

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

The PRESIDENT: I understand that Hon Peter Collier is seeking the call. Before I give Hon Peter Collier the call, I remind the house that it is the honourable member's first speech, and therefore there should be no interjections.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [5.32 pm]: Firstly, may I congratulate you, Mr President, on your election to the position of President of this house. I also congratulate Hon George Cash on his re-election to the position of Chairman of Committees. I would also like to thank most sincerely the Clerk of the house and all of the parliamentary staff for the assistance and guidance that they have provided to me as a new member. I am confident that all new members of this house will agree that the induction sessions that were conducted by the parliamentary staff were of considerable assistance and value.

I was honoured to be elected to represent the citizens of the North Metropolitan Region in this chamber in the 2005 Western Australian election. Having been born a political being, having been an active participant in the Liberal Party since I was 16 years of age and having taught political theory at the secondary level of education for more than 20 years, the notion of participating in the political process, as opposed to commentating upon it, always appeared inevitable to me.

Before I make comment on several issues, I deem it appropriate to provide some background on my personal life. I was born and bred in Kalgoorlie - I was born in 1959. In retrospect, I can say that I had a charmed childhood. My parents owned a small grocery and liquor store and while we were certainly not what would be termed affluent, I never went without. Life was basically comfortable and uncomplicated. As you do as a child, I relied upon my parents for everything - materially as well as for guidance in life skills and for loving support. I was always given an abundance of all three. Neither my two sisters nor I were ever found wanting. In essence, life consisted of school - North Kalgoorlie Primary School and Eastern Goldfields Senior High School - an abundance of valued friends, tennis, my golden palomino and working in our corner store.

Almost without warning, those days of innocence came to an end. I left Kalgoorlie at the age of 17 to continue my education. While my parents and eldest sister also moved to Perth, the younger of my sisters remains in Kalgoorlie with her family to this day. The town holds a special place for me, and I am delighted that it is currently receiving excellent representation at both levels of government through Matt Birney and Barry Haase. After Kalgoorlie, I spent four years at the University of Western Australia, where I gained a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in political science and history, and a Diploma of Education.

Following university, I entered the teaching profession, where I remained until my election to this chamber. Initially I taught in the government sector, at John Curtin Senior High School and Lesmurdie Senior High School, before moving to the private sector - Presbyterian Ladies' College for three years and for the past 15 years at Scotch College. Over this period I held a number of senior positions, including head of politics and history at both Presbyterian Ladies' College and Scotch College during my tenure at those institutions, as well as head of Ross House, which is primarily a pastoral position, at Scotch College for the past 10 years. These positions of responsibility provided me with considerable insight into the challenges and expectations of the contemporary secondary student and the role of the classroom teacher and school administrator.

I always found teaching to be a vehemently positive and rewarding experience, and I thoroughly enjoyed my time at each of the four schools at which I taught - leaving each of the first three through opportunity, certainly not through disillusionment. I always gained particular satisfaction teaching politics, in which a number of my former students achieved at the highest level in the tertiary entrance examination. I found debating contemporary issues with highly idealistic adolescents on a daily basis extremely invigorating. In a profession in which it is so easy to wish one's life away as one counts down the periods to the end of each day, the weeks to the end of each term and the terms to the end of each year, I can state without reservation that I still held the same passion for my role as an educator on my last day of teaching as I did on day one at John Curtin Senior High School in 1981.

Combined with teaching, tennis coaching has been a significant element of my life. To this end, having a strong and valued bond with the world's greatest ever woman tennis player, Margaret Court, has provided me with endless opportunities, including coaching numerous state and national champions and spending time on the international women's tennis tour. That in itself was a tremendous period of my life. I thrived on the daily challenges provided by the tennis circuit - the endless desire to be the best one can be and the constant accountability through performance and results, which is not unlike politics. Having said this, the single most

significant element to emerge from my association with tennis has been my relationship with Margaret Court - my mentor in life. I recently travelled to Sri Lanka with Margaret to conduct a series of tennis clinics for victims of the tsunami and the underprivileged. It was a deeply moving and spiritual experience that has been life changing for me. I acknowledge Margaret Court for all that she represents, and I thank her for all that she is to me.

In the past I have also held positions on a number of state and federal advisory committees, including the National Expert Advisory Committee on School Drug Education, the Western Australian Youth Advisory Committee, the Western Australian Youth Suicide and Self-harm Prevention Committee and the Western Australian School Drug Education Project. Also, I am currently the patron of the Shenton Park Dogs' Refuge Home (WA). Finally, I have been senior vice-chairman of the Western Australian section of Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy for a number of years. I have benefited considerably from my involvement with these committees and associations, and I am grateful for the opportunities that they have presented to me.

My decision to pursue a position in this chamber has been long felt. As mentioned earlier, I was born a political being, and I have had a long-held desire to be a representative of the people in this place on behalf of the Liberal Party. I will always be conscious of the fundamental role of this Parliament and the role that I will be expected to play within it. Based upon the Westminster model, the essential role of our Parliament is to represent the people and to debate on behalf of the people. Without question, ultimate authority rests with the people. This Parliament exists under the sovereignty of the people. I commit myself to representing the people through the promotion of the philosophy of the Liberal Party. I am extremely conscious of the fact that there are billions of people on this earth who want to vote but cannot, and that there are hundreds of millions who can vote but do not. However, in Australia - in Western Australia specifically - with compulsory voting, a vast majority of our citizens utilise their democratic right to a ballot. I will be their representative, and I will represent their interests. I will not use this place as a vehicle for personal retribution or vendettas.

Unfortunately, in more recent years Parliaments across Australia have been increasingly, and at times tragically, used as such forums through the abuse of an age old procedure known as parliamentary privilege. The principle of parliamentary privilege essentially commenced with the enactment of the British Bill of Rights in 1689, which states in part -

That the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament;

This was designed to protect the Parliament from the King. In 1891 these privileges were set out in two acts of the Western Australian Parliament: the Parliamentary Privileges Act and the Parliamentary Papers Act. In contemporary society there is little merit in protecting the Parliament from the monarch, as our commonwealth and state Constitutions provide meticulous checks and balances, resulting in an extremely effective parliamentary system. There is certainly justification in maintaining that aspect of privilege that deals with contempt of the Parliament to ensure that there is no interference in the proper functioning of the Parliament. However, the most controversial aspect of parliamentary privilege is that relating to parliamentary freedom of speech - a vehicle designed to protect the speeches, debates and proceedings of the Parliament from defamation action or from being used as evidence in any court. Similarly, there is also qualified privilege - a vehicle that provides some legal protection to the media. Again, there is considerable merit in the principal concept of this aspect of parliamentary privilege. However, I have deep reservations about the abuse of this aspect of parliamentary procedure. As I have mentioned previously, I resolve not to use this place as a vehicle for personal retribution. I come to this place as a representative of the people of North Metropolitan Region, and I fully commit myself to their purpose alone.

To turn to another area, I guess that one can take the boy out of Kalgoorlie but one cannot take Kalgoorlie out of the boy. I am proud of my country heritage and extremely grateful for the opportunities that a Kalgoorlie upbringing provided for me. Although I have been a permanent resident of Perth for almost 30 years, I remain mindful of the extraordinary challenges that are faced by rural Western Australians each and every day. Tens of thousands of people from the bush are required to regularly travel exceptional distances to reach the most basic services. In addition, the health, education and communication facilities, just to name a few, that are available to residents of the bush are frequently substandard. It is in this vein that I express my disappointment at the recent changes to the Electoral Act. Because of its sheer geographic size, Western Australia is unique. Those people who make a conscious choice to live outside the metropolitan region deserve special recognition and consideration. In order to counter the government's initial attempts to amend the Electoral Act, former Liberal Party President Kim Keogh established the Defence of Democracy Committee in 2002. The role of that committee, of which I was chairman, was to raise funds to fight that move by the government. The committee was extremely productive. We received overwhelming support from members of the Liberal Party and beyond, and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to successfully defend in the Western Australian Supreme Court, and

ultimately in the High Court of Australia, the franchise of rural Western Australians. As I have mentioned previously, I am disappointed at the recent changes to the Electoral Act, and I will always remain a determined advocate for rural Western Australians.

As a teacher with over 20 years' experience I am fully conscious of the considerable challenges and expectations facing the teaching profession in contemporary society. Significant shifts in the fabric of the modern family, globalisation and its associated challenges, and the ongoing changes to the curriculum, have placed considerable pressure on today's teachers. As modern adolescents often regard privileges as rights, and their parents demand rather than consult, teachers are increasingly expected to perform a far broader role than they could ever have expected. The role of pastoral carer, and its associated demands, has evolved to be a commonplace requirement for today's teachers. In addition, with the advent of outcomes-based education and the pending implementation of the associated courses of study at the post-compulsory level, the professional pressures that are placed upon teachers are considerable. I am not convinced that the Western Australian education system is adequately prepared for these changes, nor that these changes have sufficient essential support from the teaching profession, the broad parent body or even the students themselves. An air of frustration and cynicism definitely permeates the teaching community, and equally there is a significant amount of confusion amongst parents and students. A degree of disquiet that is sufficient to warrant concern already exists with regard to outcomes-based education where it has been implemented in the K-10 years. These problems will be compounded with the extension of OBE through the courses of study to years 11 and 12 in the immediate future. I am not convinced that the Curriculum Council has given sufficient consideration to the enormity of the changes associated with the implementation of the courses of study in our education system and the associated demands they will place on the teaching fraternity and school communities at large. To this end the Curriculum Council must ensure that comprehensive professional development is provided and funded in all sectors of the Western Australian education system. Given that these are state-driven changes, this is a commitment that the state government needs to provide to all sectors. Long implementation periods are an essential prerequisite for a smooth and effective transition to the courses of study for all involved. This is currently not the case. There is confusion amongst the teaching profession, particularly with regard to the framing of assessments and the time lines to be adhered to. This confusion is inevitably being transferred to students and parents. The recent announcement by the Curriculum Council that it intends to delay the implementation of 10 courses of study is testament to the problems that exist in this area. The notion of full implementation of all courses on the same date, after comprehensive implementation periods, appears to have real merit. In an ageing and conservative profession, unless consideration and accommodation is provided to the very real concerns of the teaching profession over the next few years, I fear that a significant number of teachers will seek alternative employment. Teaching is without doubt one of the most rewarding occupations imaginable. I would like to see this profession given the respect and consideration it so richly deserves, particularly over the next few challenging years.

I would now like to comment on recent legislative changes to Western Australia's drug laws and the impact of these changes on our youth. I am strongly opposed to more liberal laws on illicit drug use, particularly cannabis. To my knowledge no evidence has been presented that suggests that cannabis use is beneficial to a person's health. On the contrary, there is overwhelming evidence that prolonged cannabis use can be deleterious to a person's health, particularly to the male and female reproductive systems, the immune system, the heart and the lungs. There is also evidence that cannabis use is addictive, impairs learning and frequently leads to the use of higher-order illicit drugs. In fact, the Western Australian President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Paul Skerritt, is quoted in *The West Australian* as recently as 2 March 2005 as saying -

The drug is provoking manic depression, schizophrenia, depression and panic attacks among the users, some of whom had tried it for the first time, . . .

The article includes a quote from Professor Castle from Melbourne University, who says that the use of drugs such as cannabis during the formative years of life, such as the years at school, could affect the way a teenager or young child thought, thereby impairing cognitive ability and having a long-term impact on job prospects. The negative impacts of cannabis use on a person's health are without question. Also without question is the fact that a significant proportion of our adolescents, to be accurate about one-quarter of 17-year-olds, indulge regularly or semi-regularly in cannabis use. There is no indication that this level of use will decline. In fact, there is every reason to expect that this figure will continue to increase. Dependency levels will inevitably rise correspondingly, as will the proportion of users who progress to higher-order illicit drug usage. This is a cause for further concern. I am firmly of the belief that more liberal laws with regard to cannabis use over recent years will inevitably lead to an increased prevalence of cannabis use among Western Australian youth. The message that is being portrayed in the community at large, and in particular to our youth, through these recent changes to cannabis use is that cannabis use is acceptable. That message is transparent and unambiguous. Whereas a generation ago the use of cannabis was deemed a hanging offence, recent legislative changes have altered the goalposts. As a result, cannabis is no longer held with the same disdain. Our youth regard these changes almost

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

as a badge of honour. They believe the use of cannabis is acceptable. Parents, teachers, counsellors and the like are faced with the unenviable task of explaining the negative attributes of cannabis against what our youth see as a legitimisation of the product through legislation. More liberal laws on cannabis use are regressive and have the potential to inflict significant damage on our youth and the community as a whole.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank a number of people for their valued support over many years. To begin, I thank my wonderful parents, Les and Beryl Collier, who I am delighted to say are here today, for being the consummate parents. I also acknowledge and thank my sisters, Diane Edwards and Kerry Holman, and their families, for so brilliantly completing the family circle. In addition, I pay tribute to my political mentor and friend, Sir Charles Court. I thank him for his wise counsel over many years. I also acknowledge my many friends and supporters in the Liberal Party and beyond for their valued support and encouragement, particularly Sally and Angus Plummer, Robyn Nolan, Michael and Robyn Mischin, Kate Watts, Lorraine Beckett, Richard Wilson, Julie Johnston, Jeremy Sher, Phil Paterson, Deb Brady, Jono Daventry, Barbara and Greg Brophy, Danielle and Nick Blain, Daphne Bogue, Clive and Carolyn Hartz, the Kilderry family, the Court families and the Scotch College community. There are numerous others - Liberal Party friends, both parliamentary and non-parliamentary, lifelong friends from so many walks of life and professional colleagues from teaching and tennis coaching to whom I am eternally grateful. I recognise and thank them.

I also pay tribute to the Curtin Division and the Nedlands Branch of the Liberal Party. Both Curtin Division, which is currently superbly represented by my valued friend, Hon Julie Bishop, and the Nedlands Branch are thriving examples of the Liberal Party in practice. They both have large numbers of enthusiastic members. They meet regularly in order to service the needs and desires of their membership base and they both hold regular social functions to further develop camaraderie. In essence, they are the epitome of what a political organisation should be: avenues for debate, relevance and participation. Having held senior office bearer positions in the Curtin Division and the Nedlands Branch over many years, I can attest to their success. I thank the membership of both for their overwhelming support and friendship. Ultimately, the lay organisation of a political party is its foundation - it is its heart and soul and, in this context, the Liberal Party is in extremely safe hands.

To conclude, I always affirmed to my students that they should treat life as a series of opportunities and not a series of events. It is a philosophy upon which I have tried to direct my own destiny. I regard my election to this place as a real opportunity. It is an opportunity to represent the people of the North Metropolitan Region. It is an opportunity to represent the Liberal Party, its philosophy, members and supporters in this chamber. It is an opportunity to explore options, to consider legislation that is reflective of our community's expectations and to debate alternatives. I come to this place conscious of the expectations of not only my supporters and the supporters of the Liberal Party, but also of the entire community. I come to this place as someone with considerable life skills and, I feel, as someone with a broad awareness of and sympathy for the needs and expectations of our contemporary society. I am conscious of the extraordinary privilege associated with being elected by the people of the North Metropolitan Region to represent them in this place. I commit myself to their cause. Thank you.

[Applause.]

Sitting suspended from 5.53 to 7.30 pm

The PRESIDENT: I am about to call on Hon Sheila Mills to give her inaugural speech but, before I do so, I remind honourable members that it is her inaugural speech and, as such, there should be no interjections.

HON SHEILA MILLS (South Metropolitan) [7.31 pm]: Mr President, I congratulate you on your election to the high office of President of the Legislative Council. I also congratulate members on their election and re-election to this house, and His Excellency the Governor for his address. I also congratulate Hon Bob Carr on his tenth year today as Labor Premier of New South Wales.

Mr President, I was born in Wales. Most of my family still live there. They are proud, working-class people - real working-class people - not the redefined Peter Costello variety. One grandfather worked down the coalmines and the other worked in a brick factory. My father was a strong man. He had no privilege in upbringing, but through sheer determination he became a computer scientist after being a pilot in the Fleet Air Arm in World War II. It was always my father's belief that education was the key to social and economic emancipation. His view was that he did better than his father and it was my mission in life to do better than he did. Thus, he spent a large amount of his time and energy making sure that I achieved, not only at an academic level, which was his priority, but also in sport and music. I used to play a pretty mean tenor saxophone and was quite a handy timpani player. I look forward to joining Hon Sally Talbot in a jam session one day. The one piece I would like to play would be the Triumphal March from Verdi's Aida!

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

No-one in my family had ever stayed at school beyond 15 years of age. Further education was not an option, even if they had the ability and aspirations. I was the first person in my family to go to university, such was my father's determination that I succeed. I attended the University of Wales. The day that I was scheduled to attend for the first time provided a caravan of family members winding their way down from North Wales to Swansea. It was during my grammar school days that my political opinions started to take a firm shape. This was ably assisted by the headmistress of the school, Miss Dean, who told me that "people like me did not go to university" - my background was obviously not privileged enough. Universities were the province of the well-off and the privileged. Nevertheless, I gained offers from five universities, including Durham and Liverpool. However, I chose the University of Wales. That I was able to take up the offer was thanks to Harold Wilson and the then Labour government which, through a system of grants and means testing, made it possible. I do not know that my father ever saw the irony in this as for some strange reason, which he never articulated, he was an unrepentant Tory. Yet it was Labour that afforded me the opportunity to which he was so committed. In fact, when I was first able to vote, we went to the polling booth together because he needed to monitor my behaviour. When I came out he asked whom I voted for. I said Wilson and Labour, of course. He did not speak to me for a week. My mother gave me a gold badge of Lenin!

Notwithstanding that, as I stand here today representing the Australian Labor Party, my father would have been a very proud man. My political views sharpened during my time at university, much to my father's chagrin. It was a time of marches, protests and sit-ins. Despite what was hoped to be a sea change in British society, it remained fundamentally non-egalitarian and retained a privileged social structure.

As Mr President would be aware, I have always been a keen advocate of workers' rights and conditions of employment. Since 1970 I have been involved in the union movement. I have been a member of the CPSU/CSA for the past 16 years, the majority of that time as a delegate. Incidentally, for those members who do not know me, I was a parliamentary officer in this Parliament for 15 years. I was the union delegate for a number of those years. My research indicates that only one other parliamentary officer has entered Parliament as a member. That is the deputy leader of the federal parliamentary Labor Party, Jenny Macklin, who worked as a researcher in the commonwealth Parliamentary Library. It may amuse some to see a former staff member as a member but, believe me, I have a wealth of experience and insight into the operations of this place.

It seems that my political life has come full circle: from being a worker fighting for the rights of workers to becoming a member legislating for the rights of workers. I will never lose my proletarian agenda.

Academically, as an officer of the Parliament, I engaged in extensive research in parliamentary and governmental structures. It involved both state and federal structures and the interconnection between the two in matters of jurisdiction and constitutional arrangements. This brings me to express a major concern I have about the direction our governmental system is taking. We all know that, since the promulgation of the Australian Constitution, there has been tension between states' rights and a need for an Australian federal government to act in the national interest. At one time or another, both major parties have been accused by the states of a Canberra power grab. However, I do not think there has been a politically sophisticated articulation of Australian federalism since the Whitlam and Fraser new federalisms during the 1970s. There seems to be a lack of understanding of the complex relationship between the states and the commonwealth. Since the 2004 federal election, in an unimaginative and heavy-handed manner, the Prime Minister has once again raised the spectre of Menzies. In his address on federalism to the Menzies Research Centre on 12 April 2005, he said that the goal of the federal government was to expand individual choice, freedom and opportunity, and not to expand the reach of the federal government. Despite the professed Liberal belief in limited government, Menzies simultaneously flaunted a respect for federalism while expanding the powers and functions of the national government. That the federal nature of Australia has been undermined by the financial dominance of the commonwealth is a fact. However, the Howard agenda is to use its financial power to force political and social policies on the states in an unprecedented way and contrary to the states' express wishes at the time of their agreement to federate. State sovereignty existed prior to Federation. That sovereignty was enshrined in the document that the states agreed to. It should also be noted that, at the time of Federation, the sovereignty of Western Australia had not been subjected to participation in the commonwealth. Indeed, had it not been for the free traders from the eastern states, Western Australia would have remained outside the commonwealth entirely. The federal government was allocated those tasks that the states deemed appropriate. The Howard government fails to recognise now, more than ever, that the Gallop government, as do other state governments, has a very important stake in the authoritative determination of public priorities in Western Australia.

Howard's political problem is that, because all state and territory governments are Labor, he has a limited capacity to implement coalition policies at a micro level. The Howard response to this political dilemma is to utilise the coercive powers that are available to him; for example, the corporations power. This issue is not about choices and freedom; it is about coercion and social and political manipulation, which undermines the great

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

Australian principles of egalitarianism, cooperation and a fair go. This is a repudiation of social justice for the states; no matter that individuals have repeatedly exercised their individual choice to vote in Labor governments in every state and territory in this country, no matter that those individuals made that decision because they like the state Labor government's policy ideas about how to best provide choice and opportunity for all or at the very least that they wanted a check on the coalition government. In the Prime Minister's mind, there is only one philosophy with a valid claim to the lofty ideals of expanding individual choice, freedom and opportunity, and that is his own.

It is interesting to note that while Howard is increasingly unilateralist in his dealings with the states, the Productivity Commission's final report on national competition policy tabled in the federal Parliament on 14 April 2005 makes it quite clear that success will depend on cooperative federalism, that national coordination among governments will be critical to good outcomes.

The Prime Minister argues that state incompetence was forcing him to reshape federalism. However, he was not given any mandate to reshape federalism in this country. Certainly Western Australia is the economy driving the nation but it is widely punished by the Howard government for sheer political reasons. It is reassuring to me and to other people on my side of politics that a bipartisan response to Howard centralism has been adopted by the leader of the state opposition and, indeed, the former leader of the state opposition. Furthermore, as prominent conservative commentators point out, the commonwealth is invading areas that one imagines that it would not want. The centralism push is completely out of tune with twenty-first century realities and bucks an international trend by moving towards a centralist system when other countries, including Britain, are moving in the opposite direction. Should the Prime Minister have a referendum on the issue of increasing commonwealth powers, I do not believe that it would succeed. Rather, while recognising the reluctance of the Australian polity to alter its constitutional arrangements, the Prime Minister seeks to bludgeon the states into acquiescence by an overt corruption of the principles of Australian federalism. Historically, Australians have opposed anything that remotely resembles an autocratic accumulation of power to the centre, particularly the so-called outlying states such as Western Australia. We should not forget, students of history, that the secession movement was strong in the 1930s in Western Australia, when a referendum on secession was passed. This attitude is still current among large sections of the Western Australian community, and Howard's approach will result only in the increased alienation of the Western Australian electorate from the commonwealth. Again, I believe this view is bipartisan in Western Australian politics. My concern is that those who seek to undermine the sovereignty of the states forget the constitutional history of the commonwealth as a creature of the states' desires. Despite the ideological push of the federal government, this state, under our current Premier, will strongly resist any diminution of the capacity of this government to set its own priorities and agenda.

I will, during my time in this place, articulate these views at greater length within the context of commonwealth interference in states' rights, particularly in industrial relations laws.

Finally, Mr President, I would like to thank various people for the support they have given me. I would particularly like to thank Hon Ljiljana Ravlich; Hon Shelley Archer; Kevin Reynolds, Secretary of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union; Tim Daly, Secretary of the Australian Workers Union; and my sons, Simon and James. I would also like to commend and pay thanks to Hon John Cowdell, who did a marvellous job as President of this place. He is a man of wit, intelligence and erudition. My special thanks go to my husband, David, for all his encouragement and support; he has been marvellous. On a final note, solidarity forever, comrades!

[Applause.]

The PRESIDENT: I am about to give the call to Hon Helen Morton. Again, this is the first speech of the honourable member, so there will be no interjections.

HON HELEN MORTON (East Metropolitan) [7.48 pm]: Thank you, Mr President, for the opportunity to make my contribution to the Address-in-Reply motion before the Chair. May I first congratulate you, Mr President, on your election to the Chair of the Council, and Hon George Cash for his re-election to Chair of Committees. I look forward to working with both of you over the next four years. I also thank the parliamentary staff and those people in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet who have helped me through the orientation and induction to Parliament program. I congratulate members who are, like me, in the house for the first time, and thank fellow members from both sides of the house for their welcome and support.

As I stand before you today as one of the Liberal members for the East Metropolitan Region, I have mixed feelings. I feel some trepidation about filling the shoes of such experienced, intelligent, articulate and well-loved parliamentarians as Hon Peter Foss and Hon Derrick Tomlinson. I pay tribute to those two men who preceded me here. They are held in the highest regard by people right across the East Metropolitan Region. I wish to record my respect for those men and their achievements in this place over the past 16 years. I recognise the

privilege bestowed on me by the Western Australian division of the Liberal Party, and its faith and trust in endorsing me to its number one position for the East Metropolitan Region. The party can be assured that this privilege will never be taken for granted. I have a strong and enduring connection to the communities throughout the East Metropolitan Region. I intend to repay their election of me to this position through dedication to seeking out opportunities to improve their health, happiness, prosperity and security. I have a mixture of humility and pride that I am a member of this time-honoured establishment, assisting in the robust governance of Western Australia.

I would like to acknowledge some wonderful people who have helped me become a member of this house. Hon Derrick Tomlinson paid me the highest compliment in asking me, following his announcement of his retirement, to consider becoming his successor. His wise counsel and mentoring on what it takes to become a parliamentarian has been unflinching over the past three years. Equally, since I have been elected, the ongoing assistance and guidance of his electorate officer, Nola Smart, has ensured the smoothest of transitions to my electorate duties. Hon John Day, the member for Darling Range, has been assisting me in many roles over many years. I thank him for his example of integrity, dignity and humility in a politician.

My immediate family, which comprises my husband Allan; my eldest son Aaron, his wife Michele and their three children Jesmin, Jaxon and Jordyn; my daughter Alexandria; and my youngest son Timothy and his partner Misty, have been and always will be the central point of my life. They have provided me with honest support, good humour and a life full of wide-ranging experiences that are free from the harmful feelings of guilt about wanting a career and a family. We belong to a large close-knit family that lives in Western Australia and Queensland. I am one of seven siblings and Allan is one of eight. Our extended family is made up of close friendships and incredibly strong family ties. The closeness of our family has shown me what family traditions of integrity, love and loyalty can achieve. I respect these traditions and the value they add to my life. I thank my parents for their example.

I thank my many friends and family members who campaigned with me throughout the last couple of state and federal elections. I would not be standing here today without their support. Appreciation is also extended to the willing committed members of the Liberal Party's Kalamunda Branch, Hasluck Division, particularly its President, Heather Gilmour, the Hasluck women's division, the State Women's Council, particularly Daphne Bogue, and the Canning and Pearce Divisions of the Liberal Party of Western Australia, for their encouragement and ongoing support.

My life experiences have been my preparation to participate fully in this house. They have helped to shape my values and beliefs. It was when I was a primary school student at Frankland River, which is where I was raised on a war service land settlement farm, I heard of my first politician, Paul Hasluck. I was assigned a project on Papua New Guinea and although my father had served there during the Second World War almost 20 years previously, my mother suggested that I write to the then federal Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck. I was overwhelmed by his reply and the subsequent photographs and project material I was sent. I received top marks for that project and would like to think that that event has taught me how to respond to the smallest request or need of a constituent. Little did I think that I would have the honour of representing the East Metropolitan Region, which takes in the federal seat of Hasluck and is currently held by my good friend Stuart Henry. It is also the area in which my family and I have lived for the past 35 years.

While I boarded to attend secondary school in Albany, my parents moved from Frankland to a sheep station north west of Meekatharra. They eventually retired from the land as mobile rangers with the Department of Conservation and Land Management for eight years before compulsory retirement at age 65. Still very fit, my parents went back to a sheep station at Sandstone which, after seven years, my husband and I took over and still operate. My parents again "retired" into voluntary work at Yanchep. Love of the environment and community service has been instilled in everything we do.

We are a sports-loving family. The three generations of our family have been involved in tennis, netball, basketball, football, athletics and horseracing. On Mother's Day this year, I was watching my grandson's under eight football match. As I walked out onto the ground at quarter time, I was embraced by the team's coach, my 30-year-old son, and then by the umpire, my 24-year-old son. No Mother's Day present could ever match the pleasure of seeing my sons continue our tradition of service to the community.

I trained as an occupational therapist and worked throughout Western Australia and interstate. The best clinical application of my skills was in the field of mental health rehabilitation. Despite increased spending on mental health, strengthened community treatment and support services, reduced isolation of mental health from mainstream health systems and the expansion of psychiatric disability support services, mental health still represents a major public challenge in Western Australia, and that is an area to which I remain strongly committed.

With the establishment of a private contractual occupational therapy service to nursing homes, hostels and day care centres throughout the metropolitan area, I moved into health management. This eventually led to 13 years as a senior executive in government health services, originally as the regional director for health in the wheatbelt, and then with the mid west and Gascoyne regions. I represented Western Australia in developing the inaugural national multipurpose service strategy for country health and aged care services, and I remain supportive of multipurpose roles across government services, especially in country areas. The important role that such services play in the east region in sustaining country services was clearly demonstrated throughout those years.

Working as the director of the South Metropolitan Health Authority and then the general manager of finance and resources within the Department of Health, I became appalled at the obstacles and waste of resources created by bureaucratic inflexibility between local, state and federal responsibilities in health. As general manager of the Armadale Health Service, this was again apparent. In cooperation with local general practitioners, a low-cost antenatal service was established in the hospital grounds. The only other options for those mums to access a free service required them to travel for all antenatal care to, and to have their babies at, King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women. Everyone agreed that a free service at Armadale was in the best interests of the mothers, their babies and their families, but the commonwealth officers were not supportive because of the fear of cost shifting between levels of government. They preferred to see these mums, mostly on low incomes, travel to King Edward Memorial Hospital in Subiaco rather than have the GPs involved charge Medicare for services at Armadale. It took 12 months to get a special approval from the federal minister for health for the GPs to charge their services to Medicare in a shared state-commonwealth arrangement. Commonsense must prevail in finding new approaches to local, federal and state responsibilities in health.

While speaking about obstetrics, I mention that at one stage the government was prepared to let obstetrics close down at Armadale. It was too hard to find specialist obstetricians and guaranteed anaesthetic cover for the declining services there. I did not accept the closure of the service at Armadale. I became somewhat notorious for flying in obstetricians from South Australia for four days every three weeks to give the sole obstetrics specialist at Armadale a break until enough specialists were recruited. This government gave me a hard time in the press for paying anaesthetists to ensure that the hospital was covered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I note that the practice has proved to be necessary in the eastern suburbs, and the practice continues today nearly three years after I left the hospital. That hospital now delivers more than 1 000 babies a year.

Is it just easier to let obstetrics services close at Kalamunda District Community Hospital rather than develop satisfactory protocols for a GP and midwife obstetrics service? I believe it is sheer laziness to adopt a close-it-down approach and to hide behind centralist clinicians who argue clinical or resource appropriateness. Recent research has shown that volume is not associated with adverse outcomes for low-risk births in Australian hospitals delivering between 100 and 500 births a year. Serious implications arise for Western Australian communities if volume is accepted as a determinant for clinical or resource appropriateness in obstetrics. All hospitals north of Perth, with the exception of Geraldton, deliver fewer babies a year than Kalamunda hospital. Only four out of 57 country hospitals delivered more babies annually than has been the case at Kalamunda hospital over the past couple of years. It takes more work, but there are successful alternatives to the close-it-down approach. I intend to pursue those alternatives on behalf of the families around Kalamunda, the GPs and the midwives.

My interest in health reform is well known. I have been involved in the state and commonwealth health agreement negotiations. I have managed the negotiations and accountability for the health budget of the state, which accounts for 25 per cent of the total state budget. I have managed the state's health capital works program and the state's health litigation and legislation program. It was not easy. Annual health expenditure in Western Australia is approximately \$6 billion, and is growing at an average rate of eight per cent annually. This cannot and need not continue.

"Health 2020: A Discussion Paper", which was written in 1998, and the subsequent plan for health in the metropolitan area, written in 2000, had most of the answers. There are more answers in the Reid report of March 2004. Whichever report one reads, the solution lies partly in the expansion of services in peripheral hospitals such as Swan District and Armadale-Kelmscott Memorial Hospitals. These types of hospitals should undertake the majority of the work in the metropolitan health system, and the number of more expensive tertiary beds in tertiary hospitals should be reduced. Each time a tertiary bed is used for a non-tertiary case, it wastes the state approximately \$380 per bed per day. More than 80 per cent of cases in tertiary hospitals are non-tertiary cases. This wastes the state upwards of \$100 million a year. This government wants to increase the number of tertiary beds at the new hospital to be built south of the river to nearly double the number recommended in the Reid report. I fully support the development of a tertiary hospital at Murdoch. The north-south imbalance in population-based funding in health services is absolutely staggering. However, the unnecessary centralising of services in the south, to reach 1 000 tertiary beds, will merely replicate the waste in the current tertiary hospitals,

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

and will come at the expense of fully developing and maintaining a cheaper option for providing exactly the same clinical services at Armadale-Kelmscott Memorial Hospital and Rockingham-Kwinana District Hospital.

The lack of vision shown by this government in not re-leasing Galliers Private Hospital and Specialist Centre as a private hospital on the Armadale site is stunning. The failure of the government to honour the lease agreement with the private operator, and the subsequent penalty - an out of court settlement of more than \$15 million of taxpayer funds - is a scandal. That \$15 million makes up part of the \$97 million for the health sector under the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2005, which was debated in the house last night. What a waste! These wasted taxpayer dollars would have paid for hundreds of additional cases that are waiting for elective surgery. The implication of the government's action will be the gradual decline of specialist services at Armadale, as specialists move from the site and seek an alternative mixture of public and privately-run hospitals at which to base their rooms. Three general hospitals - Joondalup Health Campus, Peel Health Campus and Armadale-Kelmscott Memorial Hospital - stand out in terms of their ability to attract the mix of specialists who could provide the services most needed by their local communities, rather than those patients having to go to alternative hospitals. Why? It is because they have private hospitals co-located on site. Co-locating a private hospital on a public hospital site enhances the recruitment of specialists necessary to work in the public hospital. This is especially so in the East Metropolitan Region.

Having worked for the past 12 months as the chief executive officer of a home and community care service, I am certain that we can do more to help older people to continue to live independently and safely in their own homes. We cannot afford to wait for the inevitable crisis brought about by the enormous population growth in the number of people over the age of 85. Only 20 per cent of people over the age of 65 ever access an aged care service. Less than 10 per cent of that 20 per cent need nursing home or hostel care; the other 90 per cent receive home and community based care, which is provided mostly by untrained or non-clinical staff. The huge majority of elderly people continue to live at home with no or minimal support. Broader home-based support services can go a long way to meeting the future needs of this worldwide phenomenon and keep aged people out of acute and long-term institutional care. Apart from basic help to live at home, elderly people most want personal safety and security. The home and community care program needs to be broadened to include programs to promote personal safety and security.

Having worked as a senior executive in the public sector for 13 years, I can assure members that the majority of public servants are dedicated and hardworking. They take seriously the ongoing requirements to improve service quality, contain costs and be accountable. However, their ability to produce sustained excellent performance is thwarted by a sector that mostly pays lip-service to employee performance management. I am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for the opportunity to be the opposition spokesperson for public sector management. In that role I will seek improvement across the sector in public sector standards of human resource management and especially in how agencies evaluate and manage employee performance.

I applaud the initiative of the four public sector watchdogs, the Commissioner for Public Sector Standards, the Auditor General, the Ombudsman and the Corruption and Crime Commissioner, in seeking to work closer together to streamline their efforts and those of public sector agencies in ensuring integrity within the public sector. We know that we have a cultural problem in the public sector when more than 50 per cent of the employees who responded to a survey sent out by the Commissioner for Public Sector Standards in 2004 felt that they would not be protected from victimisation, harassment or some other form of retribution if they reported wrongdoing. This sort of punitive culture permeates from the top, and I will do everything possible to hold ministers and chief executive officers accountable for changing it.

The other portfolio area that I represent in opposition is that of women's interests. The "Women's Report Card" put out by the Office for Women's Policy in March 2004 provides some very interesting baseline information about women in business, education and elected positions in government; women remain significantly under-represented in elected positions across all tiers of government. Still less than one-third of all members of government boards are women. The electors of the East Metropolitan Region have set a new standard in electing to the Council four women out of five members. The report card goes on to show that Western Australia has the largest gender pay gap of any state or territory in Australia; that less than one-third of all legislative positions in WA are held by women; that WA has the lowest proportion of sworn and unsworn women police officers of all states and territories; that women carers will meet the bulk of the demand for increased caring across most aged groups; that the lack of alternative care options for the disabled, aged and children impacts greatly on women's capacity to participate fully in society; that seven per cent of adult women have experienced violence in the home, workplace or community, and that the fear that most women have of violence restricts their freedom; that family, friends and social networks are very important for women as they age and have less financial security than men; and, finally, that improved health outcomes for women will be better achieved through accessible, culturally appropriate community and home-based care that can better deal with physical, mental and social

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

wellbeing. Yet people still ask why we need policies and portfolios specific to women's interests. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the opportunity to pursue better outcomes for women in WA.

In conclusion, I again pledge my commitment to serve the people of the East Metropolitan Region to the best of my ability without fear or favour and, as charged by His Excellency the Governor, to use my imagination and creativity to contribute to the health, happiness, security and optimism of all Western Australians.

[Applause.]

The PRESIDENT: I am about to give the call to Hon Matthew Benson-Lidholm. Before I do so, I remind the house that this is the honourable member's first speech.

HON MATTHEW BENSON-LIDHOLM (South West) [8.10 pm]: Mr President, I will commence my inaugural speech by congratulating you on being elected to the position of President of this house. That is a great honour for you, as is my opportunity to represent the people of Western Australia, and in particular the south west. Mr President, given your extensive parliamentary service and knowledge of the political process, I know that you will carry out your duties with fairness and distinction, and I look forward to working with you. I also acknowledge at the outset the traditional owners of the land this parliamentary precinct occupies.

The great honour bestowed upon me, and on all members of Parliament sitting in this chamber, is, in turn, matched by the enormous responsibilities that accompany public office. In consideration of the depth and breadth of such responsibilities, new members of Parliament may well be excused for feeling somewhat overawed. Constituents, however, can be assured that I will not disappoint them, particularly if enthusiasm and endeavour are useful indicators.

His Excellency the Governor, Lieutenant General John Sanderson, made reference to the government's legislative program for the thirty-seventh Parliament. In keeping with the program outlined, my focus as a member of the Gallop Labor government will always be to assist in the provision of better services for all, to help facilitate real, sustainable economic growth throughout the regions and to work to enhance the unique lifestyle enjoyed by Western Australians.

My presence in this chamber is due principally to the 54 000 or so voters in the south west who supported the Australian Labor Party. Not since 1993 has Labor managed to gain a one-third quota in the South West Region. I thank those voters for their support. In such a dynamic and diverse part of the state, this support bodes well for the government and is indicative of confidence in our policies and members of Parliament. Notwithstanding this level of support, it was very disappointing to lose the highly marginal seat of Bunbury. I wish Tony Dean the very best for the future and look forward to his continued support in the south west.

In my home town of Albany, it is difficult to imagine Peter Watson working any harder for his constituents and for many other people in the surrounding electorate of Stirling. Albany voters acknowledged Peter's hard work with an improvement in his primary vote of more than 10 per cent. The feeling in the local community was that he deserved another four years. Peter's commitment to his electorate certainly helped improve the ALP's Legislative Council vote. I congratulate Peter on his win and look forward to working closely with him.

On a personal note, I thank my wife, Jan, for her efforts in the Legislative Assembly seat of Stirling. She polled beyond expectations and contributed significantly to the profile of ALP candidates in the south west. Apart from her own candidacy, she has provided unqualified support for me during the last three elections, particularly in 2001 when dealing with a life-threatening illness. I thank her dearly for helping me realise my dream.

I also acknowledge the magnificent local efforts of Guy Wroth, Ian Bishop, Julie Hooper, Pam Stoney, Liz Watson and David Nelson, and the many helpers on election day. Their efforts have been rewarded with Albany being in the unique position of boasting both a locally based MLA and MLC. This is truly a remarkable achievement. As Peter Watson acknowledged in his inaugural speech on Tuesday, 22 May 2001, there is one person without whose tremendous vision and work ethic I would not be here today. I refer, of course, to Hon Bob Thomas. Bob was first elected to the thirty-third Parliament, representing the South West Region, and served three terms from 22 May 1989, retiring on 21 May 2001. Bob Thomas has been a tireless worker for the ALP, particularly in the south west, for many years. His campaigning skills, knowledge of political process, and the respect in which he is held, both in Parliament and the local community, are legendary. His generosity knows no bounds, and his friendship and support of my family are qualities I will always treasure. If I can indulge further, my wife and I regularly enjoy a glass or two of quality red wine with Bob. I am pleased to report that he appears to have given up the idea of selling old pots, comics, cakes and anything else that people donate to bargain bonanzas. Retirement appears to have brought about a level of fundraising sophistication previously unheard of, much to everybody's delight.

My interest in politics and social justice go back a long way. Politics was not something I learnt at university. Rather, the whole family would debate issues at the kitchen table. Dad unsuccessfully contested a senate seat in

1958, and then became heavily involved in sub-branch politics. My mother and father have always been my inspiration in life. I still have their 1951 ALP memberships cards. Sadly, both have passed away, but I know they are here in spirit today. It is, however, with a great sense of pride that I acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of my wife, Jan, my mother-in-law, Ethel, my immediate family and their partners, and some very special friends, some of whom have travelled very long distances to be here tonight.

Growing up in Perth's eastern suburbs during the 1950s and 1960s was a rich and rewarding experience. Having attended school with kids from the local migrant hostel, I soon developed an appreciation of multiculturalism. As kids, we were all sports fanatics. At one stage, the five Benson boys were playing cricket for the Midland-Guildford club, and Dad was the practice captain. The Slaters, Gartrells and Manns, however, still ran the show. My parents had a very special commitment to the quality education of their children. They left no stone unturned in their endeavours to provide the very best for all of us. They sent all six of their children to private schools, on very limited means. My mother would often say "Get yourself a decent education; they can't take that away from you." Later on in life, there could not have been a prouder family when Dad graduated from university with both an honours and a master's degree in anthropology - not a bad effort from someone who grew up in the Valley of the Giants with no formal schooling. This commitment to education and improving life chances was built in adversity. My mother's family were Irish migrants to Victoria in the mid nineteenth century, moving to Kalgoorlie and finally Fremantle and Perth in search of work on the railways in the early twentieth century. My father's family were pioneers in the Nornalup-Peaceful Bay area in the early 1900s. Despite the enormous hardships, the family has grown significantly since those days, with extensive interests, particularly in fishing, along the south coast. I count my blessings when thinking of my paternal grandfather, as he was an illegal Swedish immigrant who jumped ship near Bunbury in the 1880s. Despite the best efforts of the police and immigration officials, Grandad managed to avoid being caught. Detection later on became somewhat difficult as Grandad anglicised his name and, mysteriously, the Bunbury Police Station burnt down along with all its records.

Just like my parents, the Gallop Labor government places great emphasis on education and training. It was reassuring to hear His Excellency mention that the centrepiece of the government's second-term agenda is education and training. He added that the government will introduce reforms designed to encourage excellence, raise standards and reward effort. The provision of skilled labour through expanded training programs is also a priority. There is no better way to enable all Western Australians to realise their full potential than by giving them the opportunity through quality education and training. In Western Australia, this takes on added meaning, given the state of our booming export-oriented economy. The need for a highly skilled and versatile work force is recognised by the government. The aim is to create some 4 000 extra training positions with the ultimate goal of forging a \$14 million partnership with industry. This will ensure that some 30 000 Western Australians will be in training by 2009.

As a former teacher-administrator in the state education system, I would like to mention one significant area of concern. The welfare and standing of the teaching profession need urgent attention. There are some outstanding practitioners in our schools, but I will quote Mr Kevin Rudd in his first speech to the House of Representatives on 11 November 1998. He said -

We have a demoralised teaching profession whose energies are now dissipated in school administration rather than in syllabus delivery.

That may well sound alarmist. However, there is quite a deal of truth in what he said.

In this state we have witnessed an absurd situation in relation to the attainment of the level 3 teaching status. In an effort to keep the best teachers in front of our students and to reward them with increased salaries, we have adopted a quota system and applied it to a standards-based format. A person is either good enough to be a level 3 classroom teacher or he is not. How demeaning and demoralising is it to say to professionals, "Yes, you're good enough. You've satisfied all the criteria. You've worked hard. Your application may have taken some six months to write, but you'll have to do it again because we've met our quota"? To add insult to injury, a family member failed in her bid for level 3 status but was subsequently deemed outstanding enough to be offered a district office job professionally developing maths teachers. When we hear that the system cannot afford certain initiatives, I ask: how can we not afford to deliver world's best practice?

My own educational experience has been rich and varied. My various university studies have focused on economics, historical geography, education and natural resource management. In recent years I have been a teacher-administrator at the Mt Barker Senior High School, and prior to that I held teaching, lecturing, course writing and tutoring roles in distance education, TAFE and the conventional school setting.

Potentially, one of the most significant changes I have been associated with is the one college, one community concept for Mt Barker. I look forward to assisting with the implementation of the local area education plan to

provide a seamless K-12 and beyond education experience for students in the Mt Barker area. The model being developed has significant implications for education in similar sized towns throughout the state.

I would now like to turn my attention to the government's programs for health and police, as outlined by His Excellency. In relation to health, the Labor government will deliver much in the south west. A new hospital for Denmark will be most welcome, replacing a very much outdated facility. I understand that construction will commence early in 2006. First-class services and hospitals will be delivered in Albany, Bunbury, Geraldton, Port Hedland and Broome. With recent statistics pointing to problems associated with life expectancy and the quality of rural health services, the government's program of reform is very good news for people living in non-metropolitan regions.

Better policing services can also be expected under a Gallop Labor government. The Frontline First strategy will see more than 500 extra police on the front line. They will come from an additional 350 police officers and 160 civilian officers. To support the service, police will have access to state-of-the-art technology. Twenty-three new police stations will also be built, with a number to be located in regional Western Australia. In my home town of Albany, the new police complex is well and truly back on track following the collapse of Devaugh Construction. Albany MLA Peter Watson is to be congratulated for the time and effort he put into keeping the project going. It was rather surprising, if not disturbing, that in the lead-up to the February poll it appeared as though some lower house candidates actually wished the rescue package would fail so that they could gain some electoral advantage out of people losing either their jobs and/or a lot of money.

Western Australia continues to outperform the rest of the country, with growth rates of around five per cent plus, and they have been even higher. This growth performance has occurred despite the interference of the federal government in state decision making, threatening to withhold goods and services tax finance and potentially jeopardising major investment decisions. Fiscal responsibility has been the key ingredient in the maintenance of the state's AAA credit rating with the government having delivered four balanced budgets in a privatisation-free atmosphere. Spending on essential services has increased while a record capital works program has been occurring since 2001. Of particular note for rural communities is the establishment of the \$75 million regional investment fund. Another \$80 million has been committed with the aim of investing in regional communities and infrastructure projects. As one vitally concerned with economics and small business viability, it is significant to note the flow-on/multiplier effects of the Gallop government's record levels of economic growth. The creation of at least 80 000 new jobs over the past four years, the reduction in unemployment to historically low levels and record business investment levels are testimony to the government's ability to deliver sound, responsible economic management and a better future for all Western Australians.

One of the biggest issues to have come before the Western Australian Parliament in recent history must surely be electoral reform. In view of the Australian Labor Party's ideals of a fairer distribution of political and economic power and greater equality in the distribution of income, wealth and opportunity, it is only logical that a Labor government would seek to address a situation whereby the gross malapportionment of voting power was considered by certain stakeholders to be an example of representative democracy. At the state election earlier this year, about 25 per cent of the voters in non-metropolitan regions elected 17 members to the Legislative Council. In metropolitan electorates, the remaining 75 per cent of the population also elected 17 members. A vote in non-metropolitan seats for the upper house is worth nearly three times as much as a vote in the metropolitan area of the upper house. The same pattern of malapportionment exists in the Legislative Assembly. The only fairness in the old system is that one vote, one value applies within the country and within the metropolitan area, but not for the entire state.

It is common knowledge that most states eliminated vote weighting years ago. It is considered to be undemocratic because it gives some voters a significantly greater say in which party forms government. This has been the case in Western Australia since 1894 and I am proud to be part of a political party that has had the opportunity and the intestinal fortitude to bring about fairness and equality to our electoral system. A matter that disturbs me greatly as a former educator is the callers on talkback radio I have heard who claim they will be disfranchised by the ALP, the Greens (WA) and others who have tried to achieve electoral fairness. Disfranchisement is something about which the ALP knows only too well. Having been subjected to a conservative upper house gerrymander since 1894 is my idea of the deprivation of the rights of citizens.

Members of Parliament are here to serve the voting public, not hectares, trees or livestock. A significant proportion of the state's wealth is generated in rural Western Australia. However, politics is about power. Our responsibility as parliamentarians is to fairly manage the use of such power for the betterment of all. A system of government that benefits a relative few at the expense of the remainder is something I do not accept. I understand the difficulties rural people face in their day-to-day working and family lives, but for democracy to be truly representative gross voting inequalities must be removed. I do not wish to elaborate now about how I

propose to address the concerns so often expressed, suffice to say that technology and the increasing mobility of constituents and MPs will help facilitate the changed process. As a new member of Parliament, this is a challenge I am ready and willing to take up.

As a former member of the State School Teachers' Union of WA, I have a very keen interest in labour relations, be it at the state or federal level. In modern western market economies, the significance of the union movement working closely with the government of the day and the business sector is of paramount importance. Cooperation and consensus affect productivity gains resulting in higher wages, increased employment levels, more funding for research and development and improved profitability and, ultimately, a reduction in our woeful current account deficit. Industrial relations systems that are significantly skewed in favour of either employers or employees are a recipe for failure. Why then does the Howard government want to impose the federal system on Western Australia and the other states and territories? The very meaning of federalism is in jeopardy with this and other centralist grabs by the Howard government.

The Howard government's proposed changes will reduce workers' rights, particularly in the areas of occupational safety and health, redundancy entitlements for small business employees, and award stripping. The fact of the matter is that approximately 60 per cent of the Western Australian work force is in the state system and many employers of all sizes are happy to be covered by the simple, efficient and user-friendly state system with its common rule awards. This is in stark contrast with the complex, overly-prescriptive and dispute-prone federal system. An interesting statistic is that in 2004, 70 per cent of the industrial disputes in Western Australia that were reported in the media were in the federal jurisdiction whereas only 40 per cent of workers are in the federal system. The proposed centrepiece of the federal system is Australian workplace agreements. These have already led to reduced pay and employment conditions very much contrary to the best stated intentions of the government. A particularly disturbing aspect of the proposed industrial relations changes focuses on the issue of states' rights and the tying of federal funding to the states on signing the National Building Code. This will in turn impact on infrastructure projects, TAFE colleges, university funding, water funding, and more. This surely is not the intent of federalism. It is, quite simply put, a continuation of the Howard government's attempts to frustrate the legitimate work of unions in providing the best for their members. It is worth reminding this house that both the federal Constitution and the Western Australian industrial relations system have been in existence for more than 100 years. The state system has been modified over that period to take account of the changing economic and social conditions and was further amended by the 2002 Labour Relations Reform Act to restore fairness and promote productivity within our industrial relations system. Contrary to the claims of the doomsayers in 2001, this has not led to increased unemployment, increased conflict or reduced productivity. To the contrary, in 2004 there was record low unemployment, with seven consecutive months below five per cent unemployment, and at the same time economic growth reached seven per cent. Western Australia continues to deliver the highest productivity of any state.

Western Australia is the nation's economic powerhouse. Our simple, efficient and user-friendly industrial relations system complements the investment climate in this state. A change to an inferior system is not in anyone's best interests. This Parliament and the people of Western Australia must send the strongest possible message to John Howard. I strongly support minister Kobelke's proposed challenge in the High Court. The Prime Minister needs to give all the states details of his plans and be prepared to sit down and talk. The current lack of information about the federal government's intentions is creating uncertainty at all levels. It is interesting to note that Mr Howard is unable to guarantee that no-one will be worse off under the proposed changes. Therefore, one can only surmise that his proposal amounts to ideological opportunism that he believes is legitimised by his impending control of the Senate.

I would like to conclude my inaugural speech with some observations and hopes for the future of the South West Region of Western Australia. The south west is a unique and most vibrant part of our state. An indicator of the popularity of this region is the recent substantial population growth. Centres such as Mandurah, Albany, Bunbury, Busselton and Margaret River are attracting more and more tourists, retirees, young families and university students. The right investment climate is resulting in significant business opportunities across the region. Young people are staying put in the area and gaining employment or traineeships and apprenticeships. This is great news, particularly for families. In high growth areas such as the South West Region there can be significant delays in society's attempts to address concerns relating to the social and natural environments. The Gallop Labor Government, however, cannot be accused of any such inaction or delay. The regions, including the south west, will continue to prosper, with investments in transport, new police stations and safer community projects, better health services like the \$8.7 million increase for the Bunbury Regional Hospital's acute psychiatric ward, big funding increases in education, and the creation of new national parks and nature reserves. Bringing all of this together is the plan to continue regional access to government, with more regional cabinet meetings planned.

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

I see huge potential in the south west and as a member of the Legislative Council I want to help effect the best possible outcomes, be they social, environmental or economic, for all constituents. Developing industries like viticulture, horticulture, aquaculture and ecotourism are set to propel the region into the future. I have a particular interest in viticulture, in which I believe we need to assist the growers and investors in the areas of marketing and promotion. The quality of our product is world class; we must let people know how good our wine is. Australian wine legend James Halliday has gone so far as to say that the Frankland River area has the potential to be one of the world's great wine centres!

I am proud to be a Western Australian representing the South West Region. If I can assist the government in delivering on its promises and improving the lifestyles and life chances of all people in this great multicultural state, I believe I will have satisfied the social democrat in me. Thank you.

[Applause.]

The PRESIDENT: Honourable members, I am about to give the call to Hon Anthony Fels. This is his first speech and I would ask honourable members not to interject.

HON ANTHONY FELS (Agricultural) [8.36 pm]: Mr President, congratulations on your election as President of this house. Looking around the house, it is very interesting to notice the faces from yesteryear now gracing the government benches. I have known some members on the government side longer than I have known some on my own side! I hope that their warm welcome will not fade too quickly! Despite these friendships there are some important reasons that I sit on the other side of the house from them. I am a keen supporter of small business, farming, free enterprise, freedom to choose and family values. Although these are not exclusive to the Liberal Party, I fit naturally within the party's ideology. I am privileged to be given the opportunity to be one of the Liberal Party's three representatives in this chamber for the Agricultural Region. However, I hope that I can serve my constituents well, no matter what their politics.

Although farming seems to be the mainstay industry in the Agricultural Region - after all, it is named after that industry - I am mindful that there are many other groups that need to be properly represented. The region stretches from Kalbarri at the north, down the coast to include Geraldton, Dongara, Jurien Bay and Lancelin, circumvents the Perth metropolitan area, then stretches south to Bridgetown and along the coast east of Albany from Bremer Bay to Hopetoun, Esperance and beyond to Israelite Bay. It extends inland east of Merredin to the border of the wheatbelt and the goldfields. It is a bigger area than the state of Victoria and comprises 68 country shires. Dominated by the primary industries of agriculture, fishing, mining and forestry, it is the grain bowl of the world. It produces half of Australia's export wheat crop and therefore is the biggest single wheat trader in the world. Until the self-destruction of the wool reserve price scheme, it was a major wool-producing region. More recently, the region has turned to growing a variety of cereal, legume and pulse crops, trees and raising cattle for beef. The BHP Billiton Nickel development at Ravensthorpe will be the biggest thing to hit Ravensthorpe and the nearby shire and port of Esperance. It is vital that our government provides the necessary infrastructure and services to encourage those involved in this and similar developments to live and work within the local community. Fly in, fly out operations do nothing for the community.

There is also a tax-driven Tasmanian blue gum timber investment scheme over our higher rainfall prime agricultural land along the south coast. I have no problem with a company or individual buying prime agricultural land to start whatever venture or pursuit they think might be more profitable than its previous use. That is the basis of a free market. However, when individuals, corporations or even now, the Commonwealth Bank, are becoming involved because they see an artificial market and an opportunity to profit from unsuspecting investors who are getting little more than a huge tax deduction for their investment, then something is horribly wrong with the reasons upon which our economy is basing its investment decisions. These are tax-effective schemes where investors do not understand the industry they are investing in. The decision to invest is based on all the wrong reasons.

It is said that Perth is the most isolated city in the world. Many country towns are a great distance from Perth. Of course, they are even more isolated. Esperance is 750 kilometres south east of Perth and our farm is a further 38 kilometres east. It is about the same distance as Meekatharra is from Perth. What is it about living in isolated areas that drives some to the point of despair? Esperance has been portrayed as a suicide capital. In a society as privileged as ours, why is it that more young people die from suicide than from road accidents? Why, in such a fortunate country, do we have suicide rates in excess of third world countries where ordinary citizens have so much less to live for? This issue should never be swept under the carpet.

Drugs are one of the greatest threats to our youth and our future society. That is especially so in country towns where opportunities for younger people are sometimes lacking. Better education on drugs is needed if we are to save many of our younger people and avoid serious mental health problems when they grow older. It is a particularly tragic local issue because Esperance really is God's own country. It has some of the most

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

spectacular and beautiful beaches, the islands of the Recherche Archipelago, highly productive and reliable farmlands and great people. However, it was not always so productive. It was not until after it was discovered that the previously barren sand plain responded well to trace element fertilisers that development took off in the 1950s and 1960s. Although the grand plans of the initial investor, an American named Allan Chase, did not carry through to fruition, worldwide interest was stimulated in the Esperance agricultural region. There was an influx of Hollywood to Esperance with every notable screen actor, producer and director owning some farming land in the region. This was a bonanza for many young couples who were able to manage the interests of these absentee landlords while developing their own modest holdings with otherwise limited capital. Major investments were also made by some of the United States' wealthiest families - the Rockefellers and Benno Schmidt. Many people still associate Esperance with Art Linkletter but it has grown well beyond that now.

While growing up on the family farm at Esperance, I saw the excitement of the new land development in the 1960s and 1970s. I also remember the downturns, especially when wool was 28c a pound and wheat quotas were in place. Like many rural children, I started my education in my local country primary school. Mine was at Castletown. In 1975, when I was 10 years old, the public address system at my school broadcast the fall of the Whitlam government. The class erupted in mayhem. It was my first lesson in parochial politics. However, my real education was the land and when I finally made it to university, agriculture seemed as good a course as any before I returned to the farm. I had a passion for two careers: farming and politics. The die is cast early in life and I could not resist becoming involved in the political process at university. I ran for the student guild elections in my first year and had a shot at the guild presidency in my second year. I was elected as a delegate to the Australian Union of Students - the only union I have belonged to - conference in Melbourne in January 1984. Well, that really did open my eyes to what politics is about. I witnessed extreme groups of Communists, Trotskyites, Maoists, Stalinists - whatever you like, they were there. They made the socialist left faction look moderate. There is an old adage that there are no friends in politics. However, I made some great acquaintances, some of whom I have kept as my trusted friends today, despite our philosophical differences.

I returned to the farm in 1985 but the rural industry was depressed. My father was still running the property and, as the saying goes, "You cannot put two bulls in the one paddock". There were no succession plans in those days! After taking a realistic appraisal of the situation, I turned my interest to small business. Like many other country boys, my plan was to buy a farm of my own. No sooner had I started a kebab shop next to the Ocean Beach Hotel - so that I could keep up with the utes and bull bars in the city - than wool and sheep prices doubled, and of course, land prices doubled with it. My education on the highs and lows of farming was continuing. I found a second job with another holy grail for farmers - a bank. This was the beginning of another learning experience in the realities of farming. The Primary Industry Bank of Australia was a specialist rural lender. Motivated with a Don Quixote enthusiasm, I prepared to tilt at some rural windmills and beat the banks at their own game. Those five years not only gave me an understanding of rural finances and the battles that farmers face, but also gave me a chance to meet many farming families within the agricultural region. I could see the difference we were making by offering a fair go to farmers who were being hammered by the major banks.

I wish my memories of the Rural Adjustment and Finance Corporation were as pleasant. In 1990, following the collapse of the wool reserve price scheme, the rapid escalation in interest rates and "the recession we had to have", I had to work in a partnership way with the customers of the bank to make sure they had the capital to diversify, and service the debts they were committed to. These were farmers who got on with the task at hand without any help from government. Some who sought assistance from RAFCOR were rejected because their farms were deemed to be unviable. It says something about the tenacity of people on the land that they got through with no help and now some of these farms are two or three times the size they were 15 years ago. Some did receive assistance because they somehow fitted the criteria. I recall one client to whom the bank had lent money. He was a foreign citizen who had migrated to Australia to buy a farm. His farm had operated at a loss for three years, and he had never paid tax in this country. He picked up a subsidy for half of his bank interest each year for two years. Who was the prime beneficiary of this government hand out? The bank was! It was not the Primary Industry Bank, by the way. It is now charging the poor cocky the top overdraft rate, the top margin and penalty interest rates and fees because now he is in default of his original loan. The old RAFCOR structure was a disgrace! It was administered under the Minister for Agriculture and had been set up as a lender of last resort. Members can imagine how some of these loans ended up. The state government finally had to decide whether it would foreclose and hold a mortgagee auction. This is when government policy implemented a change in RAFCOR from being a direct lender of last resort, to one of providing interest rate subsidies. What a gutless bit of policy on the run, that was. The government wanted to be seen to be doing something for farmers in need. Yes; interest rates were above 20 per cent and they were the killer in the 1990s; but we are now stuck with a pathetic bandaid treatment under some national scheme administered out of Canberra. Good luck to the farmer who borrows \$500 000 and finds his property inside a shire boundary drawn on a map. Too bad for the

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

farmer across the road in the adjoining shire who has no debt, but still suffers from the drought or the decline in commodity prices.

We must put in place a scheme that does not discriminate on the basis of debt level, off-farm investments, shire boundaries, commodity type or even industry. We need to do this in partnership with the existing bank so that, if the bank wants to help the client, it needs to come to the party with a sensible margin and base-lending rate. When the farmer's position improves, he can pay it all back with interest so that there is something in the kitty for the next farmer who may need it. In its administration of this, the government should at all times have priority security so that the taxpayer is always covered. If it is done properly, it should take minimal administration, give urgent working capital to fund whatever activity it is, be cash-flow positive, and everyone involved will be better off.

We also need to prepare for the problems that will occur if rates rise - both in the country and in the city. The alarm bells should be ringing. Farms are starting to sell for ridiculous prices and terms of trade are now in rapid decline, even after 10 relatively prosperous years. Government regulation is grinding agriculture down. Dairy deregulation has been a disaster for dairy producers. The wool tax and reserve price scheme were a disaster. I believe that the government should not interfere with market forces but let the market decide. The Australian Wheat Board investment in Landmark from Wesfarmers will create a disaster if there is a major downturn in farming. Farmers who own the AWB now have all their eggs in the one basket. Statutory marketing boards were once a great idea - about 50 years ago - but require minimal interference by the minister and should only be allowed to continue while farmers have an effective input and control. Cooperative marketing and processing of the finished product is one solution. We need also to look at expanding new markets, especially in Asia, for pork, beef, lamb and other commodities. Indonesia is a very special market, and improved relations with that country will be of a major importance to agriculture.

Let us turn to manufactured agricultural inputs. What a disgraceful scam the National Registration Authority, or now the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, has become. In my view it is a system designed by multinational companies to ensure their continued control over patented products far beyond the expiry of their patent protection. This has particular relevance to the Agricultural Region. Currently, any manufacturer of agricultural chemicals must rightly have their products trialled and registered for product use. What about the manufacture, repacking, or importation of formulated products that are identical to one that is no longer protected by patent? Oh, no, people cannot simply go and sell something over which a multinational no longer has the monopoly. They must go through the same procedure of registering their product and also the source of the raw material that they are using, even if this is the same raw material upon which an existing registration is based. It does not stop there. Their manufacturing premises must be accredited by a third party auditor. The raw material manufacturer - often an overseas-based company - must be approved to supply, and the overseas-produced product must be an approved technical grade active constituent. How much support do we in Western Australia get from this Canberra-based organisation? As far as I am aware, there is one staffer from that agency in Western Australia whose job it is to prosecute anyone who is in breach of those regulations. These are just some of the issues and concerns facing the Agricultural Region today.

I believe that my early days spent growing up on a farm in Esperance, my country schooling, my venture into off-farm small business and the resultant lesson in the unpredictability of rural costs, my later rural economic lessons through my time with the Primary Industry Bank of Australia, my unfortunate experiences with the Rural Adjustment and Finance Corporation and my extensive and often highly personal interaction with the primary producers of the Agricultural Region have given me a realistic understanding of the tenacity of the farming community and the towns that service them.

I am sorry that my parents cannot be here to share my swearing-in ceremony and my inaugural speech and I know they would both have been very proud to have shared in this occasion. However, I wish to thank the many people who have helped me to get here this day.

Elections are a lot of fun - always good for losing a few kilos and stimulating the metabolism. Getting elected to this chamber is, of course, vastly different from campaigning for a lower house seat. On election night I was very excited for Dr Graham Jacobs, who won the seat of Roe - a seat that I contested in 2001 against the former National Party member, Ross Ainsworth, who held the seat for 16 years. Dr Jacobs and I, and four others, first sought preselection when the seat of Roe was recreated for the 1989 state election. Prior to 1989 we had been represented by Julian Grill in the seat of Esperance-Dundas and Hon Mark Nevill in the upper house. Both Australian Labor Party members were respected in Esperance for their hard work, and I got to know them over the years through my mother's involvement as a member of the Esperance Shire Council. I also sincerely thank the Esperance Branch of the Liberal Party, particularly Trevor and Colleen Stoney, Alva Curtis, Lee and Betty Warner, David and Anne Dwyer, Debbie Storm, Allan Mathews, David and Penny Smallwood, Phil and Helen

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

D’Emden and Norval and Stella Watts, who were tireless supporters, workers and organisers when I ran for the seat of Roe. Of course, I also thank the Liberal Party, Paul Everingham and former state director, Peter Wells; and Marcia and Fillipa Sullivan in the O’Connor Division and its many good members. I even thank those who have given me a hard time over the years! I also thank John Carstairs, Greg and Fran Weller, David and Kathy Lovelock, Brian and Marlene Mayfield, Allan and Eva Cole, Hamish Purser, Ric Mincherton and Ian Hall. To the branch members and delegates within the Agricultural Region, I say thank you for the trust you have placed in me.

I also acknowledge with pleasure my running mates Hon Bruce Donaldson, Hon Margaret Rowe and Brian Ellis, who was fourth on our Agricultural ticket. I also acknowledge Kevin Giudice, Jamie Edwards, Gary Snook, Jamie Falls, Dr Graham Jacobs, Murray and Meg Nixon, Bill and Leslie McNee and family and everyone who assisted us in our election.

I also acknowledge Hon Wilson and Jennifer Tuckey, Senators Ross Lightfoot and Winston Crane, Senator-elect Judith Adams and Kevin Prince who generously travelled to Roe to assist in the 2001 campaign. I also thank Hon David and Mrs Marie Louise Wordsworth and family whose encouragement has been appreciated over the many years. I also thank my neighbours Bruce and Frida Wilson. Bruce has been a great inspiration since arriving in Esperance in 1968. I also pay tribute to Father Kevin Glover who was not only our parish priest, but an outstanding entrepreneur and mover and shaker in the Esperance community.

I acknowledge the Rector and Vice Rector of St Thomas More College, Father Bill Uren and Father David Strong. They tackled one of the most difficult jobs you could ever imagine; that is, 200 university students living together! Although I never graduated, I was a student delegate to the University of Western Australia Professorial Board. I thank the Sub Dean of Agriculture at the time, Professor Allan Robson, and politics Professor Peter Boyce, both outstanding academics who followed my student years.

I also thank Tony Moore who kept a good eye out for me as a child and young man, and who always maintained a close interest in what I did. I acknowledge Jim Samson, a distinguished former Liberal Party president and Esperance farmer who taught me that, “You will always regret the things that you never did”. I thank Peter Lauder, who has been our family accountant and friend for many years, and Dr Peter Arnold who has always provided advice and assistance whenever it was needed.

My grandmother, who has 66 grandchildren and almost as many great-grandchildren, cannot be here tonight because she is recovering in a Melbourne hospital after breaking her hip. She turns 87 next week.

I make mention of Mary Anne Vitali, who has been a great adviser and counsellor over many years. I also make mention of M’liss Henry, Karen McDonald and the volunteers of Halo - Helping All Little Ones - an organisation I am proud to have helped establish. Halo was established to raise awareness of the many issues to which children are vulnerable.

I acknowledge the Trench, Taylor, Sachse, Hughes, Teasdale and Barber families, all of whom are special family friends and have been all my life.

I thank Shane Dillon who for months put me up on the floor of his South Perth flat when I left the farm. I also thank his wife Melanie for putting up with me in the bank for many years. Thank you both for your friendship and help. I also thank all the staff who have served me loyally over the years in whatever business I have worked.

My children have seen me contest three elections and have travelled much of the electorate with me, especially most of the 80 000 square kilometres within the Roe district. To them I say this: you will not always be children, but I will always be a parent. There is only one thing that I love more than this job, and that is you.

Finally, I thank my honourable colleagues for their indulgence. I hope that I can work with all members to make Western Australia the best state in the best country in the world.

[Applause.]

The PRESIDENT: Members, I am about to give the call to Hon Ken Baston. As this is the honourable member’s first speech, the usual courtesies will be extended.

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral) [9.00 pm]: I take this opportunity to congratulate the newly elected President, Hon Nick Griffiths. I am sure your deliberations will be wise and fair, and I wish you well in the important role of managing the business of our Council. I also congratulate Hon George Cash on his re-election as Chairman of Committees. I congratulate all my fellow parliamentarians who have been recently elected to this chamber, and I look forward to working closely with them all over the next four years for the benefit of my electorate and the state of Western Australia. I also commend the members and staff of the house

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

for the invaluable induction courses that new members have attended. I found them most beneficial and now feel better informed and more confident in carrying out my duties in this house.

As is customary in an inaugural speech, I will briefly give members a quick overview of my background. My parents lived on a north west sheep station on the coast north of Carnarvon. Although this lifestyle was idyllic for a young child, it was isolated, and my early schooling was done by correspondence, the mail service was once a fortnight and the telephone lines were simple earth returns; that is, copper wires propped up by sticks. Cyclone warnings were transmitted by telegram, if the line was still in operation; the cyclones normally came before the telegram. I went on to complete my education at boarding school in Perth, making the journey home only three times a year.

For the past 30 years, I have operated a pastoral lease 90 kilometres south of Carnarvon producing wool and meat for the export market. There are only 538 pastoral leases in Western Australia. Although I have had to contend with drought, floods and cyclones, I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to operate a business in the rangelands. I have been actively involved in many issues that affect the Gascoyne region. In particular, I have gained valuable knowledge through my involvement in local government, various agricultural committees and the Gascoyne recreational fishing advisory group. In short, I have lived and worked for the greater part of my life in the electorate. This has armed me with an invaluable insight into the economic and social needs of the region at large, and this, I trust, will guide me in my deliberations in this house.

Mr President, I feel very honoured and privileged to be a member of this house, and in particular to be representing the electors of the Mining and Pastoral Region of Western Australia. It is a region that creates much export wealth for the nation and is the powerhouse of Western Australia. The mining and pastoral electorate has the capacity to drive Western Australia's growth into the future. We must not forget that the mining and pastoral electorate represents 87 per cent of Western Australia's landmass. The total value of the economy of the Mining and Pastoral Region is some \$27.5 billion, of which approximately \$23.4 billion is generated through exports; this represents 21.5 per cent of national export income. I am committed to the people of my electorate, and will work to further promote investment and development in the region, and to enhance opportunities for stable population growth.

I will focus on three strategies. Firstly, I will concentrate on creating incentives for business to operate and for people to live in the region; secondly, I will look for ways to foster and enhance regional development; and thirdly, and probably most importantly, I will seek cooperation between the federal and state government to achieve positive outcomes. I will elaborate on each of the three key strategies I have just outlined because I consider these to be the ingredients necessary to drive future wealth creation and population growth in my electorate. The first key strategy is the creation of incentives for business to operate and people to live in the regions. To provide the house with some context, if a line were drawn from Shark Bay across to Brisbane, which is the bit the government was willing to give away in World War II, that area would contain approximately 6.5 per cent of Australia's population but would create some 40 per cent of Australia's export income. It is understandable that a feeling of neglect exists in rural communities. The individuals who make up the 6.5 per cent of people who live in remote and regional Australia typify the iconic Australian character, and they want a fair go.

My interest in this issue came by way of an invitation to be a delegate to the Northern Australia Forum in Katherine in the Northern Territory in October 2000. This experience confirmed my view that government investment incentives and policies need to be targeted directly at promoting growth in regional economies. There is no doubt in my mind that economic and population growth provides the key to long-term sustainability of regional Australia. Population growth and economic development will contribute to the overall health, cohesion and vitality of our regional communities. I consider this to be a key in turning around the difficulties faced by all people living in my electorate. One issue that the regional summit certainly firmed in my mind was that the key to these incentives is not handouts. People should be rewarded for their personal endeavours and the investment they make in the regions through progressive mechanisms such as tax incentives. Given incentives and encouragement, investment will occur. We need only look at the blue gum, olive, wine and film industries, which are proof of this. As members will come to learn, I am a great believer in the potential of tax incentives to drive investment in regional areas. Although this is predominantly a federal issue, I see a role for state politicians to work cooperatively with the federal government of the day. I will discuss this issue in detail later.

Another example of a progressive regime was the removal of the fringe benefits tax on company supplied housing. Although this represented a way forward, we need to continue in this vein to create further incentives. Furthermore, the entire concept of state air travel needs to be reviewed. It now takes twice as long to fly to Carnarvon from Perth as it did 10 years ago. Other towns have lost their major air services altogether, not to mention the breakdown that has occurred in regional airline linkages. If the city bus and train services need

financial assistance, airlines throughout the state, which are regional Western Australia's bus and train services, are equally deserving of government support.

It is my dream to see people grow up, work, raise a family, educate their children, retire and become grandparents within the electorate.

I will now turn to the second key strategy that I highlighted earlier; that is, the strategy of enhancing and fostering regional development to create wealth and population growth within the Mining and Pastoral Region. As members should be aware, the industries within this region are many and varied, ranging from agriculture to the mining, oil, gas, tourism and fishing industries to mention just a few. I will comment specifically on each of these industries. Agriculture in all its forms plays a major part in the region. The Department of Agriculture needs to play a greater supportive role in encouraging improved production in the region through its advisory capabilities, rather than what appears at present to be its ever-increasing compliance role. Thanks to Hon Kim Chance, over the past four years I have had the pleasure of being a chairman of the Carnarvon Artesian Basin Advisory Group, which successfully undertook to rehabilitate the artesian basin stretching from south of Exmouth to Denham. When completed, that will save some 90 gigalitres of water. This \$7.5 million commonwealth-state project encouraged the closing of old bores and refurbishing with new state-of-the-art reticulated systems. This huge resource, and other potential water resources throughout the rangelands, presents the electorate with a massive opportunity to contribute to regional wealth creation and population growth.

Another critical issue is the capacity of the rangelands to diversify into a range of other land uses. Our current tenure system was put in place more than 100 years ago and now does not reflect the current needs and future use requirements. Our current land tenure regime also does not encourage the investment that is critical for future growth. As opposition spokesperson for lands, I can assure the house that I will take a keen interest in this matter.

There is no doubt that outback towns can play a far greater role in local tourism than they do at present. Their full potential has nowhere near been achieved. The recently launched 3 000 kilometre outback pathways project, initiated by the Gascoyne Murchison strategy, of which I am a former board member, is an example of how outback tourism can be promoted. For our tourism industry to grow, I believe we need to make sure that there are quality air services to all destinations of our state, not just a few major centres. These services need to provide a good base for packaged, realistically priced airfares, which are now expected by international and local tourists alike. I put on record that I will work hard to achieve a review of the current policy and commit to provide alternatives, options and solutions.

A sustainable fishing industry is of utmost importance to coastal towns for the income generated directly by the commercial sector of the industry and indirectly to the tourism sector. However, fishing laws and regulations need to be simple and policeable. It is pointless to have sanctuary zones introduced by one government department if they cannot be managed by another department; for example, sanctuary zones are introduced by the Department of Conservation and Land Management and then handed over to the Department of Fisheries to be managed.

There is much optimism for the future of the Western Australian resources sector. However, mining, too, has significant land tenure issues within the mining and pastoral electorate and is, more generally, a significant issue for our state. Planning delays and expense caused by excessive and often unnecessary bureaucracy are a major hindrance to development in the region. This is further emphasised by the confrontational nature of the legal process in many of the land title issues, rather than localised, conciliatory negotiations. This applies in particular to the mining industry. We must find a way forward to resolve this and I am particularly keen to work with my state colleagues, our federal counterparts and the industry to do so.

I will also make some general comments about fostering regional development. Having some five years experience on the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy, a commonwealth-state regional development program, I very quickly learnt that the key to making development projects happen is the capacity of the institutional structures to make it happen. Members can be assured that I will be vigilant and proactive as an advocate of the one-stop-shop approach to the government's service delivery, and I will work with those precious few government development agencies to undertake an integrated approach to project delivery.

The other general comment I will make is about the role of local governments in regional development. A pattern appears to be developing within state governments throughout Australia of establishing planning committees to override local government roles and functions. This is very centralistic and often can install in regional areas unwanted development of inappropriate facilities. My experience with local government gives me the view that this trend is eroding the democratic rights of local councils. This means that developers of large projects will be able to bypass local councils and submit their plans directly to the state government for swifter approval. This can arouse accusations of bias or political interference because the decision has gone outside the

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Sheila Mills; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Anthony Fels; Hon Ken Baston

normal, accepted democratic process. However, I recognise that the minister has the final approval. Consequently, funding for local government infrastructure projects to support the massive revenue source for the government needs to be more in tune with regional requirements.

I now turn to the final and probably most important of the key strategies that I alluded to earlier; that is, to work cooperatively between the federal and state governments to create much-needed growth and population for my electorate. I have seen at first hand the benefits that a region can achieve when all levels of government work cooperatively together. In the past I have seen major electoral benefits vanish for the sake of trivial party politics. I assure members that it is my hope - I hope not in vain - that I can remain above the day-to-day cut and thrust of politics and resist the temptation to score cheap political points so that we can work together to capture the full benefits for my electorate.

The relationship with commonwealth politicians and senior government officials built up over many years is an asset that I wish to translate into real action for the people of the Mining and Pastoral Region. It is probably stating the obvious, but I believe it is worth restating that the commonwealth has an extraordinary array of options to fund regional opportunities. If I can be influential in returning our fair share to Western Australia, and more particularly to the Mining and Pastoral Region, I will take the cause to whomever and wherever is necessary.

In closing, I will sum up by reiterating and putting on the record that while I am a member of this house, I will commit myself to encouraging growth, wealth and population for and within my electorate. Before returning to my seat, I thank those who have helped me to be here today. Although there are too many people to name - I apologise now to those I may miss - I specifically thank my wife, Robin, and my sons Derek, Richie and Thomas, for their support and encouragement. I also thank the members of the Liberal Party for preselecting me, a party of which I am very proud to have been a member for 20 years. I thank the individuals who encouraged me to participate, in particular Peter Broad; Gordon Thomson; Terry Cahill; David Steadman; Ross Atkins; the former MLA for the former seat of Ningaloo, Rod Sweetman; my dear friend Senator Alan Eggleston; and one other very close friend and bush confidante, Peter Robson, who has been holding the fort while I have been away. It would be remiss of me if I did not acknowledge the members of this house for being very attentive and courteous during my first utterance in this house, and I trust they will retain the same civility and decorum the next time I rise to speak. Finally, I thank those who are the real reason I am here: the electors of the Mining and Pastoral Region and the real people to whom I commit myself to work with for the next four years.

[Applause.]

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Bruce Donaldson**.