

## ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

### *Consideration of Tabled Papers*

Resumed from 15 June on the following motion moved by Hon Helen Morton (Parliamentary Secretary) —

That pursuant to standing order 49(1)(c), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 2044A–H (budget papers 2010–11) laid upon the table of the house on 20 May 2010.

**HON LINDA SAVAGE (East Metropolitan)** [11.30 am]: This is the first opportunity I have had to respond to the budget. My consideration of the *Budget Statements* has been a steep learning curve. I found that the budget documents required a lot of attention. I also experienced some difficulty in getting to the detail of what is contained in those documents. I raise that at the beginning of my comments just by way of concern, because these are public documents, and I assume that if I had some difficulty in getting to the detail—or the lack of detail—in the budget documents, there will be many people in the East Metropolitan Region who I represent who also would find these documents rather difficult to understand.

That said, I would like to speak about the budget in the context of the wages that are paid to education assistants, cleaners and gardeners. I have spoken about these people on a number of occasions in this Parliament. These people comprise a low-income group in the community that will be particularly affected by this budget. Education assistants play an important role in our schools. They play a particularly crucial role in the early years of a child's schooling. This is an important area in which the government can have an impact on, and make a difference to, a child's life. We should, therefore, recognise and value the work that is done by education assistants. However, it is of great concern to me that people will not wish to work in this area because of the low pay and the huge demands of the job. I believe this will become a growing problem, particularly with the anticipated growth in the population of Western Australia.

I do not think anyone who has been in a classroom in recent times or read in the press about the demands that are placed on teachers would disagree that education assistants play a crucial role. In fact, I would go so far as to say that in some classrooms, the help that education assistants give to teachers in the early years of a child's schooling could make the difference between the child being functionally literate and having a chance to be a part of society, or the child having very poor or substandard literacy skills. We know that literacy is a high indicator of other problems later in life. Some members would be aware of the figures from the Australian Institute of Criminology in 2009 that show that nearly 50 per cent of prisoners in Australia have left school before year 10 and are therefore likely to suffer from literacy problems. Of course, the government is spending a lot of money in this budget on building new prisons. I would urge this Parliament to refocus on where we can make a real impact on the lives and outcomes for young people in Western Australia.

The Department of Education is currently advertising for education assistants at levels 1, 2 and 3. The salary range for a level 1 position is from \$31 110 to \$36 502 a year. The salary range for levels 2 and 3 is from \$33 772 to \$39 435 a year. As members would know, in Australia, a salary of below \$37 000 a year is considered to be a low income. That can be compared with what is now the average annual wage in Australia, as reported in *The Australian Financial Review* of 5–6 June 2010, of \$64 594 a year. That is significantly higher than what I thought the average maximum wage was. It is from this perspective that I would like to comment on the budget, because the vast majority of the people in the East Metropolitan Region earn significantly less than the average wage. Many of the people in the East Metropolitan Region are low-income workers; that is, they earn less than \$37 000 a year. The East Metropolitan Region comprises 14 electorates, and, on my count, 95 suburbs and a further 30 part suburbs, making a total of 125 suburbs. In an area of that size there are, of course, many schools and therefore many education assistants, gardeners and cleaners.

As members probably know, the pay claim by education assistants, gardeners and cleaners for a pay increase of 20 per cent over three years was opposed by the government. They were offered eight per cent over three years. A decision has now been made by the Industrial Relations Commission that education assistants will receive an 11 per cent pay increase over three years, and gardeners and cleaners will receive an 8.75 per cent pay increase over three years. That means that education assistants will receive about an extra \$17.50 a week. I would suggest that any members who are interested in this issue read the decision of the Industrial Relations Commission. Members might also like to read the case that the government put to the commission during the hearing. The government argued in its case that given that the government faced a budget deficit, it was not possible to meet the demands of the greater pay claim. The commission's decision was handed down last week. Interestingly, in the meantime, the government has found that it actually has a budget surplus. However, that is not a surplus that these workers will benefit from, and nor will they benefit from the booming conditions in this state, because they are now tied into a three-year agreement. Considering that these people are on low incomes and have had a pay increase of about only \$17.50 a week, it would be fair to say that these are the people who will bear the brunt of the hardships that the Treasurer referred to in his Budget Speech of 20 May. It is just bad luck, I suppose, for

these low-paid workers that the surplus has arrived too late for them, and that the benefits of the boom will not be passed on to them. These people are facing increased housing and rental costs. They are also facing increased utility costs. I presume these are the low-income people the Treasurer had in mind when he said in his speech that he is mindful of the enormous impact that the increases in electricity and water charges will have but that everyone has to be a part of sharing the burden. I presume these are also the people the Treasurer had in mind when he said in his speech —

Against this background, the Government acted to make the difficult, but necessary, decisions to bring the State's finances under control. We made decisions so that — like families around the State — we would be able to live within our own means.

The point I make is that for many people on low incomes, living within their own means will be near on impossible. The Treasurer also said —

The Government recognises the effect these rises will have on some households and these decisions were not taken lightly. However, the Government has taken the fiscally responsible course of action and, while it may not be popular, it is absolutely necessary to ensure a strong foundation for financial security and future economic growth.

I do not agree that a strong foundation can be built for a society when the burden is placed on those who are already least able to afford it. The education assistants I am talking about are employees of government. That point should be made. These people are not being exploited by someone; they are employed by the government's Department of Education in full-time positions. These are full-time workers. This enormous increase in the cost of utilities, particularly electricity and water, will, as the Western Australian Council of Social Service has said, push some of these families to breaking point. I say again: I do not see how pushing working families—families employed by the Department of Education and other families who are on low incomes—to that breaking point could possibly be described as providing a strong foundation. I see it, rather, as undermining a strong foundation for society.

Sue Ash, the chief executive of WACOSS, said on 20 May in response to the budget that many families on low and fixed incomes are already struggling to cope and they are wondering how they are going to pay their rates, their utility costs and their rent. I also put on the record recent comments made by the Salvation Army in launching its winter appeal. I am sure that every member in this place regularly receives correspondence from the Salvation Army. It is an organisation that is held in very high regard.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Indeed.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** In an article in *The West Australian* of 29 May 2010 with the headline "Record numbers need your help this winter", Salvation Army spokesman Warren Palmer is reported to have said —

"Traditionally, our clients have been people who live on welfare and suffer from some form of disadvantage in their lives," ...

"But there is a new group emerging who earn a wage but still can't get by without assistance.

He went on to say —

"The numbers of people who are coming to see us for help is at historical highs and we are seeing more new people than ever."

As he pointed out in this article, it goes beyond the mere financial strain. Mr Palmer said that the mental strain on those struggling financially was one of the biggest issues facing society. He went on to say —

"It takes a terrible toll on people when they open up their bills and realise immediately that they cannot deal with it themselves."

I am sure that I am not the only person in this chamber—if they have not experienced it, they can imagine it—who knows what it is like to be on an income of, say, \$35 000 and to have to pay the costs that households face to send children to school, to pay insurance premiums and to put food on the table and then to have household bills go up to the extent that the bills that I am talking about—that is, electricity and water bills—have gone up to. I am very concerned about the government's response to the impact of the increase in these utility prices. I am very concerned that the response to the increases, which the government acknowledges will cause significant hardship for families on low incomes and for small businesses, is to refer to increased funding for the hardship utility grant scheme. My point is not that hardship grants are unimportant. Of course, as the Salvation Army has pointed out, there have always been people on welfare with other issues in their lives who need hardship grants or charity. I am deeply concerned that the response to the increase in utility fees seems to be that families on low incomes should also consider it part of the norm to get a hardship grant. That strikes me as a significant change in how we deal with people who are in full-time work. It is an acceptance, in fact, that people in full-time work—I again refer to education assistants, and members can look at the website and see what their income is—

would expect that the way they will survive is by getting a hardship grant. In that process, they are identified by the utility as being unable to pay their bill and then they are approached and they go to financial counselling and have to explain their situation. Why should that be the norm for a worker in a full-time job? Perhaps I am particularly sensitive to this issue because of the work I did for many years at the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and other work that I have done in dealing with people either on welfare or benefits or on low incomes. Working people on low incomes, and more so those who are on welfare, are very used to having to be very careful with their money. They are also used to not having the power or security that other people have within society. Members who have worked in those areas or have personally experienced these issues will realise that people's dignity is extremely important. It is demeaning when people have to ask for help. That is the tone of the budget that particularly concerns me.

When the government says that it is mindful of the effect that charges will have on families and small businesses, it refers to offsetting that effect by increasing payments from the hardship utility grant scheme. I note that the grant will be raised from \$380 to \$408 and, from 1 July, to \$450. Of course, the workers I am talking about will have an extra \$17.50 a week to help them! Since when in Western Australia has it been expected that a full-time worker should rely on a hardship grant, not just for this year, because the workers I am talking about have had their pay rise, but for three years? Since when has it been expected that people in the workforce will pay their bills through hardship grants and charity from the Salvation Army? As I have said, people's dignity, whether they are well paid or on low incomes, is equally important. I think it is demeaning to suggest that workers should look to hardship grants and charity to support themselves and their families. I assume that I am not alone in saying this and being alarmed. Frankly, I cannot imagine what the role of government is if it is not to ensure that all low-income employees, and particularly its own employees, are paid well enough to pay their bills.

As the Salvation Army and Sue Ash from WACOSS have said, the people who are coming to them are not from the traditional groups that have come to them; they are working people on low incomes who just cannot manage to pay their bills. We must remember that things have to be very bad for people to qualify for the hardship utility grant scheme. To qualify, a person must be unable to pay a bill and be at risk of disconnection or be already disconnected. The utility involved usually contacts the person based on the hardship criteria and then refers the person to a registered financial counsellor. I understand that there are also problems with waiting lists for counsellors. Among the other criteria for a HUGS application, a person has to explain about his or her recent and current committed expenditure and why he or she cannot pay the utility bill. Many people who find themselves in that position will be suffering from the mental strain that accompanies financial difficulties, which Mr Palmer from the Salvation Army referred to. It would be even more demoralising to be employed and unable to pay one's own way. In some ways, this has been like the perfect storm for education assistants, gardeners and cleaners. They are on low incomes but they have not received the pay rise that they sought, which was argued against on the basis that there would be a deficit. The government now has a surplus, yet these workers' incomes are locked in and they are facing a rise in utility prices, which the government has acknowledged will cause real hardship for people. Given the size of the surplus, I wonder whether those who are facing this hardship, which the government itself admits this budget brings to bear on those with low incomes, would agree with the government when it says that this sacrifice is absolutely necessary to ensure a strong foundation for financial security and future economic growth. I wonder how they feel about being thanked for sharing this burden.

People on low incomes are already the people most vulnerable to almost every social problem in society. Rather than creating a strong foundation, we will see a recipe for the creation of more disadvantage and ultimately more social and economic costs for them personally and more widely for society. Low-income families can find that financial pressures affect how they can parent and their ability to cope. In my opinion, what the government is doing is not only unfair, but also irrational. It is not only unfair, but also irrational to allow this group of people, whom the government has acknowledged are experiencing hardship and whom we know from study after study are the most vulnerable to a range of social problems, to face this. There is increasing evidence that the more unequal society becomes, the more corrosive it is for everyone. The more that we leave others behind, the greater will be the cost in social problems.

I urge members to look at a book which has been in the library for some weeks and which was reviewed extensively last year when it was published. It is called *The Spirit Level* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. The book brings together research from the past 30 years and tries to identify why affluent countries like ours are experiencing the social problems of the sort that have been talked about since I have become a member of Parliament. I am referring to mental health, binge drinking and incarceration rates, notwithstanding that we are an affluent and peaceful society that prides itself on how far it has come. We are going backwards in some very key areas, and none more so than our concerns about children. Having pooled together an enormous amount of evidence and research across many countries, the book makes the point that the enormous disparity in income is a real factor in those social problems. It is not as though there will never be the very rich and those who are on

welfare and very low incomes. However, when that gap widens, as it has very significantly in the past 10 years, problems that we thought we had a handle on are exacerbated. The government is leaving this burden to the low paid and expecting them to bear the burden with us. The government has a role to play and an opportunity in the case of education assistants, gardeners and cleaners, to actually lift their incomes to enable them to meet their obligations. Frankly, we are being not only unfair, but, as I have said, irrational. We are serving only to exacerbate the range of social problems that we know they already face. I believe that this will make us as a society face more problems, not fewer, and that it reflects poorly on us.

I want to speak about another matter in the time I have left to respond to the budget. I was not expecting to speak about this issue as a member of Parliament and it is not particularly an issue that I want to speak about. However, I will speak about it because I have had a lot of contact from members of the community—particularly women—about it. I refer to the reforms to the laws in Western Australia in 1998 which ensured that safe and legal abortions were performed and which respected a woman's right to choose to end a pregnancy. I thought that those laws were settled. Judging by the large response that I have had to this matter recently, I believe that the large majority of Western Australians also believed that the laws were settled. The reason I say that I did not expect to speak on this matter is that I did not expect it to be raised. However, it was raised by the member for Southern River and also in this house by Hon Nick Goiran. I know that people feel very strongly about this issue but it is the role of Parliament to deal with difficult issues and to debate them in a rational way.

I have had a significant number of people contact me because of the comments made by the member for Southern River, Mr Peter Abetz, who said that the laws in Western Australia should be changed to compel women seeking an abortion to view a colour ultrasound of the foetus. People are concerned that once again women are being characterised as incapable of making decisions for themselves when they find themselves in the difficult position of having an unplanned pregnancy. Before I go any further, I acknowledge immediately that the Premier has made it clear that he does not support the suggestion that it be mandatory for a woman to view a 3D colour ultrasound imaging. The people who have spoken to me have been extremely reassured by that.

Hon Nick Goiran spoke about this issue in this place. I have no disagreement with him about the number of abortions that he said were being performed or his reckoning of the total from 1998 until now, nor for the period from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2009. The figures indicate that since 1998, the numbers have remained remarkably stable, despite the increase in Western Australia's population and the claims that were made when this matter was debated in 1998 that the legislation would lead to an explosion in the number of abortions performed.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** Will you take an interjection on that?

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** No, I will not. I do not interject myself; in fact, I never have.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Max Trenorden):** Continue with your address.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I would prefer to be able to speak when it is my turn. The law that was introduced in 1998 reflected then, and still does, the views of the vast majority of Western Australians, both men and women. That view is that it is the right of women to choose to have an abortion and to have access to a safe and legal abortion. For many women that right is a very defining issue. It is as significant as the issue of women's suffrage and equal pay, which is why I have had the response that I have had. Many women—and men—feel very strongly about this issue and have made it clear to me that they will strenuously defend the laws if necessary. Given that the issue has been raised some 12 years after the laws came into effect, it is important to record why changing the law to safeguard women's rights to choose was considered so important by so many people.

In the mid-1990s approximately 8 500 abortions were performed in Western Australia each year. In the main women were able to access safe abortions despite their dubious legality, but the legal right to abortion was questionable and there was always the danger that the laws could be enforced strictly to deny access to safe and legal abortions. While the laws were open to interpretation, those organisations that provided contraception and counselling services, such as those provided by Family Planning Western Australia, remained underfunded. More importantly, while the subject of abortion remained a taboo, women's real life experiences were denied. They often felt shame about what had happened to them and were unable to speak to others about their experiences.

In 1993 Terri-ann White and I asked women to tell us about their about experience of abortion in Western Australia. We recorded their experiences and they were published in a book. Older women told us about their experiences in this state in the 1930s. They told what it was like to have to have an illegal backyard abortion. They told us about the fear that they would be caught and the fear that they could die. Of course, they also described the shame that went with having an abortion. They told us about the men—their partners and boyfriends—and the fear that they felt, because many men supported such women. Interestingly, some of them recorded that the very people who would have condemned them if they knew that they had had an abortion were

the very same people who would have condemned them for being unmarried mothers. The condemnation of unmarried mothers continued into the 1960s.

**Hon Alison Xamon:** And into the 1990s.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** Yes. Even worse, children were branded illegitimate. Even I remember children who were branded illegitimate. Even in the early 1990s when women could get safe abortions, the uncertain legal position meant that very few felt that they could speak openly about the subject. We recorded 30 stories, including that of Hazel Hawke, the former wife of ex-Prime Minister Bob Hawke. What became absolutely clear during the recording of those stories was that the decision to have an abortion was never taken lightly. I would like to read a little bit from what I said on a number of occasions when I spoke about this project, which was funded by the Megan Sassi foundation. The book looked at the legal situation, the moves by a Liberal member of Parliament to change the laws, and the imprisonment rates. The main part of the book recorded the stories of women. I will read exactly what I said when I used to speak about this book. Those words were —

The aim here is to break the silence about this experience and to enable women to share their experiences with others who have been faced with the often very difficult decision to end a pregnancy. It is disturbing to us **that in the struggle** to protect women's rights to choose, the pain, the sadness and shame that may go with that choice is rarely discussed. It seems that the grief that a woman may feel has often been kept silent so as to not give ground to those who would argue that her grief is proof that abortion is wrong. This is the ground we are demanding back for women, the right to be both happy or sad about their choice. The right to choose as only a woman faced with an unwanted pregnancy will have to and the right to express the emotions that go with that choice.

When the book was published in 1993, the existing laws accorded neither the widespread support for a woman's right to choose nor the reality in practice. The imperative for law reform came in February 1998 with the arrest and charging of Dr Victor Chan and Dr Ho Peng Lee. Many members will recall how passionate the debate was at the time. Of course, one of the issues that arose was the capacity of women to make a decision. There was even some suggestion then that women did not understand the significance of the decision that they were making and that they chose to end a pregnancy for trivial reasons. Many women have contacted me because there are elements of that—the idea that women cannot make a rational decision and would make such a decision on the basis of trivial reasons—in the debate that we have heard recently.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** Can you clarify whose comments you are talking about when you say the recent debate?

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I am referring to the comments by the member for Southern River, Mr Abetz. As I said, it was because of the suggestion that women could not make such an important decision and that they may base their decision on trivial matters that I have received so much feedback and have been contacted by so many women. Obviously we have come a long way in 12 years. It is important to read one quote from that debate in 1998. It was a quote that led to an enormous response by women in this city. At that time I was vice president of Australian Women Lawyers and the quote resulted in us having to respond by putting an article in the newspaper. I will quote it because the attempt to trivialise how women make decisions is at the heart of why so many people expressed their concerns. The comment was made by a Liberal member of Parliament, Iain MacLean. He said —

Of course, some people in the community regard a pregnancy as an imposition. They have very little feeling for human life. They think that they are the centre of the universe, and will abort a baby just because it is convenient, or because summer is approaching and they want to wear a bikini. These people have no understanding. I cannot support this “abortion on demand” proposal just because a pregnancy is an inconvenience to some people.

Women naturally are very sensitive to the suggestion that they would end a pregnancy lightly. That is particularly so because women are, in the main, the carers and nurturers of children in our society. We do not need to be reminded how precious a child is. That is why the suggestion that women should be forced to watch an ultrasound has reignited the concern. It goes to that question of women's competency to make a considered decision. The member for Southern River stated in his article in *The West Australian* of 29 May —

Indeed, experience in the US, where more than 1000 crisis pregnancy clinics have used the ultrasound in combination with counselling, have seen 82 per cent of women choosing to go on with their pregnancies.

I contacted Peter Abetz's office and requested that he provide me with the reference for that statement and I thank him for doing that. I have been provided with what I assumed was found through the Google search engine; it is a Wikipedia article entitled “Crisis pregnancy centers”. Having had the opportunity to look at this I must say that my interpretation of that information differs from his. That is because crisis pregnancy centres are described in the Wikipedia article as “non-profit organizations established by pro-life supporters who work to

persuade pregnant women to give birth rather than have abortions”. I also make the point that they do not provide abortion services. Anyone who attends one of these clinics is not going there to have an abortion because they are not medical services; they do not provide abortion services. My interpretation of that Wikipedia information is that it does not lead to the conclusion that, in the vast majority of cases, women who saw an ultrasound would go ahead with their pregnancy. It also says in the Wikipedia article that only about a quarter of the crisis pregnancy centres conduct a sonogram or an ultrasound as a way of persuading women not to end a pregnancy. I think that information, and the conclusion from a group called the Heidi Group, a Christian organisation, is the basis for his conclusion that viewing an ultrasound would lead them to proceed with the pregnancy.

I appreciate the right of any member to use any source of information to support statements. But I think it is important in a debate as sensitive as this that we refer to evidence that other people can then look at. That is why I thought I would put on the record where that information from the member for Southern River has come from. Members may have read the article that the member for Southern River had published in *The West Australian* on 29 May 2010, and that is where I have taken the quote from about the 1 000 crisis pregnancy clinics he referred to and the other information he provided.

Another article by journalist Andrea Mayes, a mother of four, was published the next day in response to that article. I will read a little from that and I suggest members also read the article because in her article she provides the source of the information she is quoting from. She quotes Mr Abetz as follows —

“Let’s give women all the assistance to do what in their heart of hearts they know is the right and honourable thing to do.”

She herself comments as follows —

In other words, women who choose abortion are ignorant, while those who choose to continue with an unwanted pregnancy are “right and honourable”.

It is those sorts of assertions about women who end pregnancies that have probably led to the number of people who have contacted me. They expressed their concern that many women in their reproductive life—I think the figures are about one in three who have a procedure to end a pregnancy—are being described as not being honourable. I think it is interesting because there is some suggestion that women do not have enough information when they choose to end their pregnancy. Andrea Mayes refers to a study by La Trobe University that analysed data from 9 683 women and found that there is no evidence to support claims that abortion causes, for example, depression. Andrea Mayes also indicates that the Cancer Council website clearly states there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that induced abortion increases the risk of breast cancer.

The last thing I will quote from her article, because I think it is useful to have on the record, reads —

Abortion is a serious decision for most women, not a whim or a casual choice, despite what Mr Abetz thinks. A 2009 University of Melbourne report found women choose abortion for reasons which “were complex and contingent, taking into account their own needs, responsibility to existing and potential children, and other people, including the male partner”.

For me that reflects very much how the 30 women who told us their stories, ranging from the 1930s through to the early 1990s expressed what is a difficult decision for most women, not a position that I think anyone could possibly suggest women deliberately would act to find themselves in.

As I said at the beginning, I had hoped that this was not a topic I would have to speak on, but it is a right that many people feel very strongly about. As I said earlier, those who contacted me made it clear that they would defend the existing laws vigorously; therefore, I thought it was very important that their concerns were placed on the record.

**HON PHIL EDMAN (South Metropolitan)** [12.17 pm]: I will start by congratulating the government on retaining Western Australia’s AAA credit rating. It reassures and lets everyone know that the Liberal–National governments are the better economic managers. Further to that, it was also pleasing, to read on page 9 of the *Weekend Courier* comments by Kwinana Mayor, Carol Adams who said —

The Government was faced with some tough decisions this year...

Even with the global financial crisis we have been able to keep our credit rating, and that is fantastic. I would like to briefly go through some of the areas in the South Metropolitan Region that have benefited from this budget. Firstly, there is \$44 million for a senior high school in Baldivis. Again it was very pleasing to read on page 9 of the *Weekend Courier* that the member for Kwinana said, “I’m glad to see they are finally investing \$44 million for a much-needed new High School in Baldivis”. That was a wonderful quote. I cannot say the same for the member for Rockingham and the member for Warnbro, whose comments were negative; they said

nothing positive. An amount of \$3.5 million has been allocated for kindergarten to year 2 classes in Baldivis; \$14 million for civil works for the Golden Bay development; and \$20.6 million for Cockburn Central Police Station. It is fantastic to see those sorts of allocations and it emphasises the very strong stance of this government on law and order. Having begun the infill sewerage program in Spearwood, the government has committed \$100 million over four years to continue the infill sewerage program in other areas as well as providing \$33.1 million to continue the construction of the emergency services complex in Cockburn. Also in the budget is an allocation of \$44.2 million to widen the Kwinana Freeway to three lanes, from Leach Highway to Roe Highway. People who travel from the southern suburbs to the city each day would be aware of the congestion on that road and will welcome that. I congratulate Minister O'Brien for that budget allocation.

An amount of \$10.1 million has been included in the budget to commence construction of a major building and construction industry training centre at the Rockingham Challenger Institute of Technology. Well done. It is fantastic that that centre will be built in Rockingham. I congratulate Minister Collier on his hard work to ensure that this project was included in the budget.

**Hon Peter Collier:** Thank you.

**Hon PHIL EDMAN:** No worries, minister. While I am on Minister Collier's portfolio, the government is providing \$3 million over two years as bonus payments for employers who take on out-of-contract apprentices and trainees to allow them to complete their apprenticeships or traineeships. Having been an apprentice as well as an employer of Western Australian apprentices, I can say that that is needed and appreciated. A lot of small businesses across Western Australia will be very pleased that the Barnett government is putting that bonus payment scheme in place.

I refer now to what the mayor of Rockingham, Barry Sammels, said about the state budget in, again, the *Weekend Courier*, on page 9. He was pretty happy with this year's state budget. He said that the things that were in the budget for Rockingham were the things that he expected to be in it and that the increases in water and electricity were expected. He said that this will be a year of consolidation for the City of Rockingham.

I have been a member of this place for only one year and I would like to draw members' attention to the allocation of funds for facilities and amenities in the South Metropolitan Region. I will start with Kennedy Bay. I am the chairman of the Port Kennedy Management Board. Recently the government provided 10.7 hectares of state land in exchange for about \$19 million to put in place the necessary facilities and amenities for that area. This issue has dragged on since 1992 when the area began to be developed. People bought their land and built their house; however, there were no facilities or amenities in place. This government has started to implement facilities and amenities in the area and later this year the boat ramp, car park, barbecue area and toilets should be completed. The people of Kennedy Bay are excited that after 18 years they will finally have facilities and amenities in place.

The government has announced an allocation of \$6 million for the Town of Kwinana's town centre revitalisation. It is exciting times for the Town of Kwinana. I can reassure members that the Town of Kwinana was appreciative of the government's contribution. It was so appreciative that in its latest newsletter, the *Spirit of Kwinana*, which I have in my hand, it referred to this development. I will quote one paragraph from that publication which, for me, sums up the impact that this development will have on Kwinana. It states —

Imagine yourself in the near future, sipping a cold drink on the terrace outside the new bar and bistro, relaxing in the shade reading the latest bestseller you've just picked up from the new Community Resource and Knowledge Centre across the park. Just across the way children are excitedly heading towards the recreation centre, whilst other families are content to relax on the grass in the Town Square, having just finished browsing around the many new retail outlets lining the bustling main street.

That sums up the impact the Barnett government is having on bringing facilities and amenities to Kwinana. When an article like that is published on the front page of the Town of Kwinana's newsletter, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

The Mangles Bay marina development has been on and off for some years. Initially, that development was halted after the Court government lost office. However, it is back on the agenda. This government is in the process of finishing the environmental assessment. Recently it announced the proponent that will take on that development; that is, Cedar Woods Properties Limited. It is a very exciting time in the City of Rockingham and that marina will bring economic sustainability into that area. It will create jobs and opportunities for short-stay accommodation. It is a tourism precinct. Frankly, it should have been done a long time ago and I am sure Minister O'Brien would agree with me.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Absolutely.

**Hon PHIL EDMAN:** I refer now to Mundijong Road, which is an interesting story. The Howard government provided \$6.7 million of Auslink funding that went into the City of Rockingham's bank account, and I might add has been earning interest, for the construction of Mundijong Road. However, the former government sat on its hands because the City of Rockingham needed the state government to buy the land on which to construct the road. There was a time line around that \$6.7 million. Fortunately, as soon as the Barnett government took office one of my first tasks as the chairman of the Rockingham Kwinana Development Office was to apply for state government funding. We have been able to get that funding and, hopefully, very soon the construction of Mundijong Road will commence. That will mean that 10 minutes will be cut from the trip to the city of Rockingham from Perth, and vice versa. It will also provide a freight route to the south east of Western Australia and better access to HMAS *Stirling*. This road has been badly needed and should have been constructed a long time ago.

During the course of this year we had government support for the Right to Write graffiti program, which is undertaken in conjunction with the Rockingham Police and Citizens Youth Centre, the juvenile justice team, the local Magistrates Court and the Rockingham police station. It has been very successful. Twelve youths who had 365 offences between them went through that program and none of them has re-offended. Recently the Premier announced \$20 000 out of the Office of Crime Prevention to fund another round of that program. It is a fantastic outcome.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** You might be interested to know that yesterday in the estimates committee the deputy commissioner for police was spruiking how positive that program was.

**Hon PHIL EDMAN:** It was implemented by the Barnett government. I thank the member for that information.

I only wanted to speak briefly, not for an hour. I will sum up what this budget emphasises.

Several members interjected.

**Hon PHIL EDMAN:** Members of the South Metropolitan Region should agree with me, especially considering the work that was done in that region by the previous government—I will not get into that now. The fact is that this government emphasises that the Barnett government is making Western Australia a better place to live.

**HON HELEN BULLOCK (Mining and Pastoral) [12.28 pm]:** So much for the good news. It is time for something else.

Several members interjected.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I did not say bad news.

I have been in this place for 12 months and out of all the events that have happened in this Parliament, I think the budget has been the highlight of the year.

**Hon Peter Collier:** Hear, hear!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I am glad the minister agrees with me.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** What was the highlight?

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I will come to it. The minister should be patient.

I will say a little bit more about this budget as it was my first experience of the nervousness before the budget announcement. The excitement after the announcement certainly is something that I cannot easily forget. As a backbencher in the opposition sitting here, I have a very good view of what is going on. To me, the budget announcement is pretty much like a Saturday afternoon lotto draw. All the participants are anxiously waiting for that special moment. Nobody knows what is in the budget, except ministers and their parliamentary secretaries. It is not much point asking them questions about the budget, because their lips are sealed and nothing can be revealed, as we know from the answers to the questions. After the budget, hundreds of pre-drafted emails were released at the same time. It actually caused my email inbox to become congested. Then the ministers and their parliamentary secretaries flew around and gave speeches at breakfast and dinner functions, trying to promote the budget.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** The last government sent Ljil up to Kalgoorlie once.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** Did it really? Next time Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich should let me know and I will give her a welcome party.

The budget certainly produced some winners, as we can see from this article dated 22 May 2010. It made some members jump for joy, as Hon Wendy Duncan did, as can be seen in the picture. There are three members in this picture. One is the National Party member for the Mining and Pastoral Region Hon Wendy Duncan; the next one

is the Liberal member for Eyre, Dr Graham Jacobs; the last one is not a member. It is actually the Nationals candidate for the seat of O'Connor, Mr Crook.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm):** Could the member identify the source of that photo, please?

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I am sorry. The article is dated 22 May 2010 and is from the *Kalgoorlie Miner*.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Whereabouts was the photo taken?

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I think it is in front of Esperance hospital. The title of the article is "\$32m for" —

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** It's a wonder Hon Sally Talbot is not in the photo. She's a frequent visitor to Esperance.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** What does that have to do with the environment portfolio? It is about a hospital.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** That explains it.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** That's how dumb he is.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** She was around the corner at some environment place on that day.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I do not intend to take long, but if I have to, I have to.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** You don't have to. We said so.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** Should I go on?

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Please continue.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** Thank you, Mr Deputy President. There is also another article dated 24 May 2010. It is also about a project in Esperance that received funding in this budget. Both of those articles have beautiful photos of Hon Wendy Duncan. I am sorry that she is not in the chamber today. They are nice articles too. I am actually happy for her. Esperance is certainly doing very well in this budget round. It got funding for both the Esperance hospital and the Esperance residential college upgrades. I am sure that Hon Wendy Duncan will be content with those two projects receiving funding.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** And the transport corridor. That should be in there.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I thank the minister very much. I will come to that. That is the point of this speech. Please listen.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Yes, ma'am.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** So much for that; I must move on. I have spent many hours looking through the budget papers and searching very carefully for one item. Sorry; I do not mean it to sound like I am searching for the Scarlet Pimpernel. What I was really searching for in these three volumes of budget papers was one line item for the Kalgoorlie–Boulder intermodal freight facility, commonly known as the transport hub, with sealed road links between the Goldfields and Great Northern Highway, but my search was without any success. I cannot find it in there.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** I wonder why.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I wondered that too.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** It's a wonderful occasion, isn't it?

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I have to say, minister, or ministers, that this government has completely missed the point. There is much debate at the moment about building infrastructure in our outback to support the demands of the mining industry, not just the iron ore industry. However, this government just completely missed the point and cannot meet the challenge of it.

The concept of building the transport hub has been advocated in the past few years. I have a report produced by the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder, dated May 2005 and titled "Interaction of Regional Roads and Rail Network". This report points out that the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder is uniquely located. It is serviced by the transcontinental railway, the north–south railway between Leonora and Esperance, the Great Eastern Highway from Perth, and Goldfields Highway. Both those highways connect with Eyre Highway in Norseman. The report states that the city forms a natural land transport hub, with which I agree completely. In this report, it is also pointed out that the increasing mining activity in the Pilbara, in the north west mineral belt and in Norseman will increase the demand for transport infrastructure. Believe it or not, these days lots of mining companies are undertaking exploration activity around Salmon Gums and Grass Patch and other places between Norseman and Esperance. Companies are doing mining activities around that area. With the increase in mining activity in those areas, it will certainly increase demand for transport infrastructure to support road and rail haulage, as well as

intra and intermodal transfers of bulk minerals and consumables and general freight. Due to the location of the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder, it has great potential to serve the entire mineral belt. The minister has to agree with me on that.

**Hon Simon O’Brien:** I am listening intently to what you are saying.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** The minister heard what I am saying, but I am not finished yet. This report also points out that in order for the Kalgoorlie transport hub to work more efficiently and effectively, a road needs to be built from Wiluna to Great Northern Highway along the shortest possible route. A road is there, but it is not the shortest route.

Based on this report, a submission was made by the Goldfields Esperance Area Consultative Committee to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services—that is a federal government committee. That submission ranks these seven projects in order of priority, from the greatest priority to the least priority. Guess what? The first project that is listed under the heading “Recommendations” is a Kalgoorlie–Boulder intermodal freight hub. The second is an upgrade of regional roads to link with that intermodal hub. The submission states that one of the roads that will need to be sealed is the Goldfields–north west road link between Waroona and Doolgunna, which is just near Great Northern Highway.

The submission from the Goldfields Esperance Area Consultative Committee also outlines the reasons that a transport hub should be built in Kalgoorlie. It states —

Currently the majority of freight destined for Kalgoorlie-Boulder from the Eastern States is railed to Perth and then returned, in the majority by road transport, adding approximately \$120/tonne to the cost.

It no wonder living costs in the Kalgoorlie area are so high. In Leonora, a lettuce costs \$8. Can members believe that? Just for that reason alone, the government should allocate \$3 million in this budget, without any delay, so that this transport hub can be built, and so that the cost of living in the Kalgoorlie area will be reduced. As Hon Linda Savage has said, ordinary families will get nothing out of this budget. However, the government does not want to help ordinary families in this budget.

Once this transport hub has been established, freight that is destined for the north west of Western Australia can also be off-loaded in Kalgoorlie and sent to the mining belt. The submission is very well expressed and concise, so I would like to quote it. It states, in part —

Sealing of approximately 175 kilometres of road between Wiluna and Great Northern Highway ...is seen as symbiotic to the proposed Transport Hub at Kalgoorlie–Boulder.

I like the word “symbiotic”, because these things really are connected. We cannot have one without the other. It goes on to say —

Currently road transport operators take a longer sealed road through Meekatharra rather than use the unsealed existing road that causes damage to vehicles and loads.

That is a reason that the second priority that is listed in the submission is to have those roads built once the transport hub has been built.

This submission, unlike the report that was produced by the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder, was considered by the federal government. As a result of this submission, the federal government actually allocated \$3 million in the 2007 budget for this project as part of the AusLink strategic regional program for the integration of the regional rail and road network. That commitment from the federal government is conditional upon the state government contributing the same amount of money. It is the same as the money that the federal government has committed for the Oakajee project, which is also conditional upon the state government contributing the same amount of money. However, so far no action has been taken by the government on this matter.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** Because there is no money!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** It is only a meagre \$3 million! I am sure it can be found from somewhere, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich.

Several members interjected.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** A time limit has been placed on the provision of that \$3 million in funding. This money has to be spent by—guess when?—30 June 2010. We have only 15 days to go. Good God! We cannot afford to have any delays. I know that the council of the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder is desperate to secure that \$3 million of federal funding. It has been trying for years to secure \$3 million from the state government, but without success.

**Hon Simon O’Brien:** What about the billion-dollar cash surpluses that existed in the time of the former government? Could the state government not find it then?

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** That is a whine. It is getting easier and easier for this government. All it needs to do is find \$3 million. That will solve the problem.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Okay. We'll have a whip around!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** It is only \$3 million. It is not \$6 million.

The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder has applied for an extension so that it can hold onto that federal funding. This is not an easy matter. In order for the federal government to approve that application for an extension, the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder was asked to answer a series of questions. The council is trying to get all the answers to those questions so that it can send off the application and secure that \$3 million in funding.

When I was going through the *Budget Statements*, I come across, by accident, page 278, which deals with the Goldfields Esperance Development Commission. Dot point three under the heading "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" states —

Planning and development of current and future regional transport infrastructure in co-operation with other agencies.

I do not know what that means. It goes on to state —

In particular the proposed Esperance Port Access corridor upgrade, Kalgoorlie Intermodal hub, upgrade of critical roads and the interconnectivity of the Goldfields Esperance region with the Wheatbelt, Mid West and Pilbara regions.

I have to say I got excited when I read the words "Kalgoorlie intermodal hub". But I do not understand what that means. It is at page 278 in volume 1. I can lend the minister this copy if he wants.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** I've got one at home under my pillow!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** It seems to me that the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder might be able to apply for this \$3 million under the royalties for regions program; I am not sure. Recently, I was told by the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder that the Goldfields-Esperance Development Commission told the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder that it can apply. I emphasise the word "can". That means that it can apply, but there is no guarantee. The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder has been informed that it can apply for \$3 million for the regional strategic project from the regional community services fund under the royalties for regions program. It seems that there are lots of doors to go through. The first dot point on page 278 under the division for the Goldfields-Esperance Development Commission states —

Of the 2009-10 \$3.5 million contestable funding available, 61 applications were received seeking \$9.2 million for projects valued at a total of \$31.1 million.

What is the chance that this \$3 million will be allocated from the royalties for regions program? The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder is not deterred. It is working on the proposal. It has already sent a brief to Minister Brendon Grylls, the Minister for Regional Development, outlining the cost and benefit of the project. Yes, I saw Hon Col Holt nod; he acknowledges that. When someone knocks at the front door and the front door is not answered, there is always a back door to knock on, just in case. If Hon Wendy Duncan were in the chamber today, I would probably have a word with her and ask her to do a favour for the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder. Unfortunately, I might have to let the opportunity go. What a drama for \$3 million. I have to ask the question: why was this \$3 million not allocated in the budget?

As you know, Mr Deputy President, we have experienced an enormous economic boom in the past few years. It came with such force, unpredicted and unexpected, that it hit us by surprise. We were not very well prepared. We did not take full advantage of the last mining boom. Due to the skills shortage, we had to import labour from overseas, including high skill level workers such as engineers, geologists and metallurgists and low skill level workers such as chefs and hairdressers. Have we learnt from the last mining boom? Are we ready for the next one, as we all know it is coming?

Several members interjected.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** History is there for us to look at, learn from and move on, not to make the same mistakes again. That is what history is for. If we keep talking about history, we can never move on, which is what this government is doing.

If the skills shortage was a major issue for the last mining boom, infrastructure will need to be our main focus in order to take full advantage of the forthcoming mining boom. Just as with the last mining boom, the forthcoming mining boom will occur in the north west. In this forthcoming mining boom, the location of the resources will be expanded to include the Mid West and the far north of Western Australia, yet there are no roads, rail or ports to accommodate the needs of the resources industry in the Mid West. We all know that \$339 million could have

been allocated in last year's budget, but this government did not do that; it allocated it in this year's budget, which means that the infrastructure to support the Mid West mining industry has just started. With increasing mining activities in the north and Mid West, there will be great pressure on existing roads such as Great Northern Highway and Great Eastern Highway and on rail lines such as the line between Kalgoorlie-Boulder and Perth. A common-user intermodal freight hub needs to be built in the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, as well as a link road between Wiluna and Great Northern Highway as an integral part of the infrastructure to accommodate the forthcoming mining boom. This infrastructure is essential, yet there is no commitment to funding in the budget. The federal government has seen it. That is why we were allocated \$3 million for the transport hub and \$60 million for upgrading the Esperance access transport corridor. I will leave that to Hon Wendy Duncan, as I am sure it will be easier for her to call on the government to allocate this \$60 million than it will be for me to ask for this \$3 million. The federal government also allocated \$339 million for the Oakajee port to be built.

I know that mining companies in the Mid West are geared up for full production, but they are restrained and frustrated because there is no road in the Mid West on which they can transport their product. What is more damaging to us is that at the moment China is looking beyond us to other overseas countries for a new supply market to satisfy its enormous appetite. Does this government have a long-term vision—a vision for the future? Where does this government want this state to be in four years, or in eight years if it is lucky? Our economy is dependent on the mining boom. With the inaction of this government, this state's future is in doubt. The people will not get the full benefit of the forthcoming mining boom.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Ken Baston**.

*Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm*