

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 5 June on the following motion moved by Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Environment) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 2664A–D (budget papers 2019–20) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 9 May 2019.

HON ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral) [11.30 am]: I have tried very hard to keep my budget reply speech as interesting as possible, but every two or three pages I find myself standing at Bunker Bay casting a lure into Geopraphe Bay. I eventually managed to come up with some words to reply. I found that this is a very lazy budget. Each of the last three budgets contains identical wording in appendix 11 to budget paper No 3, and I quote —

Western Australia's large net contribution to the Federation is mainly driven by:

- the high level of Commonwealth company tax and personal income tax derived from the State;
- the State's low draw on Commonwealth social security and health payments to residents, and low Commonwealth spending on services in the State; and
- Western Australia's very low GST grant share.

On page 301, budget paper No 3 carries a statement that reads —

Over the period 1986–87 to 2017–18, Western Australia's net contributions to the Federation have totalled \$245 billion (of which \$223 billion is since 2000–01, when the GST was introduced).

In 51 years, that is 245 thousand million dollars. Successive governments of Western Australia have let the commonwealth get away with this. Western Australia's 51.842 per cent population share of GST is to be topped up by a commonwealth grant to the equivalent of 70 per cent of Western Australia's population share. That means that we are getting back 18.158 per cent of our GST money that would otherwise be taken from Western Australian voters. Thirty per cent of our GST money will still be taken from us. Why would any political party accept this continuing rort as good and fair for Western Australia? How unfair is it that the Australian Capital Territory gets 123.759 per cent of its population share of GST? Does the ACT need to worry about fresh water for remote communities, dingo fencing, cyclones, flooded roads or dredging its ports? Pauline Hanson's One Nation never accepted this deal. This is a low, shameful deal that has been touted by the Liberals as a wonderful, generous gift to Western Australia. It is a deal that this chamber should unanimously reject. Only a rubbish deal would guarantee that Western Australia will always lose 30 per cent of its GST revenue. That comes on top of half of our fuel excise also being taken. My colleagues and I are determined to free Western Australia from the shackles of horizontal fiscal equalisation, and I foreshadow a motion to that effect. On 7 July 2017, Pauline Hanson's One Nation made a submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into horizontal fiscal equalisation. I will read an extract from that submission —

We should not be frightened of voluntary population movement, a far more efficient way of maximising prosperity than by arbitrarily redistributing the spending power of governments. There is a strong case to reject the whole concept of HFE, an outdated socialist construct which dangerously impedes market signals, effectively delivering bad advice to State Governments. HFE encourages State Governments to fail in their task of maximising opportunities for employment, for entrepreneurs and for economic progress. We acknowledge that in former times Western Australia has benefited from HSE, especially during a period (1938–1960) when the Commonwealth banned the export of iron ore. Those days are long gone, and today WA is severely disadvantaged, the more so because HFE calculations on the value to WA of iron ore royalties are based upon three-year averages ...

As a direct result of ill-advised energy policies, South Australia in coming years is certain to *have a lower capacity to raise revenue* and to *have a greater cost burden*, thereby qualifying South Australia to have its self-inflicted harm rewarded by even more draconian plunder of Western Australia (and perhaps also of Queensland) through Horizontal Fiscal Equalisation. Far better to allow the inevitable voluntary exodus from South Australia to provide real hope for the economic emigrants, by eschewing any further HFE harm to their intending destination or destinations.

South Australia is now offering subsidies and loans of up to \$6 000 for home battery systems, with higher subsidies for eligible low-income households. The WA government must stop Western Australians paying for this foolishness. I will list some of the benefits that Western Australia has missed out on because the Labor and Liberal Parties have allowed Canberra to take \$245 billion from Western Australia over 31 years. We could have built multiple pipelines to bring fresh water from the Kimberley to the centre and south of the state, and sealed all major roads,

slashing transport costs and boosting tourism, agriculture and mining. We could have provided a choice of apprenticeship opportunities for every young person and programs to ensure that every young child in a remote community attends school every day and lives in an environment of safety, good nutrition and optimism. We could have a superb police force, with good pay and conditions, high morale and the resources to minimise all forms of crime. We could have excellent remote area schools, hospitals and public infrastructure of such a high standard that families would not be reluctant to make their lives in the regions. We could have made significant progress in dealing with the salinity problem in the south west, which has severely affected more than one million hectares and threatens up to an additional four million hectares. We could have minimal homelessness, unemployment and misery, and world's best aged and palliative care. We could have improved logistics with more extensive rail and significant coastal shipping, greatly increased investment in mining and primary production boosted by the availability of skilled and professional personnel together with improved infrastructure, and growing and thriving remote communities with a rising population of Australian citizens who have travelled west for a better future.

That is an incomplete list of what we have missed out on because of horizontal fiscal equalisation. It is ridiculous to suggest that Western Australians should be satisfied with a mere 18.158 per cent reduction in the rip-off of Western Australia. If this budget accepts the continuing theft of 30 per cent of our GST entitlement, it is a betrayal of Western Australia and a total failure. We challenge the WA government to demand the immediate abolition of horizontal fiscal equalisation so that Western Australians can lead the nation into a golden era.

This budget should incorporate, at the least, a commitment to research the delivery of water in a pipeline from Lake Argyle to the south of the state. Proponents of such a pipeline include the late Ernie Bridge, AM. Important factors in support of a pipeline include the following. It would eliminate the adverse health consequences for remote communities of bore water containing natural pollutants such as arsenic and uranium, and it would provide major opportunities to boost agriculture. A pipeline would satisfy the needs of the mining industry and deal with future water shortages in Perth and the south west. There would be significant local employment during the surveying and construction phases, and long-term contributions to prosperity and security. The budget surplus is due to two factors—an increase in iron ore revenue and a boost in revenue from Western Australia's inadequately enhanced share of GST. Pauline Hanson's One Nation has played a constructive role in each of these two factors.

I have mentioned the GST; now to the royalties issue. In the March 2017 election, Pauline Hanson's One Nation took a stand against a plan to impose a \$4.75 additional levy on around 78 per cent of the iron ore being exported from Western Australia. As a direct result of our example, both the Liberal Party and the Labor Party publicly committed not to support the levy. The effect was a positive impact upon the confidence of iron ore miners, upon their feelings of security from sovereign risk and upon their willingness to maintain the high level of investment that prevailed through the financial year 2017–18 and that has continued into 2018–19.

The *Business News* of 20 May mentioned current investment plans and seven WA iron ore projects worth a total of \$12.34 billion. Without the positive impact of Pauline Hanson's One Nation, that figure would have been lower. My colleagues and I are pleased that our party has contributed to the present growth in the volume of iron ore exports, but note that we are not claiming credit for the favourable international price. My party is committed to increasing the quantum of all royalties received by the WA government. The increase in royalty must be achieved by approving more mines.

We are keen to see the development of a profitable uranium mining industry in Western Australia with our uranium exported for the peaceful generation of nuclear power. I want to live to see the doubling of WA mineral production and the doubling of WA agricultural production. Every day of unnecessary delay in the approval process is a day of delay in the commencement of royalty streams. Under all circumstances, we must prevent any attempt by the government to increase its royalty income by jacking up the rate of royalty on any mineral. I warn the gold industry that on page 298 of budget paper No 3 of the Western Australian state budget 2019–20, there is a section with the dangerous heading "Subsidised gold royalty rate"; I quote the text —

The Mineral Royalty Rate Analysis recommended that a royalty rate of 3.75% be applied to gold and the Government proposed the introduction of a 3.75% gold royalty rate in the 2017–18 Budget. This expenditure represents the difference between that royalty rate (as a benchmark) and the legislated 2.5% rate.

On behalf of the hardworking people of the goldfields, I have a message for the state Labor government. I am delivering this message with the special authority of the people who voted on 18 May 2019 at the Kambalda West polling booth where 21.65 per cent voted for the ALP and 22.1 per cent voted for Pauline Hanson's One Nation. Of 656 formal voters, 145 voted for Pauline Hanson's One Nation.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: Mr Acting President, I think you need to call maintenance and ask them to bring an oil can because there is an irritating squeak coming from this corner of the room.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members! Members on all sides will be quiet. Hon Robin Scott, if you do not take interjections, you are far less likely to get them. I suggest you just made it worse, not better. I suggest all members allow Hon Robin Scott to proceed uninterrupted. Hon Robin Scott has the call.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: Thank you, Mr Acting President.

I say again, of 656 formal voters, 145 voted for Pauline Hanson's One Nation—three more than voted for the ALP candidate. At Kambalda West, Pauline Hanson's One Nation earned twice the vote of the Nationals, three times the vote of the Greens, 20 times the vote of the Australian Christians, 18 times the vote of the Western Australia Party and 12 times the vote of the Great Australian Party.

Now for the message to the government: stop pretending that the gold royalty is subsidised, and do not dare jack up the rate; do not even dream about it. Around Australia, decades of wrong governmental policies have led to excessive centralisation of population and industry in capital cities. This problem is especially serious in Western Australia, which, by any standard, is capital city-centric to an exceptional and undesirable degree. A smart Western Australian government would promote the growth of industry and population outside the Perth metropolitan area through constructive initiatives in policy areas including taxation, water, energy, health and education. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the average age of primary producers is 56. Western Australia needs incentives for young people to stay on the land and go onto the land.

Point of Order

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I, too, am now hearing an audible squeak, which is getting even worse. I think the issue of calling maintenance or bringing some order to this chamber is becoming ever more pressing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas): Thank you. Honourable members, if there is a squeak occurring, even in good humour, I expect that squeak to cease. Hon Robin Scott has the call.

Debate Resumed

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: Thank you, Mr Acting President.

The Western Australian government should demand an end to Canberra's fringe benefits tax on the provision of homes to regional and remote area workers. The government should demand from Canberra a massive increase in zone allowance tax offsets for Australian citizens to provide a real incentive for Australians to work in our wonderful and productive mining, pastoral and fishing industries, and to provide professional services to the people who work in those industries. The remote area tax offset for zone A is currently at a pathetic low of \$388. The WA government should demand an increase in zone tax offsets to at least \$5 000; the figure needed to maximise economic growth and prosperity in the regions would be closer to \$10 000.

While giving advice to Canberra, the Premier should tell the Prime Minister to keep his hands off Western Australia's live export trade. I have sought the support of this chamber for payroll tax concessions to small businesses operating outside the metropolitan area, and I have not given up. The subsidy to metropolitan and regional transport services has increased to \$930 million. Most of that subsidy supports Perth rail and bus services. That is fair enough, provided remote residents receive fair treatment. A smart Western Australian government would in each budget seize every opportunity to ensure that people who live and work in regional and remote Western Australia have access to infrastructure and services comparable with what is available to people who live and work in the city.

I note the budget's long overdue commitment to the MRI machine for Kalgoorlie Health Campus, and I thank Pauline Hanson's One Nation for securing the federal licence that made this possible. There must be no unnecessary delay with the MRI machine.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members! The background noise is beyond background. I ask you to keep the rumble down. Hon Robin Scott has the call.

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: Thank you, Mr Acting President.

An amount of \$41 million for palliative care for the whole state, including \$5 million for a palliative and aged-care facility in Carnarvon, is a beginning, but the remote regions alone could easily absorb \$41 million. The amount of \$1 million over 2019–20 and 2020–21 for the improvement of renal dialysis treatment is tiny in the context of the epidemic nature of kidney disease in remote Aboriginal communities. Let us get real and increase this amount at least tenfold.

Dr Christine Jeffries-Stokes has for the last 10 years told us why many people living in regional communities in Western Australia have renal problems. It is due to the drinking water, which contains uranium and arsenic, but still nothing has been done about it. An amount of \$1 million will allow an extra 13 or 14 patients to be treated, because dialysis costs about \$70 000 a year for each patient. She has been backed up by Professor Fiona Stanley. This has been on the government's books for more than 10 years now. The information is there and we are still doing nothing about it.

Laverton Hospital must be rebuilt. Leonora is crying out for an aged-care facility and nothing has been done about that. After 60 years of broken promises, the Meekatharra–Wiluna road still has not been sealed. We campaigned hard to preserve the Schools of the Air. With the help of Pauline Hanson's One Nation, we worked effectively to save Moora Residential College. Recfishwest should have funding to establish artificial reefs off Karratha, Carnarvon and Albany to emulate existing reefs at Bunbury, Exmouth, Dunsborough, Esperance and Mandurah. My party campaigned strongly to prevent the partial nationalisation of the rock lobster industry, and we are still maintaining a watch. The government should press on with protecting pastoralists from feral dogs and should protect miners from feral troglodfauna and feral *Eremophila resinosa*. My colleague Hon Charles Smith will deal with all the issues relating to public safety and policing. I invite the Premier to persuade Hon Charles Smith to accept a position in the government as assistant Minister for Police.

On goldmining, my party is first and foremost about jobs for Western Australians. Continuing success in mining depends absolutely upon aggressive exploration to find new deposits and extend the resources and reserves of existing mines. I am pleased that our efforts contributed to the decision to continue the exploration incentive scheme. We are especially proud that we secured the support of this chamber for the disallowance motion that defeated the government's 50 per cent increase in the gold royalty at the end of 2017. If that wrongly advised cash-grabbing royalty increase had gone ahead, the extra royalty of around \$20 an ounce would have made some mining sub-economical. I particularly mention Telfer as a mine that could have closed as a result. What we can be sure of is that companies would have cut back their exploration drilling to fund the extra royalty. The defeat of the gold royalty increase undid much of the damaged confidence and encouraged companies to set about the worthy task of ensuring that reserves and resources are continually increasing at a more rapid rate than gold is being dug out of the ground. The truth is that the gold industry needs all the good news it can get, because there are already signs of pessimism.

I will read an important article that appeared in the online investment journal *Small Caps* on 14 May 2019 headed "Australia's gold production 'almost certain' to fall after record highs in 2019" and written by international resources journalist Danica Cullinane. I quote —

Gold production in Australia hit an all-time high in 2018, but new research sees the country's output falling dramatically by 2024 as some of its biggest gold mines peter out.

Australia broke a 21-year production record last year after producing 317 tonnes (about 10.2 million ounces) of gold according to data released by analyst Surbiton Associates in March.

A recent report by market analysis firm S&P Global Market Intelligence predicts this record gold production will grow further to around 10.7Moz in 2019—equivalent to about \$19.2 billion—placing the country second behind China in a list of the world's biggest gold-producing nations.

However, the report forecasts Australia will slide to fourth place behind Canada and Russia by 2024.

According to the report's author, S&P analyst Christopher Galbraith, Australia's gold production is expected to "fall the most"—by more than 40% to 6.3Moz over the next five years—due to the depletion of several ageing mines.

"Even if it doesn't fall by 40% by 2024—essentially, what we consider the worst-case plausible scenario, production will almost certainly fall," Mr Galbraith told *Small Caps*.

All of us in Parliament need to concern ourselves with boosting the level of investment and exploration so that our gold reserves and resources continue to increase. We need to provide every possible incentive for prospectors and small miners, which includes removing the unreasonable water charges imposed on them by the state government. Of course, we cannot allow any government action that will discourage mining.

On 20 May 2019, *The West Australian* attributed to the CEO of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia, Mr Paul Everingham, the statement that the state's resources sector will need an additional 15 000 specific skilled roles over the next six months. My party is determined to have those 15 000 jobs filled by Australian citizens. Honourable members should treat with caution the promise made by the Prime Minister on 29 January 2019 to create 1.25 million jobs over five years. Prime Minister Morrison's promise offers minimal hope to the unemployed because immigrants will take most of those jobs. Net immigration for 2017–18 was 236 700, representing 0.95 per cent of the total population. At that rate, and not even allowing for the likely increase in 2018–19, in five years there will be 1.2 million more immigrants, which seriously devalues the Prime Minister's

promise to around zero jobs. My party wants the great majority of the promised 1.25 million jobs to go to Australians, not imported foreign workers. The same is true of the 150 000 jobs in Western Australia, which the Premier has promised to create. My party speaks for Western Australians who do not want those jobs to go to imported foreign workers. Honourable members and their friends in the press gallery are entitled to ask and certainly should ask: are those jobs that the Premier has promised, the same jobs that would be Western Australia's share of jobs that the Prime Minister has promised to create?

On 21 March 2019, Gareth Hutchens wrote an article in the online *The West Australian* headed, "Premier Mark McGowan's 150,000 WA jobs promise on shaky ground as employment market stalls". It states —

Not a single extra West Australian is in a job compared to nine months ago.

New figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show there were 1,337,700 West Australians employed in May last year—and that figure declined by 500 in February, in trend terms.

The sobering data comes despite both State and Federal governments ramping up their jobs pledges this year.

Early last month, WA Premier Mark McGowan promised to create 150,000 new jobs by 2023–24.

Pauline Hanson's One Nation deplors the Canberra focus on promoting the engagement of foreign workers. In February 2013, Bob Birrell and Ernest Healy of the Centre for Population and Urban Research published a paper headed, "The Impact of Recent Immigration on the Australian Workforce", which is still valid today. Birrell and Healy wrote —

The main finding is that the number of migrants arriving in Australia since the beginning of 2011 who found jobs is equivalent to the total number of new jobs created in Australia over the same period. This has had a harmful impact on the level of employment, participation in the labour market and the working conditions of other Australians, particularly young people.

...

During the years of very rapid employment growth to 2010 the Australian Government pursued a policy of increasing the inflow of migrants, on the grounds that there was a shortage of domestic skilled workers and that, without further expansion in immigration, serious skill shortages would eventuate. There have been no changes in this immigration policy since the slowdown in employment growth post November 2011. Quite the contrary!

On a website created by Canberra's Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, this statement could be seen on 11 July 2018 —

Employing workers from overseas can give your business a real advantage.

Honourable members can see that this is sabotage of Aussie job opportunities. The same Canberra website offers a link to the Western Australian government's migration service website, which states —

The Government of Western Australia nominates eligible migrants for the Skilled Nominated and Regional (Provisional) Skilled Nominated visa categories.

WA Migration Services processes nominations on behalf of the State Government. If you are nominated by WA Migration Services, you are given an automatic invitation to apply for the intended visa from the Department of Home Affairs.

Australian job seekers in Western Australia have both the federal government and the state government working against them. This has to stop. We do not need designated area migration agreements and we do not want governments inventing excuses to import foreign workers to take jobs from Australians. Let us ensure that plenty of Australians are willing and able to fill whatever job vacancies are on offer in remote Western Australia.

Senator Pauline Hanson has personally taken the lead in the federal Parliament in promoting the vital importance of apprenticeships, and her groundbreaking policy is for a 75 per cent subsidy in the first year, a 50 per cent subsidy in the second year, and a 25 per cent subsidy in the third year. We recognise the need for special education programs to assist disadvantaged youths and adults to attain the skills they need in literacy and numeracy to enter an apprenticeship. We also are keen to facilitate persons qualified in a trade to proceed to university courses. The Prime Minister has learnt something from Senator Pauline Hanson, and made the election promise of a \$525 million skills package with 80 000 new apprenticeships. Boosting the skillset of the workforce through apprenticeships is an essential medium and long-term policy. We need immediate incentives to make living and working in remote areas more attractive to Western Australians and Australian citizens from across the nation.

My personal commitment, which is fully supported by my party, is to do whatever it takes to give girls and boys in remote communities genuine opportunities for rewarding careers through apprenticeships. To reach the necessary educational standards for acceptance into apprenticeships, young people in remote communities need to attend

school. They all need home environments in which they have facilities for study, can enjoy restful sleep, are safe, and receive nutrition and encouragement. This must be very high on our priority list. Western Australia has an appallingly high level of incarceration of Aboriginal youth. I invite everyone in this chamber to commit to putting Aboriginal youths into apprenticeships instead of into courts.

On the issue of jobs, the WA taxi industry is unfairly burdened with a 10 per cent levy. The levy should be abandoned.

On quotas and work permits, I demand that Australians be allowed to work in Australian companies in their own country. If quotas are needed, then we want quotas. Resources companies and all businesses that employ more than 30 people should have a requirement that not less than 90 per cent of their employees are Australian citizens. Quotas are not unusual. Federal Parliament, under section 44 of the Constitution, has a 100 per cent quota for Australian citizens as members of Parliament. That quota goes beyond citizenship to exclude persons who are merely entitled to foreign citizenship. Political parties talk about quotas for women in Parliament. The City of Fremantle has proposed a quota system for employment of Aboriginals, with a target of four per cent. In the resource industry in Western Australia, four per cent employment of Aboriginals is setting the bar far too low. The mining companies with which I am in contact are enthusiastic about employing locals, and, for much of the mining industry, remote Aboriginal communities are as local as they can get. The challenge is education and training.

On energy security, now is the time to encourage development of Western Australia's coal, including Muja south near Collie, the Duchess Paradise project east of Derby, and the Scaddan project north of Esperance. The WA state government should cease promoting unreliable energy. It should reject the advice of anti-coal ideologues who want Collie to die, in the pseudo-religious belief that unreliable energy can somehow magically power the state. The \$750 million Collgar wind farm, located on 18 000 hectares near Merredin, claims a power production capacity of 206 megawatts from 111 Vestas V90 windmills, at an average capital cost of \$6.76 million each. On 1 Feb 2019, at 4.00 pm, I flew over the Collgar wind farm. Not one of those 111 windmills was turning. On a day when the ambient temperature in Perth was approaching 40 degrees Celsius, the power contributed by the largest single-stage wind farm in the Southern Hemisphere towards cooling hospitals, offices, shops and homes was zero. The point is that all investment in unreliable energy must be replicated by a similar investment in backup reliable energy. That is the reason that everywhere in the world, any increase in unreliable energy automatically increases the cost of electricity to consumers. The future of electric vehicles will absolutely depend upon the availability of reliable energy.

Western Australians will welcome clean, safe nuclear energy. In a molten salt reactor, the salt, which is mixed in with the fuel, has a boiling point significantly higher than the temperature of the fuel. The reactor has a built-in thermostat that ensures that when the reactor starts to heat up, the salt expands, spreading out the fuel and slowing the reaction. In 2013, *MIT Technology Review* estimated a capital cost of \$US1.7 billion for a 500 megawatt MSR that could reliably and safely produce 4 161 million megawatt hours of energy a year. I call on the Premier to negotiate an end to the purposeless Barrow Island carbon sequestration project. All honourable members should also help prevent the expenditure of public funds on any aspect of the ill-advised fantasy project to sell to Indonesia and Vietnam unreliable electrical energy generated in Western Australia and delivered by an undersea cable.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Who is doing that?

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: The government.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: That is not a good way.

On awards, Western Australia is a mining, pastoral, agricultural, fishing and transportation state. We need to do more to honour the people who are achievers in the industries that create our prosperity. We have Golden Gecko Awards for Environmental Excellence, a Community Partnership Resources Sector Award and Work Health and Safety Excellence Awards. Although those awards should continue, I propose a slate of awards including, but not limited to, driller of the year, geologist of the year, shearer of the year, harvester of the year, lobster fisher of the year, trucker of the year, and underground miner of the year.

In conclusion, we want the Premier to stand up to Canberra and reject the totally unacceptable arrangement in which WA forfeits 30 per cent of its GST revenue so that the federal government can buy votes in the eastern states. We want the Premier to tell the Prime Minister that horizontal fiscal equalisation is finished. We want the Premier to demand the abolition of fringe benefits tax on housing for remote area workers. We want the Premier to tell the Prime Minister that remote area workers deserve zonal tax offsets of at least \$5 000—\$10 000 would be better. The voters of the Mining and Pastoral Region are the most important and most productive people in the state and do more for Western Australia than any others. I am proud to be the defender of my electorate in defeating the gold tax and supporting live exports. The voters of the Mining and Pastoral Region deserve the best.

There is a plot afoot to combine all three non-metropolitan regions into one region, so that three metropolitan regions and one non-metropolitan region would each have nine votes in this chamber. That plot would halve non-metropolitan representation in this chamber from 18 to nine. Shame on that! I have proposed measures for the benefit of the wonderful people of the Mining and Pastoral Region, and every one of those measures will benefit the whole of Western Australia and, indeed, the whole nation. Any political party that rejects my constructive proposals is directly attacking the living standards, health, longevity, prosperity and happiness of my constituents. The political parties that support my constructive proposals are friends of the Mining and Pastoral Region and of Western Australia. I invite all honourable members to be counted as friends.

This budget is all smoke and mirrors. The government puffs out its chest and tells the people of Laverton that they are getting \$4 million to plan for the new hospital. The Laverton community hub has already given \$4 million towards the hospital. Enough money has been included in the budget to seal four kilometres of the Meekatharra–Wiluna road. That will leave about 100 kilometres unsealed. Kalgoorlie still has to wait 30 months for the installation of an MRI machine. There is no mention of a desperately needed aged-care facility in Leonora. A huge windfall from GST and iron ore royalties has allowed the government to boast that good fiscal management has created a surplus, yet utility prices have still increased. The price of electricity has gone up 1.75 per cent and water has gone up 2.5 per cent. As for Metronet, or “metrodebt”, my grandkids’ children will still be paying for this folly!

Even though it is 2019, this budget is still in the Dark Ages. Even though we have artificial intelligence, autonomous equipment, information technology, and supercomputers, none of that has been used to come up with a decent budget. We are still allowing the government to look after its own instead of looking after the state of Western Australia.

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA) [12.13 pm]: It is always an interesting process to listen to members’ observations during budget-in-reply speeches. I could not disagree more with some of the comments made by Hon Robin Scott about the Mining and Pastoral Region. Australian immigrants, including my mother, have added to the prosperity of this state and to the region that I come from. Carnarvon is built on multiculturalism. I am exceptionally proud of it and welcome it, and there should be more of it. The member should stop living under the skirt of Pauline Hanson and get out to his electorate to try to understand what his electors are asking for. They are asking for designated area migration plans because the greatest struggle in regional development is the need for people. We need people to give energy to the regions and to grow the regional development agenda of our state. Pauline Hanson’s One Nation does not represent the Australia that I want to be part of, that I seek to represent and that I will continue to contribute to whilst living in an aspirational, engaging and encouraging society. It is an absolute disgrace that the member repeated the terrible comments of Pauline Hanson, a member of the federal Parliament. They are not in the spirit of Australia and they are not in the spirit of Australians. How dare the member suggest that immigrants are not welcome in Australia. His party is the only party dealing with any foreign investors in the National Rifle Association.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Robin Chapple): Members! Member, I remind you that if you address your comments through the Chair, you will not induce interjections.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: They are very stirring words that we all agree with.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Thank you, minister.

I suggest that Hon Robin Scott go out to the Mining and Pastoral Region so he can understand what he is talking about.

In response to the government’s budget, I have some concerns that I will raise in my contribution. I will also highlight some areas that have been worthwhile, particularly in the Mining and Pastoral Region and for royalties for regions. It will be of no surprise to members that I will talk about the regions, and royalties for regions, in particular. One of the first things I did today and over the past couple of weeks when researching my contribution to the budget in reply was to look at the comments I made in this space last year. My thoughts about the budget, reflecting on the comments I made last year, remain fairly similar to how I felt about the government’s priorities in regional areas at that time. On 26 June 2018, I stated —

... it is an incredible disappointment for the people of regional Western Australia. The only thing the McGowan Labor government is concerned with funding is Metronet, and it will do so, it would seem, at whatever cost. That cost is going to be felt deeply by the people of Western Australia, and more so the people of regional Western Australia, who are missing out as a result of that election commitment.

I am disappointed to see those words ring true again in relation to the royalties for regions fund, in particular. Once again, there is a massive commitment to the Metronet project in the metropolitan area. Yesterday during my contribution to the Infrastructure Western Australia Bill 2019, I commented that the government is seeking to prioritise state building projects. The Labor government certainly campaigned on Metronet in two elections. It is now in a position to develop that project and seek to have it funded through its budgets. I ask the government not to do that at the cost of regional areas in particular.

The government has received two quite massive and distinctive windfalls in one financial year and in its two years of delivering government. I would like to see the government consider its investment in regional opportunities and projects as a result of those windfalls. At the beginning of this term of government, the government was particularly focused on reducing debt and pulling funding from projects, particularly in regional areas. I will go through some of those projects during my contribution today. Now that the federal government has promised a GST floor and the price of iron ore has increased, I would suggest that the government has an opportunity to change its thinking about delivering funding to projects, particularly in regional areas. The government certainly will have an opportunity to do that, particularly when the budget is underspending in the royalties for regions program. Many valuable and valid regional projects are being championed by local communities, but the government is not listening. People are becoming increasingly frustrated about that. I suggest that when the executive meets, it should calibrate its thinking and admit that it is in a good situation. It will have paid down some debt because it has underspent in royalties for regions. It will have an increasing iron ore price and a floor in the GST. What a perfect storm to create some aspiration. I would like the government to use this opportunity to deliver some regional projects in particular.

All sides of government, all members of the Western Australian Parliament and some members of the federal Parliament have for a very long time talked about the need for a floor in the GST so that Western Australia could benefit from some equity in this space. However, I want to highlight the contribution of and congratulate Tony Crook, the former federal member for O'Connor, for his achievements in this space. In 2010, he was the first Western Australian member to move a motion on the floor of the federal Parliament seeking support for a floor in the GST. We have come a long way in nine years. We now are finally seeing that work come to fruition. These things take time. It takes governments time to make very big changes to the way they fund projects throughout Australia, particularly federally. Nine years is a long time for the people of Western Australia to wait. However, to start a conversation and highlight that issue nine years ago, which predicted a reduction to around 30 per cent of Western Australia's share of the GST, was very insightful.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: I think the debate started with Eric Ripper in 1997.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Yes; I said that many members have contributed over a long time to this issue.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Before we actually signed up to it, we said it was going to be a problem.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Yes.

For many years, many members were concerned about and working towards increasing Western Australia's GST share. I congratulate them for that work. In my first term in Parliament, I spoke about the GST issue so many times that it felt like I was on repeat. Many members did the same. That is how momentum for policy change is built. All members can take credit for the changes the federal government has now made, but I dare say that there are some members who championed the issue more than others. They were able to do that in consultation with their communities, state governments and the federal government. That is a great thing. Over the next three years, the GST windfall will be about \$4.5 billion to this government. Finally, the state of Western Australia will receive its fair share of GST—and about time, too. It will create opportunities for this government.

The price of iron ore today is about \$108 a tonne and is predicted to remain around that price. I go back to many contributions I have made about iron ore and royalties to government. Sam Walsh, the CEO of Rio Tinto at the time, made the comment that that company can thrive at \$35 a tonne, so \$108 a tonne is an absolutely thriving, booming business. That is a great thing and I fully support it, but I suggest that the government's role in that space becomes even more important. The government has to ensure, on behalf of the people of Western Australia, that we get a fair share of the return on that finite asset. That is why I still believe the government needs to pursue a fair share of the return on iron ore—a finite asset that is saleable by our mining companies—so that it can continue to invest for all the people employed by those industries, who expect the government to deliver education and health services. State governments cannot do that on their own, particularly when the budgets of the bigger mining companies such as BHP and Rio Tinto are bigger than the government's. The government really is scrutinised for its capacity to ensure fair and equitable delivery for the people of Western Australia. The people of Western Australia expect that. If the government determines to take a different policy direction from the one I believe in, such as increasing the special lease rental, which is one way to do that, then I am happy with that, but the government should bring it to the table. That would allow the government to have more flexibility in this decision-making and would ensure that in 50 years' time, we do not look back at this time of booming iron ore prices and say that we should have ensured we got more bang for our buck. I do not think that continuing to operate under state agreements struck in the 1960s is a fair and equitable way of doing that. I do not buy the sovereign risk argument presented by those companies during the 2017 election campaign.

Hon Alison Xamon: Hear, hear!

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I thank the member.

I do not buy that argument, especially when Premier Mark McGowan himself created a sovereign risk in the conversation around Mineralogy Pty Ltd because he took a personal affront to something that Clive Palmer put in a TV advertisement. If that is the way the state is going to be governed—that is, by the Premier personally responding to an advertisement that a political party put on TV and to which he has taken affront—I say, grow up, Premier. The Premier is going to be scrutinised in this environment. I expect the Premier to make bigger decisions than that. He should be better than that.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members!

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I suggest that that creates sovereign risk for no reason other than that the Premier took personal affront to what was said. I say that the Premier should be better than that, look at the industry as a whole and make some positive changes in the state agreements space. He should not get all snipey because he feels unhappy about what Clive Palmer said. I think Western Australians expect better of the Premier than that.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: What do you think we should do?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I have said what I think the government should do. I think it should review state agreements, but it should not focus on Mineralogy's state agreement because it feels unhappy about it.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members!

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: We have said that for a long time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members, this is a reply to the estimates of revenue and expenditure. If the member keeps talking to me, I am sure there will not be so many interjections.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Thank you, Mr Acting President.

I will move on. We have also seen the sale of Property Exchange Australia Ltd, which I think gave the government about \$185 million. Unfortunately, all that money was funnelled into the Metronet project and to the paying down of debt; none of it went anywhere else. At the time of the sale of PEXA, projects such as Laverton Hospital, which is screaming out for funding, were not funded when there was an opportunity to do so. We have seen a continued ultraconservative approach by the Treasurer, in particular, to those windfalls that the government has managed to gain. It has consistently refused to make decisions to reinvest into any of these sorely needed projects, particularly in the regions. The royalties for regions program has been targeted and eroded, and its funds have been underspent. There is a refusal by this government to reinvest in any regional projects.

I would like to put on the record, as I did yesterday, that the Nationals WA are in support of infrastructure projects for this state. From 2008 to 2013, the Liberal–National government drove many infrastructure projects for the state of Western Australia. That is a great thing—the government should take advantage of opportunities when they are presented. This Labor government is in a position to take some opportunity from the windfalls that have come its way, and I would like to see more of that. We have seen an erosion of funding for schools, hospitals, aged-care centres, regional family centres and community resource centres, particularly in regional areas. This erosion has occurred in not only the royalties for regions budget, but also the government's overall budget. The Nationals have worked very hard in opposition to highlight some of the areas that have been and continue to be of concern to regional communities, and I will highlight some of those. Funding for community resource centres and Schools of the Air is under threat by the Labor McGowan government. Programs such as the boarding away from home allowance have had the royalties for regions component cut by the Labor McGowan government, which reduces the opportunity for regional families to choose to educate their children in the way that they see fit. Members of the opposition and the crossbench in this Parliament have had to fight hard on those issues. We have seen the government backflip on those decisions and reinstate funding to those really vital projects in regional areas, except for the boarding away from home allowance. That is keenly felt by families in regional communities, because they lack the opportunities and choice available to people in the metropolitan region. That continues to be a thorn in the side of regional families.

As I briefly mentioned, there was an underspend of \$319 million in the royalties for regions program across the 2018–19 period. I want to put this into some perspective. Over the same period as that underspend, the government, knowing that regional hospitals and schools are in states of disrepair across the state, has made the decision to underspend on the royalties for regions program. That has directly affected the aspirational opportunities of those communities. The Carnarvon aged-care facility is now funded. I am very happy about that, and I will talk about that a little later. Newman Hospital is still not funded, nor is Meekatharra Hospital. I already spoke about the boarding away from home allowance. The water police in Karratha, Schools of the Air and camp schools have all been affected. The regional grant scheme has disappeared. The capacity for regional development commissions to work with their grassroots communities has disappeared, and people are really feeling the effects of that. They want to know how they can engage with government. They had previously done that through the regional

development commissions, but they are not doing that now. How do they engage with their government if the government is not listening on those projects?

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: What sort of projects are you talking about? Why wouldn't they come under the regional economic development grants?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I have just been through them, but the minister was not listening. For those who were not listening, I will highlight where there was an underspend of \$319 million.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members, can we keep the chatter down, please?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Thank you, Mr Acting President.

While there was a deliberate decision to underspend the royalties for regions program by \$319 million—I have highlighted some of the projects I am talking about, and they are just some of them—the McGowan government has continually told us that it is unable to afford those projects in regional areas, knowing that it was underspending the royalties for regions program. I find that disappointing.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Your spending rate was less than ours.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: That underspend is a fact, minister. I find that disappointing. I want the government to focus more on the royalties for regions program and provide opportunities for regional communities, as we did in the Liberal–National government. We had the opportunity to do it, and it was a priority of our government to deliver on that program. I am exceptionally proud that we did that when we had the opportunity.

The government surplus that the Treasurer talked about in the budget in May is something he has set about doing since he came to government. That is what the Treasurer should do; I have no problem with that. But I remind members that the surplus is built on the correction of the GST, a spike in iron ore prices and the erosion and underspend of the royalties for regions program. The underspend and the cost shifting in that program have allowed the government to utilise that funding in other areas. I suggest that the government needs to consider using the royalties for regions program to bring back some equity for regional communities, as it was originally designed to do.

I have said before that I do not believe the McGowan government has a prioritised regional development agenda. The proof of that is in the actions of the government. In my contribution to the budget debate of 2019, I will continue to say that that continues to flow through on the government's priority agenda. There is not a clear regional development agenda. The Treasurer in his budget speech said —

... the McGowan Labor Government remains committed to investing in regional Western Australia, with the Royalties for Regions Program totalling \$4.2 billion over the next four years.

That is what the Treasurer said in his budget speech, but we continue to see decisions made by this government that contradict that statement. As in anything, the government can make a statement, but it must follow it up with action and prove that it believes that the regions in Western Australia are worth investing in. There is no point just saying it; government must actually follow through. When we continue to see schools and hospitals in a state of disrepair in regional areas, that statement is not being backed up. The travels Nationals WA members have done through the regions in Western Australia over the last 18 months have shown us firsthand, through community engagement forums and community feedback, how projects need to find space and priority in the McGowan government's regional development agenda.

It is still not clear. We have seen this firsthand. I and other members have raised the issue of Hedland Senior High School and a number of articles have been written about it. Hedland Senior High School is one of many schools that require more government assistance, but this school in particular has been a burning issue in the Port Hedland community, which has a number of other issues to face as well. If we can get essential services right in delivering school services to the kids of Port Hedland, that is the starting point, and I do not think that is too much to ask for. An article published in *The West Australian* of 25 January 2019 highlights some of the drastic conditions at Hedland Senior High School. I might add that the high school is in the centre of the Pilbara —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Robin Chapple): Members, I am listening intently to the contribution of Hon Jacqui Boydell, but I am finding it difficult to hear.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Thank you, Mr Acting President. There are challenges at Hedland Senior High School. Teachers are carrying around hammers to complete maintenance as they walk around the school, the toilet blocks are dilapidated, the gymnasium floor is not safe to use and there is no shade or amenity in the school grounds. In Port Hedland, it can be 47 degrees in the middle of summer, so no-one in their right mind would want to sit in the school playground and have their lunch when there are no shade areas. The principal highlighted these

issues. He went to the media after two years of frustration in trying to deal with the government to get some assistance to bring the school back to some sort of level playing field so that the kids could be in a supportive and aspirational learning environment. That is not too much to ask. The principal had to go to the media to try to negotiate an outcome with government.

I think the government gave the school \$500 000, which is a drop in the ocean. I am pleased to see further funding for Hedland Senior High School in this budget. I do not think it will be enough; the school probably needs a complete rebuild. I hope that is a priority of the Minister for Education and Training, and Leader of the House, who is out of the chamber on urgent parliamentary business. I know that the minister is aware of this issue and is trying to work with the school to address some of its concerns. That is good and I am glad that she is doing that. However, on 25 January 2019, the principal of the school felt that his only option in dealing with this government was to go to the media. Off his own bat, he took that step to speak to the media. No members of Parliament that I know of, particularly from the National Party, suggested that he should do that. Principals do not want to deal with the media when they are complaining about their services funded by the government because they are sensitive to the negativity around that. Also, the kids in that school are often placed in difficult circumstances and they require government support. They want to continue to learn and their learning environment is as important as the learning environment will be at the new Bob Hawke College. I suggest that if we can afford to build that school, we can afford to put some funding towards Hedland Senior High School.

How we develop aspiration and regional development for those communities in the Pilbara is a complex issue. However, that is where the asset is; it is where all the mining takes place. It cannot be moved. The mining companies cannot take their business anywhere else. The asset is in the ground in the Pilbara. That is where the jobs are, but over many, many years, mining companies have been allowed to say that nobody wants to live in Newman or Port Hedland so they will let everyone fly in, fly out and build a big dormitory in the middle of Newman and suggest that that is okay. However, it is not okay because the result of that is seen through the struggles the Newman community is facing today. I was in Newman in April with Hon Mia Davies, the Leader of the Nationals WA. She came with me to Newman to understand some of the issues there. It is confronting to see. BHP's Kurra Village is in the middle of Newman. When Terry Redman was Minister for Local Government; Regional Development; Lands, he refused to re-sign the lease in an attempt to bring about a residential workforce. BHP has dodged that issue a little and taken over a lease at the caravan park at the other end of town. It has said that it no longer has a work camp in Newman, although the workforce is living at the caravan park when 200-odd houses in the middle of town are boarded up and, consequently, causing havoc in the community of Newman. About 150 of them are department of housing houses, so the state government has a role to play in ensuring that some stability comes back to the community of Newman.

I highlight that because when we continue to allow transient work camps in our regional centres, they end up being a massive dormitory. There is no community spirit, and education services, police services, nursing services and the local Aboriginal population find it very difficult to come together as a community. The community is underpinned by a transient workforce that has no involvement in the community whatsoever through after-hours activities and PCYC activities that help grow a living, cultural town. None of those things exist in Newman. I have to say that the police are doing an amazing job, as is the school, in trying to work with what they have. Nonetheless, they are facing a very serious situation in which there are a number of empty department of housing and BHP houses. A group of kids is camping out in the houses and destroying them, and people feel unsafe in their streets. That does not encourage anyone to want to live in Newman. From driving down the streets of certain parts of Newman, I can understand why people do not want to live there, I really can.

The government's role in that should be to force companies that mine at the base of a town, as in Newman, to have a residentially based workforce. It is recognised that FIFO will always, of course, be necessary for geographically isolated mine sites. Within the mining industry, FIFO is necessary also for short-term jobs over shutdown periods, due to the nature of work, particularly in a geological sense, and for executives who need to fly in and fly out. However, cleaners, truck drivers and maintenance operators can all be accommodated in Newman. The houses are there. Even today, some of BHP's workforce live in caravans in the caravan park when there are 200 empty houses in the middle of Newman. That destroys the town, it does not grow it. Again, the role of government in that space is to have some hard conversations with BHP—in the case of Newman—and to say that this is not acceptable. I know that BHP in Newman has committed to a new drive in, drive out-style operation, but the quote from BHP at the time, if I recall correctly, was that the process of going to DIDO was "organic". I can tell members that nothing BHP does is organic. It has probably been planned to within an inch of its life, five years out, so I question BHP's commitment to transferring to a DIDO workforce in Newman. I can tell members that it would make such an aspirational change to Newman, and I urge the government to continue to have those conversations with BHP to ensure the community has its backing, because it really needs it. That is the reality of living in Newman today.

During the time of the Liberal-National government, the royalties for regions program delivered opportunities for those who chose to live with their families and work in regional communities. It was an unprecedented period of

regional development in Western Australia. I do not think anyone can deny that. Now the pendulum is slowly swinging back the other way, and I fear we are moving back to the days prior to the royalties for regions program, even though that program is enshrined in legislation. People living in regional areas are being forced to make the best of a bad lot. Their hospitals and schools are falling down and there is a lack of opportunities for not-for-profit groups. It is time for the Labor government to stand up for those in regional communities, and I will not take a backward step in saying that.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Jacqui Boydell, keep addressing the Chair and that will be fine.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Thank you, Mr Acting President.

It is not just me saying this. I refer to an article that appeared in today's *Countryman* by the very perspicuous Mr Trevor Whittington. The article states —

A frank discussion about how to encourage more regional businesses to take on apprentices and what is needed to stop the education brain drain of skilled staff from the regions to Perth in search of better schooling opportunities for their high school-aged kids is critical.

I agree with that. The article continues —

It is well known that the students who are most likely to pursue a career in agriculture and accept the challenges of living in the bush are those born, bred and complete their schooling in the bush.

The previous government had half a crack at addressing the problem investing billions of dollars of Royalties for Regions funds into rebuilding regional towns, which was important in making these communities competitive with a growing and glamorous Perth but failed to stop the brain drain.

The challenge now is for this government to work out what it plans to do to not just convince today's kids that there is an exciting future in agriculture, but that living in the bush will not see them miss out on government services and opportunities for their own children.

That is a reality. He goes on to say —

Unfortunately, once a graduate comes out of three, four or five years of training having lived under the bright city lights, then few roads are attractive enough to lead them back to the bush.

One way of tackling the problem is to address the quality of schooling and technical training.

What we need is to target the super towns ...

I thought SuperTowns was dead and buried. The previous Liberal–National government was very proud of its SuperTowns project. We are saying that we need to target SuperTowns and upgrade school buildings and residential hostels. I agree with that, except the problem is that the McGowan government is closing residential colleges. That is its intent. Due to the actions of the opposition, the National Party and the crossbench in this house, and the federal government, that did not happen. There are still challenges in that space. I absolutely do not deny that, but the government should rectify that situation not by cutting funding from residential colleges and schools in regional communities when it is highly needed. Diversifying the educational opportunities for kids through training lies in the regions to encourage people to stay there, so those services have to be built. This government has shown a propensity to do otherwise. I believe in the aspiration that Trevor Whittington put in the *Countryman* today, but I say to him that the problem of delivering on that aspiration lies with the McGowan government.

Also, we have seen firsthand the dilapidated state of Laverton Hospital. It has been much talked about in this chamber and many questions have been asked about it. The previous Liberal–National government allocated \$19.5 million to Laverton Hospital. Upon coming to power in 2017, the McGowan government saw fit to strip away that funding, leaving Laverton Hospital with no solution for its foreseeable future. It then became a political football, even in the federal election space. I was pleased to hear during the federal election campaign that the coalition government will commit around \$16 million to Laverton Hospital. It is much needed and much deserved. The hospital services not just the town of Laverton, but also the community surrounding Laverton. Babies are not delivered at Laverton Hospital, but about a month ago a baby was delivered at 32 weeks at Laverton Hospital. The baby survived because of the diligence of the staff, the telehealth service, which is funded by royalties for regions, and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which has some jets that are funded by royalties for regions. The baby survived due to the quick actions of the staff. That hospital has literally no services, and for a baby to survive after being delivered at 32 weeks is a credit to the people who were involved in the delivery. Hopefully, Laverton has an answer for its hospital. I look forward to that funding being delivered by the Scott Morrison government as it works with the Laverton community going forward.

I would also like to remind members that under the Liberal–National government from 2008 to 2013, we had a statewide regional development agenda. We fought exceptionally hard every day in cabinet to deliver on that agenda. Investment levels in certain areas did not hinge upon the political leanings of the towns and regions and members of the executive government. We invested fairly, and that can be seen through the investment we made across the state through the royalties for regions program. It was not like the Local Projects, Local Jobs program, which has delivered very dubiously in Labor-held seats. Many questions have been asked in this house and in the media about the delivery of that very political leaning program. This government still has not been able to answer questions about how the Local Projects, Local Jobs program was delivered and whether there was scrutiny around spending. I would like the special inquirer to inquire into Local Projects, Local Jobs. I think he has an innate capacity to tell government how it should spend its money. I would encourage the special inquirer to meet with the Premier and say, “Premier, I’ll be happy to put some scrutiny over the Local Projects, Local Jobs program.”

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: As I said before the lunchbreak, I welcome the special inquirer’s scrutiny of the McGowan Labor government’s Local Projects, Local Jobs initiative. I am interested in the opinions on whether business cases were written up, whether cabinet made decisions, how that funding was allocated—was it or was it not a grant?—and who received it. All those details seem to have eluded the Legislative Council despite two years of questioning about that program. It is my belief and that of my National Party colleagues that regional communities deserve the equitable services and infrastructure that those who live in the metropolitan area receive. It is incumbent upon the government of the day to make a plan to ensure that that equity is delivered through the funding of its infrastructure projects. It does not happen by osmosis; a very clear plan is required. Every single day that plan has to be enacted to build sustainable regional communities and to diversify the economy within those communities. The opportunity is there and waiting, but government support is needed to enable that to happen. I do not think we have seen the McGowan government put forward a clear plan that supports regional communities and allows that to continue to happen.

I refer to page 206 of the 2019–20 budget paper No 2, volume 1, which states —

Regional Western Australia and primary industries are key drivers of the State’s economy; the regionally based resources sector delivers 80% of Western Australia’s traded economy, with food and fibre the next largest export earners.

It is great to see written in the budget papers that the government recognises the financial benefits of those regional communities and what they bring to the state of Western Australia and the nation as a whole. However, we have not yet seen a vision that commits to that statement, unlike the one given under the previous Liberal–National government. I would like to see one before the next election in 2021. We need that commitment to build on a vision, to build those communities and to invest in their capacity, because there is great capacity in regional communities. The plan, which is repeated in the McGowan government’s third budget, is to fund Metronet at any cost. We have seen \$4.3 billion allocated to the Metronet program. The government is spending more on that one metropolitan project than on the entire royalties for regions program for the rest of the state of Western Australia. I do not have to say what the agenda of the McGowan government is because that is clear in its actions. Over and above any other government program, its priority is to fund Metronet. Regional communities are left to flounder and wonder how to get their message across to the McGowan government.

In successive budgets of the McGowan government, we have seen a cost-shift to and an underspend of the royalties for regions program. In the 2019–20 state budget, \$4.2 billion has been allocated to the royalties for regions program. However, the execution of the program has deviated from the initial intent. That is clear in the budget papers. It is the view of the Nationals WA that the royalties for regions program is now just a shell of its former self. I recall Mark McGowan saying in the 2013 state election campaign that royalties for regions was dead. It was not dead when the Liberal–National government was in power. That government fully forged ahead on its commitment to regional communities and laid out a plan in its budgets. I can confirm that the now Premier’s comments from 2013 are now true. The former format of royalties for regions is dead, and that has happened with him as the Premier of this government. It has become a more structured and targeted program, and essential services are now funded from it. Royalties for regions is now just an accounting line item for Treasury, the Treasurer and the executive of this government to cost-shift essential services of government into. Projects such as Meekatharra Hospital, which was previously funded under the royalties for regions program, languishes in disrepair while the McGowan government continues to cost-shift essential services into the royalties for regions program.

On 3 May this year, I attended the “Cue Parliament” with other members of the Mining and Pastoral Region. I acknowledge that Hon Robin Scott, Hon Kyle McGinn, Hon Ken Baston and Hon Mia Davies were in attendance. For members who are not aware, the “Cue Parliament” is a meeting of the area’s local governments. The Shires of Murchison, Meekatharra, Mount Magnet and Cue, which is the host, come together to discuss the prioritisation of ongoing projects in the region and how to engage with government. The overwhelming sentiment of those at

the “Cue Parliament” was that the state government is not interested in engaging with them. Their paramount feeling was a mounting level of discontent and frustration.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Martin Aldridge): Order, members! When the interjections become a loud roar, I will interrupt debate and ask for them to be constrained. Hon Jacqui Boydell has the call. I would like to be able to hear her in relative silence.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: The overwhelming sentiment at the “Cue Parliament” was that the state government is not interested in engaging with the mounting levels of investment these areas need to maintain functionality.

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: The honourable member should get up and make a contribution. He can make a contribution to the budget debate himself. If he wants to make a contribution, he should get up and do it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members! You will get your chance to make a contribution when Hon Jacqui Boydell has finished hers. She is on her feet and I want to hear her. The interjections will cease.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: The latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that all the Mid West Development Commission towns, with the exception of Geraldton, have gone backwards in population. If the royalties for regions program was being executed according to its original intent to expand opportunities, attain sustainability and grow prosperity for regional communities, the picture presented at the “Cue Parliament” might have been different. Regional communities deserve a level of investment that will inspire hope. However, they are being ignored by this government.

The government is continuing to use the royalties for regions program to prop up essential services of government, such as technical and further education subsidies, to the value of \$180 million, the employment of regional education assistants, to the value of \$35.2 million, and regional water subsidies, to the value of \$1.1 billion. Of course those services are essential. However, the royalties for regions program should not be about propping up the state government’s budget so that it can allocate funding to the delivery of unfunded election commitments. That is not what the program is there for. As a result of that cost-shifting, regional communities are suffering.

In addition to cost-shifting, there has been an underspend of \$319 million. I touched on that earlier in my contribution. I believe that underspend is being used to pay down debt. At the same time as regional communities are trying to engage with government and promote mining, agricultural and pastoral opportunities, the government is choosing to not only cost-shift, but also underspend on much-needed projects to drive a regional development agenda. If that trend continues over the forward estimates, just over \$900 million that had been quarantined to be invested in regional communities through the royalties for regions program will be used for a purpose for which it should not be used—that is, delivering essential services. The McGowan government has no strategic or cohesive vision for the development of regional Western Australia.

I now move to job creation. I refer to a press release dated Thursday, 9 May 2019, in which the Premier states —

More than 37,000 Western Australian jobs have been created since the 2017 State Election.

I find that quote very interesting. It is a curious juxtaposition. How can the government claim that it has created more than 37 000 jobs when, in the 12 months from January 2018 to January 2019, the average unemployment rate in Western Australia increased to over 6.3 per cent? That is four per cent higher than the national average. The unemployment rate in Western Australia is the highest in the nation. If we do not challenge statements such as that, they will continue to be printed and go unheeded. To add fuel to the fire, the underemployment rate is also increasing. Another concern is the increasing casualisation of the workforce, particularly in the mining industry. That creates a diabolical situation for young families who are trying to buy a house, invest for the future, plan for their child’s educational needs, or plan for another child, because it does not enable them to get a bank loan. The government should play a role and deal with the mining industry, in particular, about the casualisation of its workforce, because it is limiting the opportunities for young families in Western Australia. I question the government’s plan to create any jobs in the regions. I refer again to the Premier’s press release, which states —

The State Budget includes a number of initiatives to build on this positive start to continue to create jobs and support WA’s economy, including:

- \$12 million in new funding for international destination marketing;
- \$10 million for international aviation development to secure more direct flights to Perth;
- \$4.5 million to implement the StudyPerth International Education Plan;
- More than \$22 million for the creation and ongoing management of national parks, marine parks and conservation reserves ...

The Treasurer, Mr Wyatt, has been quoted as saying that these programs are expected to create over 5 000 jobs. I question the validity of that number. I am very interested in how Treasury has arrived at that number. Has that number been plucked out of thin air? Is it an aspirational target or is it based on future predictions?

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2017–18 annual report states that it has 293 employees. The government would have us believe that those initiatives I have just listed will create employment for the equivalent of 17 times the number of people who work in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I question how the government plans to achieve that target. In practical terms, 5 000 jobs is a very large number. I am absolutely in awe of Mark McGowan's plan to create 150 000 new jobs by 2023–24. I am glad we have that figure on paper because it is a great key performance indicator. It is a wonderful KPI to judge this government's performance on its plan for jobs. I thank the Premier for that KPI.

How were those figures brought together? Are they full-time jobs? Are they part-time jobs? Are they casual jobs? Where will they be situated? Are they government jobs? There is no clarity around where those jobs are coming from, yet there will be 150 000 of them! It is a bizarre set of numbers.

It is stated on page 191 of the *Budget Statements* that the tourism industry supports more than 104 000 jobs. In less than three years, the government plans to create more jobs than the entire state's \$10 billion tourism industry, which has taken decades to build. I do not get that. I will be happy to hear any response the Premier has to that because I would like to understand his vision. That is the point of me asking: how will this government deliver that vision?

Hon Jim Chown: Call it Dave Kelly's fault!

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: We will see that, honourable member, when 2023–24 comes around, and there will be a couple of annual markers in there, I am sure, to see whether we are on track.

In creating jobs, I will talk about diversifying the economy. Although I welcome the \$12 million statewide investment in tourism, I want to highlight some of the areas that are lacking in the government's plan for tourism. To me, it seems very focused on the Perth metropolitan area and some firm favourites in regional areas, not on all Western Australians. When in government, the government does not get to pick favourites; it gets to put a state strategy together for all tourism operators to benefit from. Instead, there have been recent announcements in the media about subsidised airfares to Broome and Exmouth. They are already well-marketed tourism destinations. I am happy that those communities will benefit from that, but I would like to see how the government intends to support tourism operators in Carnarvon, Karratha, Port Hedland, Kununurra and Mt Augustus, and on the Outback Way and the Warlu Way.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members! When the Acting President is speaking, other members will stop speaking.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: The government's plan for tourism and the "Welcome to the Road Trip State" brochure map does not refer to any of those communities in the Mining and Pastoral Region. It does not refer to the midwest, Gascoyne, Pilbara or goldfields. Western Australia is a big state; it is not just the tourism destinations of Broome and Exmouth. Regional areas are able to diversify their economies through tourism. Tourism operators are screaming out for government support. They want the government to please put them on the road trip map. The government should not get to fast-track its favourites. In talking about fast-tracking favourites, I refer to a media release dated 12 May in which the Minister for Tourism stated —

Proposals for innovative tourist attractions which have the potential to generate hundreds of jobs could be eligible for State Government help to navigate various approval processes.

What does that mean? Does it mean that a tourism operator who in the tourism minister's opinion has an innovative tourism attraction will be given help to fast-track through the approvals process? Really? I do not think Western Australians expect the government to fast-track the approvals processes to favour one operator over another. That is not accepted practice of government. It would be dangerous for the minister to fast-track favourites or to suggest that he could do so. If the minister is not told of the potential for tourism opportunities in Karratha, for example, how will projects in Karratha get to be fast-tracked? I suggest that the minister should be very careful about the way in which he continues to operate the tourism portfolio. Regional communities want tourism opportunities to be developed in their towns and outlying areas. They cannot do that if the minister is going to fast-track his favourites.

I now move to the health portfolio. Late last year, I was very pleased to attend the opening of the Karratha Health Campus. It is a world-class and outstanding facility. All members who were there, including the Premier; the Minister for Health, Hon Roger Cook; and the member for Pilbara, Kevin Michel, applauded the Karratha Health

Campus and said how fantastic it is. I know that the community of Karratha is very grateful to have that world-class facility in their town and servicing the region. It is a phenomenal facility and it brings vibrancy to the town. I know that the community of Karratha is very supportive of the staff who work there. However, the sentiment that this is a wonderful facility in Karratha, which is a fantastic thriving community, is slowly being worn away. There is too much pressure on staff due to understaffing and being overworked. I have spoken to one doctor who came to work at the Karratha Health Campus in January this year because of the lifestyle opportunities and the vibrancy and cultural diversity that Karratha, as a regional city, could offer them and their family. They came on the understanding that government housing would be provided. The government did not provide suitable housing, and for five months, that doctor ended up sharing a bed with their 11-year-old. The doctor was doing shift and rotational work and was under enormous pressure at a hospital, coping with patients coming through at a rate far outweighing staff planning procedures. It has been very difficult to sustain that doctor in that community who, I will say, was trained in WA and graduated with honours. We do not just need any doctors in regional communities; we need good doctors. We want people like this doctor to stay. It makes it very difficult for them to stay in a city like Karratha when they have to share a bed with their 11-year-old son for five months because the government cannot house them properly. The capacity for this government to continue to retain and attract providers of essential services such as doctors in our communities remains questionable when things like that are happening in Karratha, which is a vibrant regional city. Also, it was the doctor's understanding that the funding for staffing allocated to Karratha Health Campus allowed for an average of 40 patients a day to come through the Karratha Health Campus, but currently 70 patients a day are being seen. I do not think that is unusual, even for some metropolitan hospitals, but health services need some integration with government in order for them to be delivered in a timely manner and to take the pressure off staff who are seeing almost double the quota of patients they have been allocated for. That is particularly true in regional communities where incentives are needed to attract and retain doctors. I do not want those conditions to continue for doctors in our regional communities. If they are suffering those sorts of things in a regional community such as Karratha, there will be a doubling down of pressure on them in the smaller towns. I hope the Minister for Health continues to work on that. I know he is very conscientious in the delivery of regional health and I have had many conversations with him about that. I want to see that as a higher priority for government.

In reading the budget, it was very interesting to note that BHP will be the recipient of the latest round of the state government's exploration incentive scheme grant. On the one hand, the government is pursuing BHP for allegedly—I say allegedly—short-changing the state to the tune of \$300 million, while on the other hand BHP is on the receiving end of taxpayer money in the form of an exploration incentive scheme. It is interesting that the now Minister for Mines and Petroleum, Hon Bill Johnston, criticised the exploration incentive scheme back in 2013 after Fortescue Metals Group and Hancock Prospecting received funding through the scheme. He was quoted in *The Sunday Times* of 19 May 2013 as saying —

“Surely the Barnett Government would give priority with the exploration incentive scheme to WA junior mining companies rather than multi-billion major companies.”

What is Mr Johnston, as the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, doing about that, in particular when BHP is in a legal stoush with the government over an alleged underspend of \$300 million, but at the same time the government is giving BHP taxpayer dollars that it does not need, which junior miners are potentially missing out on? The exploration incentive scheme is there to help deliver opportunities to junior miners to further expand their businesses. I find that bizarre. Although Minister Bill Johnston was highly critical in opposition, he is doing exactly the same thing in government, and should be called out for his hypocrisy. I find it an oddly bizarre situation that the government is choosing to support BHP while at the same time pursuing unpaid royalties. It should not hide behind the suggestion that it is pursuing BHP for taxpayer royalties while simultaneously funding BHP to expand its business. As I said in my contribution earlier today, we must ensure that government provides the people of Western Australia with an opportunity to benefit from those finite resources and that it reviews the state agreements. From the perspective of the Department of Treasury and the Premier, the government has decided to pursue BHP for \$300 million, while the other arm of government is giving it money. It is an incredibly bizarre situation.

In closing, I will return to the issue of funding. I have already acknowledged the funding that has been allocated to the Carnarvon aged-care facility, and I look forward to that facility becoming a reality. I acknowledge the angst in the community around the delivery of that facility. I think it has been unfair for the people of Carnarvon to have to go through this push-and-pull situation, not knowing when their aged-care services were going to be provided or from which facility. Indeed, when the Minister for Health rang me the night before the budget was delivered and told me that it was going to be funded, I cried. I thought it was fantastic and I was exceptionally relieved. I credit the Minister for Health and the government for funding that much-needed facility—he has done a great job with it.

We need to acknowledge and welcome the \$1.3 million for construction of the renal health unit at Newman Hospital. That hospital provides services to the outlying regions, not just the community of Newman, and this new unit will allow people who need ongoing support to be treated closer to home. The \$310 million allocated for the construction of the Tom Price–Karratha road is also much needed, and will allow for a drive in, drive out workforce potentially to be developed. That is a good thing. It is an important project and I am glad to see it funded.

The budget surplus comes at the cost of regional living standards and the sustainability of our regional communities. I say that because of the cost shift of the royalties for regions fund. The underspend in that fund highlights the lack of prioritisation that the McGowan government has given to regional development. This government has had some major windfalls in the first two years of its term. It could have chosen to continue the regional investment strategy that the Liberal–National government started. However, it has chosen to use those windfalls to pay down debt and to pay for Metronet at the expense of regional communities, where people are crying out for funds for major infrastructure such as hospitals and schools. The McGowan government's budget has cemented in the minds of regional people where its priorities lie.

The National Party is the only party in this Parliament that represents regional communities. We need to keep standing up and fighting to ensure that our regional communities can expect to have facilities similar to those in the Perth metropolitan area. That is at the heart of what the Nationals are about and is the hallmark of what we do. People in our regions need a strong voice at the decision-making tables of government, which they clearly do not have in the McGowan government. The National Party will continue to highlight what we think and know that our regions need, and fight to ensure that they receive it.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [2.34 pm]: The tabled papers certainly should be noted. We are seeing the third year of a government that was elected in March 2017. I want to give the government some feedback on its performance so far. I know that members opposite would appreciate it very much, or they ought to, because some difficult signs are now becoming manifest. The government has been in long enough to set its course, and we are being shown that that course is not a very good one at all. The government's catalogue of achievements is wafer thin, and people are rapidly becoming aware of its shortcomings.

Just the other day we enjoyed a brilliant speech by the Leader of the Opposition. He gave us many examples of Western Australian Labor, or the McGowan Labor government, as members opposite like to call themselves, overreaching itself and, quite frankly, being wrong, and exhibiting an unseemly overconfidence that will ultimately be its undoing. Hon Peter Collier referred to members opposite attaching themselves too firmly to the McGowan brand, and pointed out a number of occasions on which, having done so—in Darling Range and in the course of the federal election campaign and so on—it had not gone down too well. Perhaps members opposite need to begin to understand that they do not have the world-beater as their figurehead, and that he was elected in March 2017 not because he was brilliant and the people loved him, but because the people were sick of the previous incumbent.

Perhaps we can compare that with some of the actions we saw prior to that election, when certain Labor Party heavyweights, such as John Halden and Stephen Smith, participated in a quite bizarre exercise to do with the Labor leadership. I look forward to the day when the full story will be told about that series of incidents. I think we will all be surprised when we find out what actually happened there. I have my theories, but we will find out in due course. Members opposite are starting to find out that their Messiah is no such thing, and that all the spin doctoring that has been built up around that person, whom they have been enthusiastic to support, is an illusion. I suspect that they will not know what to do, and already we are seeing that.

I recall standing in this place years ago and observing of the Carpenter government the same things that I am seeing now. The way I described it at the time was that, normally when a government is swept to power, it has its mandate, its program and a fresh approach, and comes into office with its sleeves rolled up to get on with things. First of all, there is a honeymoon period, but then when the government gets down to business there is a period of flowering, in which things actually get done—programs are put in place, and so on. Then, of course, all governments, no matter who they are, get a bit tired. Perhaps they become complacent, and they run out of ideas and fresh initiatives. I think I saw that happen with the Court government in 2000. It got tired. Inevitably, the longer governments go on, they attract hubris—John Howard called it barnacles that need to be scraped off. Governments acquire those sorts of retardants and, ultimately, their day is done. I noticed something quite remarkable about the Carpenter government; that is, it went from its period of election, with a strong return, to its period of decay almost immediately, with no intervening period of positive things happening for the state.

Hon Jim Chown interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That government just troughed.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: The opening of the Mandurah rail line—I seem to remember that happening at that time.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I am glad someone has perked up, because I am reminded of an expression that went around at the time: name three things the Carpenter government has achieved. People would say, "Let's see, there was the Mandurah railway." Of course, that started off as a Liberal–National project.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: But you guys opposed it. Paul Omodei opposed it.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: We opposed —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Martin Aldridge): Order! Minister, this is not your speech; this is Hon Simon O'Brien's speech.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: He enjoys the interjections.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I do not.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: This is a place of work and there will be no enjoying oneself, apparently.

Hypothetically, if I were for a moment to entertain the interjection, I would point out that the response to that question was, "Oh, what have we done? We've completed the railway." On a good day, they would also perk up and say, "There's the desal plant." What else? I asked for three things. No-one can come up with anything else.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: The Tonkin Highway extension! Roe Highway stage 4! Roe Highway stage 5! Roe Highway stage 6!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, minister! I think I have just about run out of patience providing cautions to you today. If the minister is not able to contain herself, the minister may need to leave the chamber and take a breath.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: We would all hate to see that, Mr Acting President.

Hon Samantha Rowe: Well, stop inviting interjections.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Simon O'Brien's speech is time limited.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I have just been rebuked by Hon Samantha Rowe, and I would not want that to happen again, so I should behave myself.

I observed in the Carpenter government, without much contradiction, this accrual of detritus in a period in which it simply went from election to decline and decay without the normal intervening period of a government doing positive things and making progress. I am seeing the same thing with this current government. I want to get down to some examples of things that actually matter but are being neglected, and I will come to that in just moment. It is my proposition to this house that this government is even worse than the Carpenter government. It surprises me because, by and large, they are the same people who were kicked out in disgrace in 2008. Perhaps they learnt nothing from their time in the wilderness; they are certainly not doing anything particularly different.

My dear friend opposite, the Minister for Ports and a few other things, was quick to remind me about the sorts of things that a good building agency like Main Roads was doing back in those days. She was saying—in fact, she was quite loud and strident in rattling off a list of things that she or the Carpenter government did. I will repeat some of those things in case members missed them in the cacophony at the time. She was yelling across the chamber, "The things we did. Look at what we did. We did Roe 4, Roe 5, Roe 6, Roe 7", and then she stopped. Enter the McGowan Labor government, and what happened to Roe Highway then? There was no Roe 8 and no Roe 9—indeed, no blinking anything. There are no desalination plants this time around—night, night! We have spoken on other occasions about plenty of fairly suspect transactions but a lot of focus is going on things that are, frankly, not to the benefit of Western Australia. I had a few things to say yesterday about one of the government's latest frauds—the Infrastructure WA group. What an expensive exercise that will be but it will achieve nothing. Come in here with a bill to build a port. Why does the government not do that, rather than bring in a bill for a bunch of overpaid sinecures and clinging-on mates? Build a new jail or a new hospital. Do something for Western Australians.

A report came out today. A new highway has been achieved here in Western Australia—yes; in the time of the McGowan Labor government while ambulance ramping reached 1 056.9 hours.

Hon Jim Chown: A record.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Yes. Apparently yesterday ambulances were ramped for at least 234.7 hours, not including the figures for the Peel Health Campus, which were unavailable. They were ramped for 234 hours, and every hour an ambulance is ramped is an hour that it is not available to respond to other emergencies in the community.

What is this government concerned about? It is concerned about rearranging bureaucracies to produce megadepartments and nobody knows what they do—megadepartments that perhaps report to as many as five ministers. Anyone who cannot tell that that will lead to tears before bedtime is quite deficient. It is absolutely appalling.

On the priorities of this government, every week we come in here and see its business program and the bills that receive priority and the ones that do not. Meanwhile, our Assembly counterparts are saying that things are being held up. They do not have much of any real importance but what legislation there is is being held up allegedly in the upper house. Yes, it is being held up by a government that, in this place as well as the other, does not know

what it is doing. Where is the plan? Where are the processes of achievement? We are seeing absolutely nothing. Already the government is deep into year 3. The government has had some good times because the iron ore price has recovered and a federal coalition government has managed to get through some extraordinary changes to the GST to the benefit of this state. What has the government done with it? Seriously, what has this government done with that extra windfall?

Hon Darren West: Is this financial advice from a Liberal? Is that what we are hearing?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Hon Darren West's cockiness highlights the arrogance that is becoming an emblem of the ALP. As recently as 18 May, the political climate here changed quite a lot.

Hon Jim Chown interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Yes. The coalition government was returned and the next day the stock market figures went through the roof. What was added in one day? I think it was \$30 billion. Have members opposite learnt anything from that? I do not think so. I do not know what they would have learnt from the example of their federal leadership, but there was rather a lot to learn, because the federal Labor Party lost an unlosable election. We had a government that was seen by many to be past its use-by date and that had all sorts of hubris attached to it in respect of changes of leadership and all the other things. I know that that has become a bipartisan phenomenon in Canberra in recent years, unfortunately, but nobody had the coalition picked to retain government. I will be quite honest; I thought our prospects were very, very remote. Some months beforehand, I had no doubt that the federal government was toast—absolutely gone for all money, and by a very big margin—but we all know what happened in the final analysis, and we have all been trying to work out how and why. With things that are unexpected, as soon as we start to work out what actually happened, it becomes plain.

We on this side of the house have taken great encouragement from that. Why? It is because we see our opponents in the state government exhibiting the same lack of empathy for the Western Australian voters that their federal colleagues parlayed. How did their federal colleagues go to the electorate? They did it under the leadership of their state leader, Mark McGowan. It was not Bill Shorten because everyone knew he was on the nose in Western Australia. The Labor Party had done its polling. The Labor Party in WA did not go out with Bill Shorten; it went out with Mark McGowan. That was a great success, was it not? What did the Labor Party go out with? It went out with policies that certainly were not small-target policies, were they? They were policies that were cheered to the echo by the same Mark McGowan who was leading the charge: "Yep, this is the way forward. This is what the Australian people want. They want to be taxed out of existence. They want threats hanging over their heads in respect of their retirement arrangements and their superannuation arrangements. They want their very future to be put in doubt. Yes, they want the tripe taxed out of them by people who want to get rid of coal power and, indeed, any form of fossil fuel. That's what the people want! They want to live in the dark. They don't want a safe and secure power supply. They want to get rid of blooming rubber balloons. That's what the people really want. They all want to be forced to drive electric cars." How out of touch can you get? We found out on 18 May, and the chief cheer squad over here in the West was the leader of the state Labor government, Mark McGowan. Not only was he crawling up people; he had all the members opposite crawling up him as well. Can members imagine the crick necks and other injuries when they had to do such an about-turn? It would not have been pretty, and it was not pretty, yet did the government learn anything from it? I do not think it did.

Hon Peter Collier: Cocky as ever.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: It is as cocky as ever. It knows that it is onto such a good thing that when it has a motion on notice that comes to the top of the wazza, as one did yesterday, congratulating the McGowan government, it does not even bother to move it; we can just take it as a given. Hon Donna Faragher would have voted for it, I am sure! Do not throw that at me, honourable member! Sorry!

Hon Darren West: We like Hon Donna Faragher!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: We all do!

What did we have this morning? Did we have some private members' business from government members? No; apparently everything is hunky-dory. Everything is perfect. The government has nothing to advocate for on the part of its constituents—nothing.

I have some things I want to bring to the attention of the house, and they are not about keeping people in the dark. They are not about teaching people extreme philosophies. They are not about deciding that people all have the freedom to choose which of 147 gender identities they want to have when they get up each morning. They are not about persecuting rugby players who might tweet something in response to someone else about what they believe, and hounding them out of their job. The people who vote for me are not interested in any of that rubbish either, and as soon as members opposite get that through their heads, they might have some chance of surviving as a government, but they will not, because there is something wrong in their DNA. The Labor of a few years ago

does not exist anymore. I was standing at a polling booth at Carlisle Primary School on 18 May with one of my Labor colleagues and a good friend—I am not trying to verbal anyone here; it was a member from another place—and that member said, “Isn’t it funny? You can’t judge a book by its cover when handing out how-to-vote cards; you never know who they’re going to go for. There was a time when someone wearing work clothes, work boots and whatever would be a Labor man. Now none of them takes our how-to-vote cards.” I felt like saying, “Doesn’t that tell you something? Doesn’t that make you want to have a bit of a look at yourself—that the working man no longer identifies with or trusts the Labor Party?”

Hon Colin Tincknell: Didn’t you tell them?

Hon SIMON O’BRIEN: I will not go any further; we were just having a nice cordial conversation. We agreed on it. It is noticeable. Of course, as the day wore on, more and more tradies and people in hi-vis came through. Those blokes who had been doing a hard day’s work would say, “Jeez, I’d better hurry up. I’ve got to go and vote.” So they all came through in a bit of a rush about half past four or five o’clock. Did members notice that at their booths—yes? They all came up and got the Liberal how-to-vote card in the seat of Swan, which we won.

Members of the Australian public, and the Western Australian public in particular, made it pretty obvious what they are interested in. They are not interested in class warfare and all this other end-of-days rubbish. What are they interested in? In part, it is reflected in a petition I tabled earlier this week in which residents of Western Australia condemned the ongoing and increasing violence, theft and other offences committed by juvenile offenders. In various parts of the South Metropolitan Region and, I am sure, elsewhere, that is a real concern, yet I do not hear a peep out of this government. There is not one acknowledgement of that at all until government members are doorstopped by the media because there has been a riot at a shopping centre in Secret Harbour or Cockburn, with people throwing chairs or knives at each other. When the government is asked what it is doing about it, it says that it will look into it. There are no initiatives to do anything and no recognition that perhaps there is a problem, yet the government has had plenty of warning about it. Back in January, a chap called Josh Zimmerman, a reporter for *The Sunday Times*, ran a story on PerthNow titled “Beggars scaring off shoppers in Fremantle, business furious at council inaction”. In part he said —

Fremantle businesses are being driven to the brink by aggressive vagrants and professional beggars scaring customers off the strip.

Store owners and staff have vented their frustration at daily confrontations with abusive homeless people, an increasing number of whom they say catch public transport there because of its reputation as a soft touch on anti-social behaviour.

And they have taken aim at Fremantle council for its refusal to address the problem, which they say is killing off trade in already difficult conditions.

During the course of two short visits to Fremantle’s main dining and shopping precinct over the course of a week *The Sunday Times* witnessed:

This is in two visits —

A MAN openly urinating on the side of St John’s Anglican Church in Kings Square, the site of a \$270 million renewal project. Human excrement was clearly visible outside the back door to a nearby store.

SHOPPERS sitting at benches on the High Street Mall getting up to leave in a hurry after two nearby homeless men broke out in a loud argument and shoving match.

CLEARLY alcohol or drug-affected men in various states of undress approaching shoppers and asking for money.

I can tell members that there has been a noticeable increase in this form of antisocial and, in some cases, criminal behaviour in Fremantle. It has probably happened elsewhere as well, but in particular I have noted it in Fremantle. Back in March, I went to Fremantle with Hon Donna Faragher and Hon Nick Goiran. We were asked to visit by a lady called Julie Morgan, whom I spoke to just a little while ago today. She had arranged a group of different business proprietors—sole traders and others—to give up a bit of their time to meet with us and give us their testimony about what is happening in Freo. I know a bit about Freo. I moved there just before I was 10 years old. I grew up there and went to school there. I had various jobs there at the hospital and on the wharf at different times—all sorts of things—so I know the place. My wife used to run Gibney’s Dry Cleaners on the corner of the main drag down there. Sure, occasionally one used to see someone affected by drink or other issues and getting a bit loud in the street. It is undignified, but occasionally it is the sort of thing that happens. Fremantle has forever been a centre for a range of social services and other provisions that tend to produce an influx of people with some challenging issues. Nonetheless, that was then and this is now. Every bit of advice I get is that it is getting worse all the time and it has reached a critical point. One of the considerations put to us by Julie and the others is that they do not want people to be put off from coming to Fremantle. They want people to go there and be customers—

to drink the coffee, eat the fish and chips, buy the threads and all the rest of it—but at the same time they know that they cannot live in a fool's world in which this behaviour, if allowed to continue, will drive all their customers away. It means that they cannot leave junior staff to lock up at night for fear of what might happen to them in the laneway out the back and so on. This has been reported in the local press quite a bit.

Hon Donna Faragher, Hon Nick Goiran and I, along with the honourable Peter Katsambanis, whom we were glad to welcome to the wild country south of the river for a change, went to Freo, had our meeting and discussed a range of things. We gave the locals some advice about how we might be able to assist in improving things. What we discovered in that meeting and subsequent meetings was an incredible inertia and a lack of leadership from those who should be taking responsibility and doing something about it. It all goes straight back to the state government. After I had my initial few meetings, I sat down with the Mayor and the CEO of the City of Fremantle, both of whom I know, because I knew this matter would have come to their attention. Indeed, the council was receiving some criticism. The council should not be responsible for policing operations. It is using quite a few staff to do this—they were formerly called rangers but are now known as community safety officers or something like that. They can act only as agents to call the police on the behalf of other citizens. I discovered that there was to be a meeting in the next few days. I wished them all the best and said I would be interested to find out. Since then I have asked questions in the house that are pertinent to that matter. In question without notice 271, I asked the minister representing the Minister for Police —

- (1) What changes have there been in police staffing levels at Fremantle Police Station since March 2017?

That is a pretty standard and straightforward question. It is asking for a number. I asked —

- (2) More specifically, what resources have at various times been applied to staffing police bicycle patrols in Fremantle?

Again, that is a pretty straightforward question that is asking for a number such as, “We used to have three pairs of blokes, and now we've got two” or “now we've got 10.” It was a straightforward question for information. I asked —

- (3) What is the government's response to widespread reports of an escalating incidence of antisocial behaviour and crime in inner Fremantle?

In response to the part of my question about staffing levels, rather than tell me a number, I was told that “district superintendents are responsible for deploying their allocated resources within their districts”, blah, blah, blah. The government could not—or would not—give me an answer. Another of this government's tactics is to combine its responses to multipart questions into a single answer. The response to parts (2) and (3) was —

- (2)–(3) Over recent years the Fremantle sub-district has recorded a reduction in verified crime. Many initiatives and partnerships have been introduced within the Fremantle central business district, focused towards collaborative working relationships designed to improve community safety. This has included the establishment of the Fremantle police CBD team, including officers on foot and bicycle patrol; working with the City of Fremantle community safety team to respond to minor incidents of antisocial behaviour and provide early engagement with people who are homeless or who present with social dysfunction; building community circles around social messaging groups between business, police and local government for rapid response; an expanded CCTV network managed by the City of Fremantle; and the establishment of the Fremantle police district mental health co-response team.

Wow! To hear that, people would think the government was really getting on with it. The only trouble is that most of it is rubbish! It is not happening at all. On verified crime, we have asked shopkeepers to keep an independent record of incidents of antisocial behaviour, because if they go to the police, half the time the police hierarchy has said, “We don't want to spoil the stats”, so they talk them out of lodging a formal complaint. That is what happens. So much for recording a reduction in verified crime! It is based on dodgy statistics.

The facts of the matter are that the police officers of the Fremantle CBD have an extraordinarily difficult job to do. I think it is a disgrace that they are not being properly supported to do it. They do not have enough colleagues and their accommodation is grossly unfit for purpose. Basically, they are being stopped from doing the job that they want to do. I think that is appalling. For over 20 years I have been supporting our on-the-ground frontline police in this place. It is disgraceful that the Western Australia Police Force and the government cannot do the same thing for those officers in Fremantle. There are problems in Fremantle, but if the officers' hands are tied, what on earth can they do about it? The situation is in a downward spiral and nothing is happening that is making a blind bit of difference because this government is not dinkum about it. A survey was done by a group of Freo businesses called Freo Now. I will not read it into the record, but one question was “How concerned are you for your staff with the current antisocial behaviour you are witnessing?” Can members guess the total percentage who are either extremely concerned—most of them—very concerned or moderately concerned?

Hon Colin Tincknell: Was it 75 per cent?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: It was 92 per cent. The survey showed also that 42 per cent are extremely concerned, and 38 per cent are very concerned. A similar number expressed concern for their customers about the current antisocial behaviour that they are witnessing. We do not need to go to surveys. We only need to ask the girls in my office. They say they would not go to Fremantle, because they are constantly approached by vagrants, they are leered at, and people try to cadge cigarettes or money from them.

Hon Colin Tincknell: And in Mandurah, Ellenbrook, Scarborough, Bunbury —

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I suspect it is happening everywhere. I could warm to this theme, and I do not want to talk down an area, but I am concerned about what is being done about this problem. I want something to be done about it. When I get up in Parliament and ask a question—I know what the answer is—I do not expect to be fobbed off in the way that I was. It is not a good reflection on the Minister for Police that she signed off on the response to which I have alluded just now. Further to that question, the minister said that the police were planning to have an operation in Fremantle, and that this many officers would be doing this and that many officers would be doing that. That must have been ready for publication in the press at the time the answer to my question was being compiled. On Tuesday, 9 April, I asked another question: why did the minister not provide that information to Parliament, when it had been provided to the press? Again, the minister fobbed me off and said it is up to the police to provide that information. Surely it is the police who provide the minister with information. Why will the minister not pass on that information to me?

The fact of the matter is that the Western Australia Police Force used to have pushbike patrols in Fremantle, but, because of the cutbacks that were forced upon it, they were cut. If members are familiar with Fremantle and the layout of the place, if a bun fight suddenly erupts on Marine Terrace and a couple of cops on pushbikes are at Fremantle Station and become aware of it, they can literally be there in seconds to deal with that situation. Clearly, that is the sort of response that we need. However, it has been taken away. The temporary allocation of 20 officers, for a 24/7 operation, was too little, too late, and it has now been stopped. That will not achieve the sort of cultural change that we need. The shop owners in Fremantle appreciated that there were more cops on the beat. Some of those officers were in cars and some were on horseback. Officers on horseback are very visible, but I do not think they are the best way of responding to low-level antisocial behaviour. I do not think officers in cars are the best answer either. We need foot patrols and pushbike patrols. I guess that maybe they will learn something from that temporary operation that has now been and gone.

Hon Darren West: We have police on bikes in Geraldton.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I am glad to hear that. I wish we could have them in Fremantle.

Hon Darren West: We have them in Geraldton. They are very good.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I wondered where they went! Surprise, surprise! How many are there in Collie? They are probably all in Collie. Why is this happening? I hesitate a bit to say that we need here something that was introduced in New York many years ago when a zero-tolerance approach was introduced on its subways. I recognise that the solution to that sort of antisocial behaviour is not to just move them on somewhere else so the problem is temporarily relocated; we need a clear indication that this sort of behaviour is not to be tolerated. That has to come from a government, but, unfortunately, the government is preoccupied with spin. It tries to attend to things that nobody is actually worried about, and it does not give a damn about the things that people are worried about. If it were concerned about fixing this sort of problem, it would be on to it, but I am not seeing any leadership at all. I see the odd bandaid being slapped on, but that is about it.

Do members know what Labor people want to do about Mrs Julie Morgan, who had the guts to stand up in public about it? They do not want her coming to any more meetings because she might criticise them! Yeah, right! How about dealing with the problem? The member for Fremantle, Simone McGurk, has ministerial rank. Why does she not get the various agencies together in a room to hammer out a plan to deal with this? The government is not prepared to do it. That is a fail. This is happening all over the state. We just heard about a range of other areas where it is happening and we are seeing the same lack of conviction and leadership as we are seeing in Fremantle. If government members think they have still got their tails up, they might need to think again because I think this government is already becoming terminal. It is not delivering anything that people want and it is trying to shove a whole lot of stuff that people do not want down their throats. We know what happened on 18 May with the federal election result. Maybe that will be some sort of wake-up call for this government; I do not know.

I ask one more time, if anyone is awake on the government benches: can they please take seriously the antisocial crime and other behaviours happening in Fremantle? It is not good enough to turn a blind eye to it. This practice whereby people are just allowed to walk into a shop, pick up what they want, walk out with it and say “get stuffed” if anyone tries to stop them —

Hon Darren West: There is a law against it.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: There is a law about it, and the member's government will not do anything to uphold that law.

Hon Darren West: They are not allowed to just walk in there and do it; there is a law against it.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I do not know what planet you're living on, Dazza—sorry, Hon Darren West—but go into any supermarket —

Hon Darren West: Earth, member. The same one as you're on! We have only one.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Go into any supermarket—the member obviously does not go into enough—and talk with people there about their experience. Talk with security staff who say, “There's nothing we can do when people come out with a trolley load of goods and just want to go past.” The backbone that governments should be able to exhibit is just not there. Is it incapable of saying, “This is wrong; we've got to do something about this”? Apparently so. The government will not even recognise there is a problem. It says, “Oh, it's against the law.” Yes, it is, and people are thumbing their noses at it! That is what widespread antisocial behaviour means. What is the government doing about it? Absolutely nothing. How much confidence do I have that it will do something about it? In view of some of the interjections I have just heard, not much confidence at all.

I have put these concerns on the record and I will be raising them again. I hope that this government can somehow form a bit of backbone. I hope that government members can get their heads out of their collective nether regions long enough to glimpse daylight and understand that what they are doing is upsetting people and they are not delivering what good governments should deliver. Having said that, I note these budget papers, but note them with a very jaundiced eye indeed.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Pierre Yang**.