary investment that would therefore be needed to have the courses on offer, not just for those students who want to move on into university. I know that the maths course, for example, and the science course at Como are outstanding. In fact, Como could be made a gifted and talented education school now—absolutely right now. The decision should simply be made to get that done. Kent Street is very well known for its aviation school, its fashion and its cricket. They are two schools that I think would complement each other well.

The question is: if we were to do that, where would we do it? My view is that because of the land available at Kent Street and the fact that Kent Street is heritage listed, that would be the obvious location. It would also provide the density of students attending that would then perhaps one day attract the state's investment into light rail, which would go up to and run directly around Curtin University of Technology. Another option—I know that people are sensitive about one school taking over the other—that I know Curtin University is very keen on would be to create an entirely new school on Curtin University grounds. The proceeds from the sale of land would go into paying for a large component of that capital spend on a new secondary college in that inner south east area of my electorate of Victoria Park, and I have no doubt that the member for South Perth probably has similar —

Mr J.E. McGrath: That would be a better option for the Como area; it's more central.

Mr B.S. WYATT: Yes. I am painfully aware that I am not an expert on education, and I want to get some feedback, input and, hopefully, some support from the education department about how we should go about

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

having this community discussion. Over the next week I will send that discussion paper out to all those relevant parents and citizens associations and principals because I want their feedback on how we go forward. My constituency regards choice of secondary education as the big, missing government-provided service in our area. Victoria Park is a wonderful inner-city electorate comprising the Swan and Canning Rivers. It also has a train line. It is a wonderful area but I think it is that choice of secondary education that people find wanting. I look forward to engaging in that discussion with my constituency. I want the member for South Perth involved as well because ultimately —

Mr J.E. McGrath: You might end up moving to South Perth!

Mr B.S. WYATT: No; I assure the member for South Perth that will not be the case! We can hopefully have a constructive dialogue around this. I really want to move outside any political element to it, member for South Perth, because it is an important issue. It impacts on the electorates of South Perth and Victoria Park. I have a final point in respect of education —

Mr J.E. McGrath: Is the member aware that there is a plan to turn Como Secondary College into a K–12 school?

Mr B.S. WYATT: There was. That was the initial closedown to do that. It never seemed to happen. Como has a similar issue in respect of a regular spend on maintenance but I think it is beyond that now. It is an old school; it is beyond that. That may be an option: do we create one big K–12 school or should it be purely secondary? That is a discussion that the member and I can have here. We need further involvement from our constituents before we can progress that.

I want to make one other point in respect of schools. Like many MPs, I travel around Western Australia to visit schools. Section 125 of the School Education Act requires every government school to have a council unless it is exempted by the minister. Section 126 allows the Minister for Education to exempt the school from having a council for a number of reasons—for example, because of its size or nature. I put questions on notice to find out exactly which schools have been exempted from the requirement to have a school council. School councils generally comprise parents of the kids who are at that school, and I think they provide a very important service to those schools. Of course, in regional and remote Western Australia, a lot of Aboriginal communities really struggle to have a viable school council. In a small population, with the challenges of poverty, having a viable school council often does not exist. No doubt when the minister answers my question on notice I will find out exactly which schools are exempt and which have been exempted over the last few years. There needs to be a push from the Department of Education to get more people, including professional people, interested in education. They may be based in Perth but have the time and interest to serve on school councils outside the metropolitan area. That does not mean they will need to travel once a month to a remote location to attend a school council meeting. It may be that they only go to that location once or twice a year. That sort of input into government schools that are struggling at the moment to have a viable school council is very important for the ongoing success of some regional and remote schools. People living in small populations may not have the sort of expertise they would like to call on that, for example, some school councils in my electorate fortunately have.

My final point relates to the Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency Malcolm McCusker. This week I received a letter from the Governor. I do not know whether every member of Parliament received it—I did. It relates to some comments that he made in his speech to Parliament. Issue was taken in the media in respect of these comments made by the Governor —

Australia has one of the oldest democratic systems of government in the world, a system which was achieved without civil war or bloodshed, and which is the envy of many.

I know some letters have passed between the member for Kwinana and the Governor. Quite rightly, the Governor was upset that he was perhaps characterised in the media as somebody who was not understanding or supportive of Aboriginal people. The Governor, in a long letter to me—I assume other members received it also—set out his long-term support for Aboriginal people, not just in terms personal but of course in what have been very generous donations from the Governor and his family to various Aboriginal groups around Western Australia. I do want to make that point. I have spoken to the member for Kwinana, who shares the view that nobody doubts—I certainly do not doubt it for a minute—the Governor's commitment to Aboriginal people in Western Australia. The one thing that has always struck me as very brave of the Governor when he was a senior lawyer, and since as the Governor, is that he has always been very, very strong in respect of his objection to the high rates of Aboriginal juveniles in detention. I do want to put that on record. I have not spoken to the Governor yet, but now that I have received his letter, hopefully I will do so in the not-too-distant future. With that, 28 minutes seems to have flown by, and I conclude by saying that, as I said, I have incredibly high regard for the Governor.

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

Amendment to Motion

Mr B.S. WYATT: I move —

That the following words be added to the motion —

but regrets to inform His Excellency that the Barnett government should be condemned for its handling of Corrective Services, and in particular the dismissal of Mr Ian Johnson, APM, the corrective services commissioner

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition) [1.20 pm]: I support the amendment moved by the member for Victoria Park. It is a very important issue we are raising, and we have raised this issue today because we have not received appropriate or full answers from the government in relation to what is an important issue of public administration in Western Australia; that is, the dismissal of a senior public servant, at great cost to the taxpayers of the state, without any explanation whatsoever from the government minister responsible, or indeed the government ministers responsible for that dismissal. So, we are going to keep raising this issue on behalf of the people of Western Australia until we get to the bottom of exactly what is going on in this very important portfolio of corrective services.

As Gareth Parker from *The West Australian* I think fairly aptly summed up last week, since the election a range of issues have come up that were not raised prior to the election that have been poorly handled by the government, and that I think are rapidly showing that the government is not handling important issues in this state well. The loss of the Browse project—the second biggest project in the history of the state; the loss of the project due to the interference of this Premier; the loss of that project to Western Australia. It would have been the second biggest project in the history of this country. The re-merger of Synergy and Verve, without explanation and without making it plain to the public before the election that that would happen; the re-merger of Synergy and Verve, which is opposed by everyone in the state, including, I suspect, the majority of the Liberal Party—in fact the overwhelming majority of the Liberal Party—but supported by one person, being the Premier. It is opposed as an economic measure that will not advance the interests of consumers or business in this state. The very weak farmers package, whereby the commonwealth stepped in because the state was not carrying out the obligations it undertook to farmers in this state in the Premier's much-vaunted whirlwind tour out to visit some wheatbelt farmers, and then the failure to deliver anything significant there. Then we recently had the issues surrounding disability care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the failure to deliver there.

But in the midst of all this we have the debacle in the corrective services department, whereby Mr Ian Johnson, APM—Australian Police Medal—was recently dismissed by the government at a cost to taxpayers of \$420 000, without any explanation whatsoever to the public or to the Parliament when those issues have been raised. We are going to raise those issues, and as the member for Hillarys, the other Johnson of note—Johnsons seem to be dismissed with impunity by this government with regular frequency—recently said, in his speech just a moment ago, we need to get to the truth of matters, and we need to get to the truth in relation to this issue about Mr Ian Johnson. A full explanation is needed. What we are doing in this place today is providing the opportunity for this minister and for the Premier, who should be in this place for this debate as the minister for public sector management, to give us the facts as to why this senior public servant was dismissed and what other senior public servants in Western Australia, who are regularly lauded by the Premier, can expect from the government. Can they also expect summary executions? We need to know exactly what has gone on here.

Ian Johnson, the recently departed Commissioner of Corrective Services, joined the police force in 1976. He served as a police officer in this state for 29 years, rising to the position of assistant commissioner, and in 2006 left the police force to become Commissioner of Corrective Services. He received a five-year contract in 2006 and that was then renewed by this government. He was described in March this year as a very strong commissioner by none other than the Premier. The Premier, I think on the day he sacked him, also described the member for Hillarys as a very good minister.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: It was the day before, I think.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The day before he sacked the member for Hillarys, the Premier described him as a very good minister. This person spent 29 years in the police force and five years as corrective services commissioner, and he was reappointed and lauded by the government. He did a course at the FBI National Academy in the United States and as corrective services commissioner put in place a number of improvements and reforms across the prison system in Western Australia. I will not go into all of those, but he established and put in place a range of reforms.

I saw him on the news last night. It is apparent that he is a bit perplexed by what has gone on. He indicated that he has unfinished business as corrective services commissioner. If someone indicates that they have unfinished business and then their job is taken away from them without their agreement whilst they have that unfinished

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

business to perform, does that not therefore mean they have been sacked? Does that not therefore mean the person has been dismissed? He was carrying out his unfinished business, according to him last night on the television, and then he had his job taken away, yet the Premier came into this house and said he was not sacked. He was not dismissed, yet he says he has unfinished business and everyone in the world apart from the Premier thinks he was sacked. Certainly the entire media in Western Australia think he was sacked. Let us put this in context. There have been four Ministers for Corrective Services in the past four and a half years, one of whom served eight months before he was sacked from the ministry in this government. The new minister has occupied the post for six or seven weeks and he did not meet with the commissioner, the head of the major agency inside his portfolio; he did not even meet with him. For all the ministers in this government and in any government, it is inconceivable that a minister would not meet with the head of their department, particularly the most senior department within their portfolio responsibilities. It is inconceivable that a minister would not meet with that person. In the context of not meeting with that person, this Minister for Corrective Services the member for Jandakot over here, carried out a cold-eyed review of the portfolio. Not only has he created a new term for the English language, a “cold-eyed review” —

Mr J.M. Francis: Put it into Google and it will be there.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am sure it will be a new entry.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Did you google Ian Johnson?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Had the minister googled Ian Johnson, he might have been able to find him and meet with him! In any event, the minister carried out this cold-eyed review, but when he was asked why the commissioner was dismissed following the cold-eyed review, he said that he did not know and that it was a decision for the Public Sector Commissioner. He carried out the cold-eyed review and looked at all the issues across the portfolio, but does not know why the commissioner, the subject of the cold-eyed review, was then dismissed. That was a matter for the Public Sector Commissioner and therefore, the minister advised me yesterday, I needed to ask the Premier, as public sector minister, why the Commissioner of Corrective Services was dismissed.

So I then followed his advice. I asked the Premier why it was and the Premier could tell me why he was not dismissed. He said that he was not dismissed because of the riot in Banksia Hill—that had nothing to do with it. He was not dismissed in any way, shape or form or in any relationship to the removal of the member for Murray–Wellington as the minister—he was not dismissed because of that. But then I asked why he was dismissed and he says, “I don’t know.” He does not actually know why he was dismissed but he knows why he was not dismissed. If he knows why he was not dismissed, why was he dismissed? Why was he dismissed if he knows why he was not dismissed? These are important questions that the Premier should come into the chamber and answer. Why was this person dismissed?

Then the Premier said, “No, he wasn’t dismissed”, even though we know that he left the position after seven years of service and 29 years of service prior to that as a police officer rising to a very senior rank. We know that he did not want to go. According to the Premier’s definition, he was not dismissed, even though he did not want to go, and the Premier says he does not know why he was dismissed but he knows why he was not dismissed. So, why was he dismissed? That is the question we are all asking. The Premier, if he was not as cowardly as to not come into the chamber to participate in this debate, should be here to answer this as the minister responsible for public sector management. The Premier is cowardly cowering in his office at the moment, unwilling to come in and answer these simple questions on why a senior public servant was dismissed from his role at a cost of \$420 000 to taxpayers.

The Premier brazenly goes out there and says, “Oh, he received his entitlements, therefore it’s no cost to the taxpayer.” He was given the amount of \$420 000; that is, \$420 000 that taxpayers have had to pay. We have to also remember that we now have to employ a new Commissioner of Corrective Services. This is a significant cost to taxpayers, and the Premier should come in here and answer these questions as to why he was removed. It is to my mind inconceivable that the Public Sector Commissioner would remove Mr Ian Johnson, APM from that role without the knowledge or support of the Premier, or any sort of dealings with the Premier as minister responsible for public sector management, or our cold-eyed friend over here, the member for Jandakot, in relation to these matters. Yet they just tough it out without giving us any sort of explanation whatsoever.

We are here in the Parliament of Western Australia. This is the highest accountability body in the state. Parliaments have learnt over the decades across this country and internationally that this is where the answers need to be delivered. We do not get answers from Freedom of Information Act requests from the government. We do not get answers in any other way apart from raising issues in this chamber. The fact that the Premier will not come in and answer these questions should be a matter of some shame for him—some shame for him that he

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

will not come in here and answer these questions in relation to this senior public servant who was removed from his role without explanation and without explanation to the Parliament.

What is going on here, and what can the rest of the public sector expect from this government? There are numerous senior public servants across the state. I have had numerous dealings with many of them; professional people who could get higher paying jobs outside of the public sector. Are they now subject to summary, arbitrary execution at the whim of someone inside government about whom we do not know? I ask that because we do not know why it happened. We do not know who issued the orders. The Premier does not know, according to his answers yesterday, why it happened although he knows why it did not happen; and we know that the minister in this place will not answer any of the questions, as he would not yesterday. So, what in fact has gone on? A full explanation of this matter is needed from the government, and a full explanation of the handling of the corrective services portfolio is needed, because this has been a very smelly affair indeed.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro) [1.35 pm]: I rise to support the motion. At the outset I view this issue as a matter of courage and integrity. I say right now to the Minister for Corrective Services that there is evidently a surplus of courage and integrity in the man that he sacked, the man that his government sacked; we are not sure exactly whether it was the Minister for Corrective Services or the Premier, and neither is the minister. My experience of the man in the two and a half years or so that I formally held the shadow corrective services portfolio was that he was forthright, honest and a professional public servant who, to the best of his ability, enacted government policy. Frequently I did not like what he did because he was enacting the government's stupid policy, its failed policy—its clearly failed policy, as is being experienced right now in the prison system. The prison system, and the juvenile detention system in particular, are symptoms of the failure of Barnett government's law and order agenda and certainly the failure of its policies in the minister's portfolio. That the government should sack a senior respected public servant, a former senior police officer, after a long and distinguished career, for the purposes of so clearly scapegoating him for the government's own policy and decision failures is extraordinary and shameful. That that should be done without the minister having the courage and integrity to front the man himself prior to the sacking being announced to him by another faceless public servant is extraordinary. It speaks volumes about the minister's deficits of courage and integrity.

I will now reflect a little on the minister's performance to date, because in this portfolio it could be characterised mainly by an absence—an absence of courage and integrity, as I have explained, but also an absence of any presence. For more than a month following the minister's swearing-in, as we heard from the member for Victoria Park in his contribution to the Address-in-Reply debate, the minister was unavailable for comment. It is not as though the Department of Corrective Services was short of things to comment on. It is not as though the corrective services portfolio lacked any ability to draw the interest of the people of Western Australia. We in opposition were asking questions and the media in Western Australia were seeking answers from the minister on a number of issues. The first thing, the most obvious one, is one that the minister inherited—that is, juveniles having to be housed at Hakea Prison—and no blame can be attached to him there. That occurred fundamentally as a result of a bad decision by the minister's government. Last year the government chose to close one of only two juvenile detention facilities in the state, thereby creating a single point of failure in the form of Banksia Hill Detention Centre, where all juvenile offenders of the state were housed in double-bunking situations with, we know now, significant staffing shortages and other vulnerabilities. What happened? The single point of failure failed and as a consequence the current minister has found himself in the situation of having juveniles in Hakea. That was not the minister's fault, other than the fact that he was previously part of the Barnett government, which did not suddenly just pop into existence, as the member for Victoria Park so colourfully put it, but has been here for four and a half years. One of a series of bad decisions was the closure of Rangeview Remand Centre and the consequent clear failure of the system. When the juveniles went to Hakea and there was a subsequent court challenge to the government's decision to put juveniles in Hakea, the minister refused to comment. He refused to comment publicly. He refused to front the cameras; he refused to talk to media about the situation and the claims that were made publicly or raise the concerns of the public more widely, beyond those people raising the concerns. A great many concerns arose and they were not just raised by families involved, they were also raised by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Inspector of Custodial Services and the president of the Children's Court.

That series of publicly raised questions caused concerns more widely among the public, but the minister refused to make any comment. As a result of concerns about the situation within Hakea prison where those juveniles were being held, the situation started to impact on the judiciary of the state. They started to make public comment, which is almost unheard of, in relation to a government policy decision that was impacting on the prison system. A magistrate in Kalgoorlie ordered that a teenage inmate be released on bail because the magistrate did not feel it was appropriate for the teenager to be sent to Hakea adult prison. The President of the Children's Court, His Honour Judge Denis Reynolds, made probably unprecedented commentary on and

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

criticism of what was going on within Hakea Prison. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Western Australia then called into use an almost unheard of law in the state to ensure that an inquiry was held in the course of the Supreme Court case into what was going on in Hakea. As a consequence of that inquiry—I doubt whether we would have heard otherwise—we learnt about the critical shortages of staff within youth custodial services at Banksia Hill and then in Hakea. That was made public only because of that inquiry. Through all of that, the member for Jandakot, as the responsible minister, would not talk to the people of Western Australia. He would not reassure them, let alone the parents of the families involved and other extended family, about those concerns.

But on coming into this chamber, under the protection of privilege, he made attacks on the people who were claiming that their children were being inappropriately treated. He did that, despite warnings by the shadow Attorney General that he may be breaching the sub judice rule. He did not have the courage and integrity to walk out of this place and front the cameras, the media and the people of Western Australia and give his answers directly. Instead, he had a Dorothy Dixier asked in here when he constrained his comments to what he wanted to talk about. That was inadequate.

That was not the only thing that was going on with his portfolio in the month he was absent. There was also a Bunbury prison breakout. It was not just a minor breakout; there were questions around the individuals who broke out and how recently their security had been downgraded. But that is by the by because that was not the issue. That a violent breakout by prisoners who passed female prison officers, who were advised not to intervene for the sake of their own safety, and that those individuals made their way into the community and then threatened the community was worthy of comment by the responsible minister. But the minister was not available for comment. That occurred on 18 April.

I understand that the inquiry into the children in Hakea began about 2 April. On 18 April there was the Bunbury Prison breakout. Also on 18 April the opposition raised in this place the issue of asbestos at Hakea. It is far more serious than the minister indicated in his flippant response. The asbestos at Hakea is widespread and dangerous. In my view, the nature of the asbestos means that it is an urgent matter and the minister has not dealt with it. Again, he has not commented publicly outside this place. He remained here unavailable to take questions outside this place from the media and the people of Western Australia. The sacking of the former Commissioner of Corrective Services, which we have heard much about, is probably the minister's ultimate failure to be responsible, transparent and honest and to demonstrate courage and integrity. By sacking a man of the calibre of the Commissioner of Corrective Services without even personally bothering to tell him he was going to do it and why was shameful. The minister should be ashamed. It was appalling behaviour and I expect in his response that he will provide far greater explanation of his thoughts about the decisions and actions behind this matter than he has today.

My final couple of points on this matter are about what he has been willing to come out and say in public. Finally, after being absent and unable to be contacted for all those issues, the minister has made two public statements regarding his portfolio. But I think perhaps they would have been better left unsaid. Perhaps he should have remained absent rather than make these comments. Firstly, on 6 May this week, the minister attacked the youth custodial officers as being the problem. The minister said that perhaps the reason that we have such high stress and absenteeism through stress and sick leave at Banksia Hill Detention Centre is that the people there are not up to it; they are the wrong people. They were not the minister's exact words, but I can give those to him. The minister said in an online report in PerthNow on 6 May by Emily Moulten —

You have to say if you have that much of an issue in one particular section of the government, then perhaps we're recruiting the wrong people in the first place," he said.

It is extraordinary that the minister would choose to attack those people. I know some of them and I know that the reason for their collapse of morale and high rates of absenteeism and sick and stress leave is the government's bad decision to shut down one of only two juvenile detention facilities and cram in people held in remand with sentenced prisoners, which completely throws into turmoil any efforts they would normally have to try to reform those individuals. A day later I read in *The West Australian* another statement that I believe the minister should not have made and that he is possibly regretting—I hope he regrets it—attacking the state's prison officers. Having attacked the youth custodial officers as being responsible for their own stress and sick leave, the minister has now attacked the prison officers of the state by saying that they are rorting the system. Gareth Parker reported in *The West Australian* on 7 May that the minister —

... is concerned that some prison officers have systematically rorted sick and personal leave as he declared the job required "a certain thickness of skin".

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

Again, that implies that those quite dedicated individuals, many of whom I have met and admire and respect, are inadequate and that it is their fault they are suffering from such high levels of sick and stress leave. I will sit down because I want to give the minister an adequate opportunity to respond appropriately and to finally demonstrate some courage and integrity. Stand in this place and say why Commissioner Ian Johnson was sacked and apologise to the youth custodial officers and prison officers of this state. That is a group of people for whom we should all be very thankful and respectful of.

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Minister for Corrective Services) [1.47 pm]: I inform members that I will not yell because I am losing my voice. I will probably speak only at this level, member for Warnbro.

The member for Warnbro raised four issues, which I will address in the order that I have written them. The first is my not publicly commenting about a matter that was before the Supreme Court of Western Australia. Clearly the Chief Justice thought this matter was so important that he chose to preside over and hear this case himself. As the member rightly pointed out, the Chief Justice invoked a law, which I had not heard of, to give due process to the rights of juvenile detainees in this state. As I have pointed out before and will point out again, I was so concerned with some of the reports that the very first thing I did as minister was go to Banksia Hill Detention Centre and Hakea Prison to see for myself exactly what was going on. There were a number of reports out there, including that children were being locked up for 23 hours a day. Some of the reports were true in the early days, but that is not the case now. Obviously the member for Warnbro has read the Chief Justice's judgement from last week. It was reported that they were not being fed enough. There were issues around their diet initially when they were moved after 20 January but that is certainly not the case now and it certainly was not the case six or eight weeks ago when I went there. I was personally satisfied with the food; I ate it myself. It was not one of those occasions when they knew I was going to eat it; I just went rogue and did it pretty much without notice.

Obviously, a large amount of damage was done to the Banksia Hill facility. The bill to repair and modify some of the security provisions is around \$1.55 million. A significant amount of damage was done on 20 January at a significant cost to the taxpayers of Western Australia; we need to keep that in mind also. But it would have been inappropriate for me as minister to make public comments every time someone raised this issue in the media, making ridiculous and untrue claims about 10-year-old boys being locked up for stealing a can of Coke.

Judge Reynolds, President of the Children's Court, has reviewed the case of every juvenile in detention in Western Australia and has satisfied himself they are there for sufficient cause. They include significant offences that juveniles have either been convicted of or are in remand for allegedly committing, including murder and aggravated sexual assault. I will get to the member's points in a moment, but they are significant offences and they are in detention for the protection of the community. My priority and the priority of the government will always be to protect the community.

Mr M. McGowan: What about the questions I asked you?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I will get to the Leader of the Opposition in a second.

I believe it would have been highly inappropriate for a minister to run continual public commentary on a matter that was being heard by the Chief Justice of Western Australia.

Secondly—these comments are in no particular order—I come to the Bunbury prison breakout. The member for Warnbro asked me a question about that matter the day after it occurred. The member and I have often discussed some of the issues and pressures that were perhaps, as the member suggested, the reason for these prisoners' security and threat assessments to be downgraded early. The department has informed me that that was not the case and there has been no pressure to downgrade the risk assessment of those individuals early. The member for Warnbro can take that for what it is worth; that is the advice I have been given. After we have had that conversation I specifically asked that question.

Mr P. Papalia: I am more interested in the commissioner.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Thirdly, on the matter of Mr Johnson I can tell the member for Warnbro what I said yesterday; that is, Mr Johnson chose to take his four weeks' leave two or three days before the cabinet was sworn in. Mr Johnson was caravanning in regional Western Australia for four weeks and that is why I did not meet him. The member can now google what I meant by cold-eyes review. I am sorry the member had not heard that term before. Yesterday, he enlightened me on something that I had not heard before; we are always learning from each other.

But I spent those four weeks doing what the member would expect a new minister with a new portfolio would do, and that is thoroughly reviewing as much information about the department that I had inherited as I physically could every day. I have read a lot of information every day. I visited as many prisons as I could. I spoke to prisoners. I will not take up the house's time by sharing those stories, but I have been deeply touched by

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

the stories of a number of prisoners in Western Australia, and by the work they are doing, especially by what is being done at Karnet Prison Farm to rehabilitate and save animals such as dogs. A number of issues have come to my attention. In fact, one of them even today is the Auditor General's report into workplace absence and injury management across government, which rings a number of alarm bells for me about the way government has managed some of these issues.

Mr P. Papalia: Can I interject just as a request? Can you hasten your office's response on facilitating my visits to prisons? It's extraordinary that the process has been made so complicated now, and yet we've had three other ministers and it wasn't complicated.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I have spoken to the member for Warnbro about that and I now have a chief of staff in place and we will expedite that. I am not in the business of hiding anything from anyone.

I determined early on that I believe the Department of Corrective Services needs to change tack, as I have said, on a number of different issues. The first is with crime prevention among at-risk juveniles, especially in the area of young Aboriginal boys.

Mr P. Papalia: Is that why you sacked Ian Johnson?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The member keeps saying this. I did not sack Ian Johnson. I had some concerns and I raised them with the Premier. I also believe that the department needs to change tack on a number of different issues.

Mr P. Papalia: Are you suggesting he was not capable of changing tack?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: As I said, I was not in the room when the Public Sector Commissioner had that conversation with Ian Johnson. That is an issue the member will have to take up. I know that I have only five minutes, and I do not want to yell.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! Let the minister complete his remarks.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I think the member needs to go back and revisit the way that the Labor Party handled some of these issues when it was in government. I will refer to this article.

Mr M. McGowan: Is that your answer?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am just making a very quick point and I will get back to the question. In 2004 your government dismissed —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! You have had your opportunity to speak.

Mr P. Papalia: Is this called being responsible and having some integrity? Tell the commissioner why he got sacked!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am just making the obvious point that I think the member is bit red hot to raise some of these issues. An article in *The West Australian* in 2004 reads —

WA's top prison official will be paid \$140,000 in a golden gag deal to leave the troubled Justice Department.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet confirmed yesterday that it had agreed to prisons executive director Terry Simpson getting more than a year's pay to step down just six months into a new three-year contract.

I ask members to keep in mind that Mr Johnson was the commissioner for about eight years. To continue —

...

At the time, Justice Minister Michelle Roberts said she had been let down by the department.

Yesterday, she refused to divulge any details about the sudden departure and golden gag of Mr Simpson and would not say whether he resigned or was sacked.

She also refused to comment on whether he had her support. "The head of the Department of Justice came to an arrangement with Mr Simpson," Mrs Roberts said.

"I think the key thing that the public want us to do is to meet our objectives and I am very confident that in terms of what we have been doing in prisons —

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Michelle Roberts

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I cannot hear the minister's response. You have asked him the questions; allow the minister to respond.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I will continue —

... I am very confident that in terms of what we have been doing in prisons that we are moving forward, that we are ensuring less people are escaping."

That was the standard when members opposite were in government. What I said yesterday and what I will say again now is that I raised some concerns with the Premier and I asked —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: It is not even comparable!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I raised those concerns with the Premier.

Mr P. Papalia: What were they?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I have been through this. I believe that the Department of Corrective Services needs to change its position on a number of different issues —

Mr D.A. Templeman: Why don't you start telling the truth? Tell the truth! You got up in your maiden speech saying how you were going to get all godlike and you would tell the truth all the time and how transparent you were, but you won't tell the truth today!

The SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: As I said, I was not part of the conversation between the Public Sector Commissioner and the former Commissioner of Corrective Services.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I will move on to the member's last point about comments I made this week that perhaps some people may just be in the wrong job. I am amazed that the member finds that so offensive. I am just stating a fact here. I know it is a very tough job being a prison officer. Everyone knows it is dangerous. They are dealing with dangerous known offenders, and that is why these prisoners are behind bars. Prison officers I have spoken to also need to know that when a young prison officer comes through the system, they are safe and they have their back if something goes wrong, and that the young officer has been well trained and well selected. It is telling that in the last couple of days I have received numerous emails from prison officers who seem to believe that I have hit the nail on the head. One of those emails reads —

Sir, I'm a Prison Officer at ... Prison and have been for 7 years ... The point of my email is that I agree with you that the wrong people are being employed by the Department of Corrective services not only in Juvenile but also in the Adult custodial I feel the aptitude test maybe simple for someone in their mid 20 to 30s —

Tabling of Paper

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The minister appears to be reading; I ask that he table the document.

Debate Resumed

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The email continues —

but very daunting to someone in their mid 40 to 50s and therefore the system is allowing someone that is academically clever but not street wise or mature enough to deal with situations that may arise. Therefore they take the first opportunity to shirk their responsibilities and go on long term workers compensation ... you can look at the selection processes and recommend changes. Thank you for your time.

Regards,

...

[See paper 286.]

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I have had a conversation with the WA Prison Officers' Union about the selection process and the training pipeline, and it believes that we need to review this. I think that is fair enough. If we look at the analogy of the movie *Top Gun*, we need the best of the best prison officers, who are keen to mould —

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 303.]

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 8 May 2013]
p279a-293a

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Joe Francis; Deputy Speaker; Mrs
Michelle Roberts
