

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 13 August on the following motion moved by Hon Helen Morton (Minister for Mental Health) —

That pursuant to standing order 68(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 506A–E (budget papers 2013–14) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 8 August 2013.

HON SAMANTHA ROWE (East Metropolitan) [5.20 pm]: I rise to give my budget reply speech and would like to note that I am not the lead speaker tonight.

Like my colleagues last night—Hon Kate Doust and Hon Ljiljana Ravlich—I have many concerns about the state government budget for this financial year. From what I can gather, the state budget is full of broken promises and will have a negative impact on the people of Western Australia, in particular in my electorate of East Metropolitan Region. This was a budget that was supposed to deliver to the public all of the promises of the state election campaign. There were a number of key assurances made by the Liberal Party in the lead-up to the poll—improved public transport, ease of cost-of-living pressures, reduced taxes for businesses to help with rising costs—that featured prominently in Liberal Party material. Almost every leaflet that was distributed during the campaign carried the crystal clear assurance stamped across it that everything had been fully funded and fully costed.

The 2013–14 state budget does not deliver the promises made by the government; and of further concern, it contains unexpected project delays, cash grabs and price hikes. It contains measures sure to hit the hip pocket of those who are doing it tough in this state; those who are afraid to turn on their heaters during winter because they cannot afford the electricity prices and those who have been waiting for years for a house from the Department of Housing within which to raise their family. Upon release, this budget certainly contained an unwelcome surprise for those who chose to make a long-term investment and install solar panels on their homes in the hope of reducing their power bills, with the assurance of a steady feed-in tariff to help them make back some of that cost. Although the government has been forced to turn back on this cash grab following a strong backlash, the public has every right to be angry about this government's indecisiveness and poor management of this state budget.

A key issue that is facing many families, particularly in my electorate, that was raised with me continually during the state election campaign is the cost of living. The budget certainly contains no good news on this front. The government is slugging WA taxpayers with an estimated \$1.6 billion increase to taxes as a result of poor budget management. The government has now gone back on a number of clear commitments that it made during the election campaign. For example, the government was prepared to break its promise to 75 000 householders who had installed solar panels on their homes to take advantage of the Barnett government's promise of a feed-in tariff. The budget contained a most unwelcome surprise for these householders who were certainly not unreasonable in expecting the government to honour its agreement and the contracts that it had entered into; not to have them slashed before their eyes.

The decision to slash the tariff rate was irresponsible and unfair, but it was defended by many in the government, particularly the Treasurer, Troy Buswell, who made no apologies to those whom he had misled. The decision was set to punish many good people who were trying to do their bit for the environment and reduce the impact of cost-of-living pressures on their households. Despite the government's word and a written assurance from Synergy that the tariff rate would remain in place for 10 years, the government was prepared to renege on the agreement it made, causing much anger and worry for many solar householders who were simply trying to reduce and ease some of their cost-of-living pressures.

Understandably, there has been a strong public backlash as a result of this poor government decision. By Monday morning, less than five days after the budget was handed down, the Solar Citizens website petition calling for a reversal of the decision had received well over 8 000 signatures. A number of public figures and stakeholders had also been damning of the government's move to take money from solar households. Even Liberal backbenchers were opposed to their own government's state budget. Following the intense public backlash that resulted from this appalling decision, the government has been forced to back down on this cash-grabbing measure and it has been shamed into honouring its commitments to solar householders—Western Australians fought to win a fair outcome.

Thankfully, although these households that stood to lose up to \$800 a year as a result of this decision will now have some peace of mind, the announcement and then reversal of this cash grab demonstrates the government's lack of understanding of the environmental issues, as well as the cost-of-living issues that people are facing—not to mention its lack of being able to manage the state budget. Last week, the Premier was prepared to break his

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Hon Samantha Rowe; Hon Col Holt; Deputy President; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Katsambanis

government's promise to people on solar feed-in tariff rates, one of many broken promises that this budget has revealed. Now that the government has done a backflip on the solar feed-in tariff scheme, it has created a nearly \$51 million budget black hole.

I will quote from a media release from the shadow Treasurer, Ben Wyatt —

Ratings agencies warned that a Barnett Government failure to implement any of its announced revenue-saving measures would put the State's AAA credit rating at risk.

Mr Barnett and Troy Buswell have been working on this budget for months. Yet just days after it was handed down, it has abandoned one of its key revenue-saving measures, following a voter backlash.

His stunning backflip simply confirms that the Barnett Government cannot be trusted to deliver anything it sets out in the budget.

Mr Barnett and Mr Buswell's chaotic economic management has left Western Australia's finances in a dire State and if they can renege on a revenue-saving measure just days after the budget was handed down, who knows what backflips Western Australians can expect over the next four years.

Another key election promise around the cost of living was keeping electricity prices at or around the rate of inflation. Shortly after the election, the government broke this commitment and announced that from 1 July 2013, the cost of electricity prices would increase by four per cent, which is much higher than the rate of inflation at 2.5 per cent. The Treasurer told us that it was, "Near enough". But for those who are doing it tough, particularly in parts of my electorate—Belmont, Armadale and Forrestfield—near enough is not good enough. We have families who are doing it tough with their family budgets already stretched and for the Treasurer to insult them in such a way is not acceptable.

Although the increase of four per cent to power bills constitutes a breach of this government's election commitment, the budget is also further distanced from its promises by intending to increase power prices by seven per cent each year—nearly three times the rate of inflation. This means that by 2016, an average family would be charged around \$2 000 a year for electricity. Their annual bill would go from roughly \$963 to a massive \$1 998. These increases will hit hard and for many individuals and families in WA they will mean making sacrifices and going without. Another cost-of-living victim in this state budget is the cost-of-living assistance payment, which will be increased by only three per cent despite all utility costs increasing by higher rates. We in the Labor Party believe in providing a strong safety net for low-income families. In the current context of higher rental costs, rising utility charges and other cost-of-living pressures, it is not appropriate to dilute a necessary assistance payment, part of that safety net, by failing to maintain its value.

In addition to broken promises on power charge increases and the failure to maintain the value of the existing cost-of-living assistance program, other utility charges are set to rise substantially. Water charges are to increase by six per cent and gas charges by 6.4 per cent. Households across WA are now hundreds of dollars worse off than they were, and they are already struggling to cope with the increases they received last year. All this comes at a time when many people are doing it tough. The report into the cost of living put out in 2012 by the Western Australian Council of Social Service presents some alarming data on the effects of increased costs of living on people with low or fixed incomes. From what I can tell, this budget contains no relief for these people, and many others in Western Australia, who are watching the commitments made to them to ease cost-of-living pressures dissipate before their very eyes.

Another Barnett government decision likely to have negative impacts on the cost of living is the recently announced plan to force council amalgamations. The state government wants to slash the number of metropolitan councils from 30 to 14 within the next two years. Following the announcement from the Premier, my electorate office received a number of phone calls from very distressed residents from Belmont, businesses and community groups who fear this plan will impact their rates. I refer to an article from 1 August on ABC online news which states —

Professor Brian Dollery from the University of New England in New South Wales says he does not believe larger local governments deliver better outcomes for residents.

...

"Costs rise and rates go up to pay the higher cost, small communities lose their representation, they become swallowed up by larger bodies, local identity disappears, all in all people are much less happy than they were before."

"One of the arguments was that rates in Queensland would fall if you had larger councils but in fact they are still rising."

After hearing Premier Barnett clearly expressing on a number of occasions over the years that he would not have forced amalgamations as part of his agenda, the fact that this backflip has happened so clearly after the election demonstrates that the Premier's party was prepared to mislead the public for the sake of gaining power. Ratepayers throughout the East Metropolitan Region and the metropolitan area more broadly are fearful of rate rises that would result from the mergers and the impact that increases could have on their ability to keep up with the rising costs of living. These fears are certainly not unfounded, given the significant rate increases experienced by other local councils across this country.

For many people, the most disappointing part of this budget is the delays to major transport infrastructure commitments.

Hon Peter Katsambanis interjected.

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: I am sorry, what was that?

The funding commitments in the budget will make it most unlikely that the government will meet its undertaking to complete construction of the airport rail link or the Metro Area Express light rail by 2019. During the 2013 election campaign, the Liberal Party released two very clear policies relating to the MAX light rail network and the airport rail link. At the time, the Barnett government spent nearly \$1 million of public money advertising the MAX light rail plan to the people. In Liberal Party election material both the airport rail link and the MAX light rail projects were posted to be fully funded and fully costed, something that has now proven to be just a myth. What is more, the Premier was not clear about his reliance on federal funding to cost these projects and he certainly did not make his expectation of that funding clear to the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard or to the opposition leader Tony Abbott. The fully funded, fully costed promise was misleading from the very start. Regarding the budgetary implications of the \$1.9 billion MAX light rail project, the government has committed a total of \$432 million over the period of the forward estimates. To put that into perspective, the government has committed just over 22 per cent of the total cost of the project in the next four years and only 4.5 per cent of the total cost of the project in the next three budget years. Therefore, in the final two to three years of the construction time line, the government needs to find \$1.54 billion to meet these costs. Quite understandably, during the election campaign many people were very excited at the prospect of receiving the MAX light rail and they have been left disappointed in their government and distrusting of its commitments. The need for this infrastructure remains and, sadly, it will not happen any time soon.

The airport railway line, as mentioned, was another major urban rail project announced by the Liberal Party during its election campaign. As with the MAX light rail network, members of the government were quick to sell this policy as a priority and as a fully funded, fully costed project. It was also to be delivered by 2018. The Liberal Party transport policy states plainly that the airport railway line is the only option that will deliver maximum convenience and cost savings for travellers. Therefore, it was of course very disappointing to learn that only 23 per cent of the funding for that was provided for in the 2013–14 state budget. People are justifiably angry to discover that only \$174 million of the estimated \$2 billion needed to complete this project has been provided for in the forward estimates. Over the next two years, less than one per cent of the total project cost will be delivered. If we are to believe the Premier's current commitment that construction will conclude by the end of 2019, we must also believe that he will find an additional \$1.8 billion to commit to this project in the final two to three years of construction in 2017–18 and 2018–19. This is a far cry from the three-station train line complete with 3 000 parking bays to be built by 2018, which was the sales pitch that the Minister for Transport and Treasurer, Mr Buswell, made to the public during the state election campaign only six months ago. The airport rail link was to modernise our airport and provide more transport options to some of these areas. It was set to link a number of areas with currently limited public transport options. For example, it was set to provide opportunities for many people based in Forrestfield, who were promised this infrastructure by this government. The residents of Belmont were also to benefit from the airport rail link, which will open up new public transport options to those previously relying on buses. I have spoken with residents in Redcliffe who were also excited about the prospect of a rail connection on their doorstep and who now share this disappointment and uncertainty that the government's budget has produced. Given the track record of this Liberal government on prioritising and delivering necessary urban rail projects, the people of Western Australia are rightfully questioning Premier Barnett's true commitment to urban rail promises. As the people of Ellenbrook have learnt the hard way, the Liberal government can simply not be trusted to prioritise urban rail projects. While regrettable, the insufficient funding commitments and foreseeable construction delay to the delivery of these key election commitments is not unexpected.

Another blow to rail users in this budget is the removal of free parking at train stations, which is expected to net the government around \$20 million a year. This was not raised prior to the state election in March, despite a strong focus on rail in the government's campaign material and much discussion of train station parking by Liberal members and candidates. I have residents of Belmont and Forrestfield in my electorate who do not live

near a train station. Because they cannot walk to their local train station, they are forced to drive there, and soon they will have to pay for parking. Obviously, they drive to the train station so they can catch the train to work and not pay the exorbitant prices for car parking in the city. Now they have to bear the cost of parking at train stations when they are already trying to cut their costs by not using their vehicles. This was not explained to them in the lead-up to the March poll.

As the Leader of the Opposition, Mark McGowan, has been discussing with members of the public, parking fees are likely to rise over time just as train fares do. It will cost a commuter who currently uses free parking around \$100 extra a year. The opposition leader has labelled this a massive impost on ordinary families. The Treasurer, Mr Buswell, has confirmed that the Liberal government will not rule out further increases to paid parking at train stations. Members of the public have also expressed opposition to the plan to slug train commuters with parking fees, arguing that the move will increase the number of people who drive to work, which will lead to more road congestion, clog up residential side streets surrounding train stations with those trying to avoid the fees and place additional financial pressure on families who are already struggling.

In addition to the cost-of-living pressures facing WA families, some of WA's most disadvantaged individuals and families face homelessness or housing insecurity while waiting on the state housing list to be allocated a home. This budget promises some relief in terms of low state housing stock, a major problem all over the state and an issue that I have discussed with my constituents in Belmont. The budget provides that the government will commit \$65 million in 2013–14 as part of a two-year program to fund the construction of 433 homes, which, as quoted in the budget papers, is believed to be a significant boost to public housing. The number of applicants for state housing on the Department of Housing's waiting list is approximately 24 000. In the department's south city zone, which includes areas of Belmont, some families who have applied for a family home with four or more bedrooms have been on the list since 2003. This means that some of our most disadvantaged families have been waiting some 10 years for stable and affordable housing within which to raise their families. In the same south city zone, some seniors needing a one-bedroom property have been waiting since 2007, up to six years. Individuals requiring a one-bedroom property in the area have been waiting since 2004, up to nine years. These time frames are not acceptable and do not meet the obligations of a government to house low-income individuals and families. These time frames clearly show a statewide public housing crisis that has only worsened under the watch of this government. The Treasurer's assertion that the 433 homes set for construction within the next two years constitutes a significant boost to public housing is highly concerning given that the sheer number of people waiting—some 24 000-odd, many of whom do not have homes—are struggling to keep up with the private rental market and often go without the basics just to keep a roof over their heads. Last week was national Homeless Persons' Week. Drawing attention to the current struggles faced by people with no housing or unstable housing and given the seriousness of this issue, the government needs to act decisively to ease this crisis, which it has not gone far enough with in this budget.

In the field of education, this budget fails to impress compared with the increases that Western Australian students stood to gain if Premier Barnett had signed on to the federal Better Schools plan. The budget papers stated that over the past six years expenditure on education has grown by an average of 7.9 per cent a year. Despite record growth in student numbers over the preceding two years, a drop in the funding rate rise will occur from this year with a 6.3 per cent increase. Anne Gisborne, president of the State School Teachers' Union of WA, is concerned that in the following years the increase to education fell as low as one or two per cent. If the Premier had wanted to do the right thing by school students in WA, he would have done what other Labor and Liberal Premiers across the country have done and signed up to the federal Better Schools plan. That would have been in the better interests of our students but instead the Premier chose to play politics with our children —

Hon Col Holt: What do you think would make it better?

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: I will go through it. Instead, the Premier rejected what would have amounted to millions of dollars in additional funding. Under the plan, Western Australian schools would have received significant funding boosts from the commonwealth. When Prime Minister Rudd was in WA recently, he urged the Premier to rethink his position and revealed that WA schools will be \$920 million worse off over six years if our state refused to sign up to the Better Schools deal, and still the Premier rejected it. The deal would have been of great benefit to all schools, particularly those schools that educate some of our most disadvantaged students. To give some examples, it is estimated that over six years under the Better Schools plan, Cloverdale Primary School would have gained around \$1.28 million in additional funding from 2013 to 2019, an increase of 20.4 per cent per student; Kewdale Primary School would have gained almost \$1.2 million in additional funding from 2013 to 2019, an increase of nearly 25 per cent per student; and Belmont City College would have gained almost \$8.6 million in additional funding from 2013 to 2019, an increase of 19 per cent per student. Clearly, education is not a priority of this state government.

I would also like to touch on another area that is of great concern to a lot of my constituents in the East Metropolitan Region; that is, crime. Regardless of people's postcode and how much they earn, everyone has the right to basic safety and security. In many pockets of the East Metropolitan Region, particularly areas such as Belmont, Armadale and Forrestfield, people often feel in fear of their safety in their own communities and their own homes. There has been a shortage of police officers for some time. This has been felt by the community, particularly when calling the police to seek assistance in an emergency. During the election campaign an elderly woman that I was speaking to said that she heard an intruder late at night. I think she was in her seventies or eighties. She called the police to say that someone was breaking in and all they said was, "You'd better remove yourself from the situation." She had someone breaking into her home! She was calling the police for assistance! It is not the fault of the police that there are not enough of them. They need a 24-hour police station. They need more police officers.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Adele Farina): Order, members!

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: What they need is a 24-hour police station. What they need is more police.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! We were doing well for so long. Hon Samantha Rowe has the call.

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: I thought that that might gain some remarks. This budget provides for an additional 550 police —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Samantha Rowe has the call. Anyone who wants to conduct a private conversation should leave the chamber to do so.

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: As I was saying, the budget provides for an additional 550 police officers over the next four years, which is something that was already committed to during the state election campaign and is a much-needed increase. The target, however, has to be met to assist with this police shortage. Also, the government has a strong track record of not meeting its policing requirements; it is already 100 police officers short from the previous year. Therefore, we hope that we receive those 550-odd police officers because I can tell members that the residents of Belmont, Forrestfield and Armadale need them.

I would like to conclude. The Premier angered many people recently by suggesting on 6PR last month that he did not think people studied his promises. The fact is that the public is taking notice of this government's long list of broken promises and members of the public are very concerned about the negative impacts that this state budget will have on them.

HON COL HOLT (South West — Parliamentary Secretary) [5.51 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to the motion, which is about an important moment in any government's year, I suppose. As I listened to Hon Samantha Rowe talk I reflected on the complex nature of putting together a budget, and on my time at school when I did accounting and economics. I think at that time I was pretty good at that sort of stuff, but I quickly drifted away as soon as numbers got too boring for me. I moved into a much more different field, based on science. I would have thought 30 years ago, when I was studying, that the budgets that came into this place would have been quite a bit simpler. If Hon Norman Moore was still with us, he could probably have shed some light on that in this debate, but as he is not, I will just assume that the budgets that came into our house in those days were much simpler. That probably reflects the simpler life we may have had in Western Australia in those times and the not-so-demanding expectations of communities and the demand for services and investment into our communities to make sure that the Western Australian economy grows and communities have all the services they need. Obviously, putting together a budget of this nature, which in my view is a very big budget, is complex and a bit more of a daunting task, having not really contributed or taken part in any way.

It is also made even more difficult with, as I said, not only the competing needs of the community but also the changing revenue streams that this budget has to cope with. We have seen the Australian dollar change quite dramatically over the last 10 years. I think it got up to a high of 104c or 105c to the US dollar. I was watching the news just the other day about the plateau effects of where the Australian dollar was sitting. It seemed to go up a bit. Only 10 years ago, the Australian dollar was 60-odd cents against the US dollar, then it had a bit of a rise and plateaued at around 80c, then it plateaued at 90c and again at about 102c for quite a while. Now it seems, just for a little while, to have plateaued at about 92c. Setting budgets in that kind of environment tends to be a little difficult. I note some of the assumptions that Treasury makes to have the best guess it can about what that might mean for the budget and I think it is a difficult task.

Another thing that affects the Western Australian state budget a great deal is the iron ore price and how it changes over time. We have been through a fair boom of construction, so now we expect a time when exports will increase because of that construction. I know that the major companies are always trying to lock in iron ore prices for the future and I am sure that they have to worry about how they deal with forecasts in their own budgets. Putting together a state budget that in a way relies on that indirectly from those companies is, again, a pretty daunting task. I think back to some of the magnetite projects that I am sure members in this place would have loved to have seen go on, because those projects potentially add not only greater revenue streams but also greater opportunities for Western Australians in employment. I especially think of the Southdown project near Albany. A magnetite mine is always difficult to get off the ground. As soon as the iron ore price changes or drops, magnetite mines seem to get mothballed. The Southdown magnetite mine near Wellstead and Albany has been talked about for a long, long time. As it seems to gain momentum and the project gets a bit further along the track of getting approvals and being all set up, and all it really needs is investment, suddenly the Australian dollar or the iron ore price changes and the whole thing goes kaput for a bit longer and is mothballed. Iron ore prices obviously have a great effect on our budget settings as well.

What was highlighted for me in this budget was the goods and services tax. We will obviously talk about that a bit more tomorrow, but it seems that as that falling share of GST occurs in our budget, we have to make greater adjustments to how we deliver services. I am not sure that having a state such as ours that delivers more than 10 per cent into the GST pool and gets a lot less back actually helps us meet the demands of our vast and huge state. I think we have some pretty special needs that probably should indicate to the Commonwealth Grants Commission that maybe we are a special case and need an extra bit from the GST carve-up for what we do.

I want to spend a bit of time talking about what I think are some of the highlights in the budget. Obviously, the bulk of government expenditure will go to the areas of health, education and law and order. I think that is right; our communities and our societies expect that people should be able to get good medical treatment when they need it. In the past when I have needed to go to hospital, I have been astounded by the level of care that we receive in our hospitals. We should be always grateful for that. One of the greatest challenges for any government and its budget is how to keep delivering those services in a timely and cost-effective way, given that the demand is so high and that those services are so critical and expected. Budgets around health can, in a way, potentially be a runaway train; we have to somehow meet that need and still meet our budget requirements. They are big challenges.

Education is another such challenge. Often regional members talk about some of the factors of why people do not live in regional Western Australia. It is clear to me that although it is based around health to a degree, access to quality education is one of the biggest factors why families and students see regional Western Australia as perhaps potentially not meeting their education needs. I think that is wrong. We are changing that very considerably; we are doing a lot of work in this space. When people sit down in a regional town and ask, "What's the best avenue for my child; what's the best future; and how can I provide the best education for my child?", I hope that they start to think that they now have lots of options rather than simply packing up the home and moving to Perth or sending their child to a boarding school in Perth. I think we are changing that dramatically. I note that in his Address-in-Reply speech, the minister talked about changes to the curriculum and how we might address some of those, I think, complicated systems that we have to work within now. I welcome reviews on that and how we might move that forward.

Another highlight of this budget, from the perspective of a National Party and regional member, is continued record investment into regional Western Australia. We know that regional Western Australia plays a significant role in this state and this state's budget, and it plays a significant role in the whole of Australia. We need to continue to invest in regional Western Australia to ensure that we attract people to live there and that we provide an adequate level of services to all our communities.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm

Hon COL HOLT: Before the dinner suspension, I had started to talk about this government's focus on regional development and its investment in regional development. As I touched on before the break, regional Western Australia is incredibly important for the economy of not only this state, but Australia. It has been recognised in other states that Western Australia is the engine room of the economy of this country. That is, I guess, why the commonwealth government keeps penalising Western Australia on its share of the goods and services tax revenue. Our underlying economic drivers are now at the point at which this state could almost be self-sustaining were it not for that fact.

This government should be very proud of the investment that it has made in regional Western Australia. During the term of the previous Labor government, the investment by the government through the regional investment fund was \$20 million a year. That is 20 million \$1 coins. I worked out once—it is a bit sad, really; idle mind—

that if we were to put those coins end to end, and we started at Parliament House, the number of coins would run out at about 80 kilometres past Northampton. That is a helluva long line, is it not? That is a long line of coins for the regional investment fund.

Hon Darren West: Up to Geraldton would be a longer line than that.

Hon COL HOLT: I am talking about the regional investment fund. The number of coins would stretch that far.

Hon Adele Farina interjected.

Hon COL HOLT: This is my story, and I will continue it. This year, the royalties for regions budget is \$1.3 billion, I think, but I will work on \$1.2 billion, because that is what it was when I did my sums a few years ago. If we were to put \$1.2 billion worth of \$1 coins end to end, they would go from Perth to Joburg to Gallipoli and back to Perth. Members can work it out if they like, but I am pretty sure it is 60 times the investment. That is a fairly sizeable chunk of investment going into regional Western Australia.

Hon Adele Farina interjected.

Hon COL HOLT: Hon Adele Farina does not agree. I did not think she would. But it is true.

Hon Simon O'Brien: I agree!

Hon COL HOLT: Thank you, sir!

Hon Darren West: Your project spending would make it to China in \$1 coins, surely!

Hon COL HOLT: As I said, it would go from Perth to Joburg to Gallipoli and back to Perth. The member should work it out and he would get to that same conclusion.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Liz Behjat): Order, members! I do not think Hon Colin Holt is actually inviting interjections during his contribution to this debate, and other members might want to make their own contribution. So perhaps members would bear that in mind.

Hon COL HOLT: Thank you, Madam Deputy President. I actually did not mind a bit of interjection across the chamber, but I will move on.

I now want to talk about this budget in terms of this government's investment in the regions. It is \$1.3 billion worth of investment. The government is continuing to invest heavily in the health budget. As I have mentioned, one of the reasons that people stay or do not stay in country towns is access to health services. We cannot solve every problem and provide a health solution for everyone in every location. I think we understand that. Therefore, as we go forward, and as the health budget is stretched again, we will need to look at innovative ways of providing primary care, as well as specialist services. I think we are doing that fairly well. Given the growth that has occurred in some of the remote areas, it is a big challenge, but we are starting to address it with the investment that we have made through this budget

Under the north west health initiative, there will be an increase in health and aged care services in the north of the state. I will get to the south west in a minute, Hon Adele Farina. This follows from our \$560 million investment in the Southern Inland Health Initiative, which is going into the southern half of the state.

Hon Adele Farina interjected.

Hon COL HOLT: If Hon Adele Farina wants me to name some, I can go back through the budget papers for a number of years to highlight those issues.

The hospital upgrades in the north of the state will be at Newman, Tom Price and Roebourne. Significantly for this government and for the delivery of health services in the regions, there has also been an investment into telehealth. We have often talked about how telehealth can provide a great service to people in regional areas. But we probably have not had a real crack at it. I think we are doing that now. When the Nationals were in York the other day at our conference, one of our members had a bit of a heart flutter. He was taken to the local hospital and hooked up to the telehealth service, and he was diagnosed on the computer over Skype or the internet, or however it works, and that diagnosis gave him some confidence that it was okay and he did not need to be transported to Perth but could go back and take it easy and they would see him in a few days. The use of telehealth in that case meant that he did not have to be driven for perhaps a few hours to get to the local emergency service. In this case, the emergency service was only about 40 kilometres away, at Northam hospital, which, by the way, now has a 24/7 emergency department thanks to our investment in the Southern Inland Health Initiative. If telehealth can work in York and provide that sort of service, it provides good hope for people in rural and remote areas such as Jigalong and Nullagine. There might be some infrastructure issues, but we will work through those. The government has also made an investment into the regional dialysis service and

extending that service into the wheatbelt. I am sure that will be greatly welcomed. Some of the regions are already providing that service, including the south west, but this will be into the wheatbelt.

I have been highlighting some areas of the budget to show how the health spend is going into the regions. Another issue is the health of kids in Fitzroy Crossing and the need for research into foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. I have picked this issue, because it is a significant issue that has been talked about for a long time. We are investing some money into research and placing an emphasis on how it affects our communities and how we might address this issue in the future.

Funding for the patient assisted travel scheme is continuing. This is a record level of funding. We cannot provide every specialist service in regional Western Australia. But we need to compensate people for having to travel sometimes to their centre for a specialist service or a specialist consultation. Putting more money into PATS is certainly one way in which we can help alleviate that burden for people.

There are some big challenges for country members, especially those in the wheatbelt. It is not so bad in the south west; there are some real reasons to work as a doctor in the south west, although I acknowledge that there is plenty of work to be done in the south west to attract and retain doctors. The wheatbelt is probably a bit more of a challenge. Through the Southern Inland Health Initiative, 17 new general practitioners have been recruited to the wheatbelt, which I think would be unheard of. Nurse practitioners are now operating in emergency departments, and they play a mentoring role for some of the nursing staff. There are also four primary health teams operating in a pilot project at Merredin, Narrogin, Northam and Katanning to provide a better primary health service to people throughout the wheatbelt. I think every member would acknowledge that certain population density and remoteness challenges for medical services in the wheatbelt need to be addressed.

There will also be some major investment in hospitals. Busselton Hospital is coming along pretty well. There is some more money in the budget for Busselton Hospital, but Carnarvon, Karratha and Esperance hospitals will also get money for refurbishments. That is a major investment in those hospitals. Some major changes are being made in the health services in regional Western Australia. Again, there will be more money for those sorts of things in the out years.

I will leave health there and talk about education. In the last four years we have concentrated to a degree on the health space; there has been a big investment. Education is the next area on which to focus as the reason that people remain in or leave the regions. Obviously, it started under the regional schools program; some of those upgrades are almost complete. I think Pinjarra and Collie, and maybe Denmark, are just about done.

Hon Peter Collier: And Merredin, which is a sensational school.

Hon COL HOLT: Yes, Merredin is sensational. A few others are coming along; Carnarvon and Broome have had some of those funds as well. That is exciting. About 12 or 15 schools have had some investment to get them looking spick and span to meet the needs of the local community. Denmark is pretty interesting. It is a growing community that wants quality education. I think part of the rebuild will start to help deliver that.

I also want to touch on the gifted and talented education program. The Nationals made an election commitment to expand the GATE program into regional Western Australia. I note that the Leader of the Opposition asked a question yesterday about the GATE program. In 2014–15 and beyond, there will be major investment in the GATE program. A number of schools already run gifted and talented education programs; there are 16 in total, 15 of which are in metropolitan Perth. The feeder students who go into those programs are identified through the primary extension and challenge system in primary school. A quarter of those PEAC students are in regional Western Australia, so why are a quarter of the gifted and talented education programs not run in public schools in regional Western Australia? It is obviously a bit of a policy failing from when the programs were thought about. One has started this year in Bunbury; it has the academic stream. It is a good start and it is good to see that the Department of Education and the minister have invested in that. I am very keen to work with the minister this year on a lot of the groundwork on how it might be rolled out in the coming years. We will have to consult with members of the community and ask them which stream of the gifted and talented education program will best fit their needs. If that is coupled with some of the work on the expansion of and improvements to the residential hostels, there will be some good synergies, and we could look at providing GATE programs in those schools associated with the hostel network.

I know that the minister touched on compulsory education for years 11 and 12 in his speech on the Address-in-Reply. How do we cater for all the kids who will not necessarily go down the pathway of years 11 and 12, as I did? If kids did years 11 and 12, they were set on going to university or doing higher education. It has totally changed now. A lot of kids do years 11 and 12 if they do not have anywhere else to go. A lot of those kids do not want to go to university, and I do not think there is a need for them to go to university anymore. Great careers can be achieved through other ways. Trades are a classic example. The gifted and talented education program

has streams other than the academic stream, including arts, dance, languages and drama. Those are other avenues to keep kids engaged at school. A visual arts stream in a place such as Broome could really attract Kimberley kids to stay at the hostel into years 11 and 12 and get those extra two years of education and be engaged in the process. If there are no kids sitting in the classroom, what are the teachers going to teach them? They cannot teach them anything because the kids are not there. We have to find ways of engaging them and keeping them in the classroom. We have instigated some programs. We should be working on extending the GATE program and using it to attract kids to school, because that will provide greater avenues for whatever stream they might be interested in. I am quite comfortable with rolling out the GATE program in the out years, because I think it will take us a year or a year and a half to do a lot of the consultation on where we should take our next step. I am looking forward to that. It will be a great day when some of those programs are running in years 7 to 12.

Early in my first term, I heard a story about a doctor in Bunbury who left the Bunbury hospital emergency department because he had a gifted and talented child. Their only real avenue at that point to give their child the best opportunity of an education was to move back to Perth. They are the decisions that people make. It is one of the trigger points for where people live. If there had been a gifted and talented education program in Bunbury, that doctor may have stayed there and kept working at the emergency department, and obviously all the benefits that flow from having a specialist emergency doctor in the community would have remained. I think we can use it as a community development tool and we should look at doing that. Sometimes those community development tools take a little longer to roll out, because we want to get it as right as we can. I think we will see that being done in the out years.

I want to touch briefly on some of the investment in roads and transport. I note that there is always a lot of talk about the Metro Area Express light rail.

Several members interjected.

Hon COL HOLT: There was a lot of talk about Metronet, but it has disappeared. There is also talk about improvements to the road network in metropolitan Perth. It strikes me that there is a bit of a dichotomy in arguments. When we talk about road improvements in the city, we always talk about congestion, convenience and timing. When we talk about roads in country WA, we always talk about safety. To my mind, there is a bit of a dichotomy there. I do not want to make a judgement on which is most important, but to me the safety issue for country roads is pretty important. I think there is some real investment in this budget that will tackle some of those issues. I know that country members will be fairly aware of some of the hot spots in the road network in country WA that really need to be tackled. The Great Northern Highway is one of them, I think around Bindi Bindi; Hon Brian Ellis might be able to help me here. Is it Bindi Bindi or is it further up, at Wubin, where it is a bit notorious?

Hon Brian Ellis: Bindi Bindi.

Hon COL HOLT: Bindi Bindi? That is what I thought. Wubin is a bit like that, too, but there is going to be some investment there to fix some of those issues. There will be additional overtaking lanes on Great Eastern Highway, and I think Albany Highway might be earmarked for the out years as well. From the perspective of a member for South West Region, increased investment into the Coalfields highway is a real case in point. It has a lot of traffic, a lot of trucks and it is potentially a very dangerous road, depending on whether one is driving up the hill into the sunrise, or down the hill into the sunset. It promotes its own special, unique problems. A lot of improvements have already been made there, and this commitment will improve it further. Hopefully we will not lose any more lives on that stretch of road.

While I am talking about the Coalfields highway, I would like to talk a little about Collie and the investment that has gone into Collie as a SuperTown. Collie is a fantastic place that is loved by the locals; the people who live there see it as a real haven and do not want to move out of there. There tends to be an image problem for Collie amongst people who do not live there, which is a bit of a shame. The SuperTown program was, for Collie, about building on the economic drivers that come with the natural resources there, and improving the town's amenity to make it a very liveable place. I know that the work that has gone into the local school has helped that, although I think there is probably more that we need to look at in terms of accommodating more students, especially as Collie grows. For me, Collie is a place that is going to be on the map in regional Western Australia for a very long time.

Having said that, I want to raise some concerns that I have about what those underlying drivers are. Every second or third day we read something in the paper about the challenges that Griffin Coal is facing in paying its bills. It is of real concern to me that one of the two companies that operate the coal industry that Collie is known for is having those sorts of troubles; I am really concerned about what will happen to that community. I think we probably need to put a bit more government focus on how we are working with those companies to ensure that

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 14 August 2013]

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Hon Samantha Rowe; Hon Col Holt; Deputy President; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Katsambanis

we secure our energy future. I think we have done a good job; it just worries me every time I read in the paper about a little issue with them paying their superannuation bills or whatever else it might be. We should be working a lot closer to make sure we have confidence that that energy supply will continue.

There are also a couple of potential industries that could go into that area that we should be trying to encourage. One is the dairy industry; the Department of Agriculture and Food produced a report not that long ago about potential investment in the dairy industry. It identified that our greatest opportunity in terms of expanding the industry is around powdered milk exports. A powdered milk processing facility could be based almost anywhere; the transport of the actual end product is not the issue, it is about getting the milk to the factory, and Collie was one of the places that was earmarked in the report as a potential site for such a processing facility. Of course, associated with that are the economies of scale of the dairy farms associated with such a facility; in the past our dairy industry has operated on fairly small herd sizes. We need to change that paradigm and increase the herd sizes up to the 3 000 and 4 000-head dairies that operate in New Zealand and drive the industry there. Again, that is a potential opportunity that we should focus on to see where we can land that project. We have talked about the tailing-off of investment into the construction and mining industry; what is the next kick for regional Western Australia in terms of the underlying economy? I think that we should look at some of those sorts of things, such as dairy farm location.

Another potential industry for Collie is the fertiliser plant that has been touted for that area for quite a while. It does not seem to have landed an outcome just yet, but I hope that the coal companies and the fertiliser company can somehow come to an agreement that lands that project for regional Western Australia, the south west and, even more locally, Collie, because I think it would provide a real impetus for Collie to keep growing and attracting people to live there.

I will now move on to some of the budget highlights. I have done a lot of work in the area of emergency services, and I think the government is addressing some of the needs of emergency services. One of the things that will be announced soon is a rescue helicopter for the south west, based in Bunbury, which will be a great asset for that part of the world. Given some of the challenges we have around the south coast, the west coast and the south west coast, including fishing disasters, boating tragedies and people getting lost in the bush, a rescue helicopter based in the south west is a great initiative. During the election campaign, the Nationals brought out a policy of having a fuel card of \$2 000 for our volunteer rescue groups, including bush fire brigades, ambulance services and the regional State Emergency Service. We are going to deliver that initiative in this year's budget to recognise the work that the volunteer organisations and the volunteers who work in those organisations do for their communities. Often, if one goes and talks to them, the fire brigade captain will say that he spends a lot of his time and his fuel driving around for the benefit of the community, and this is just a small way of recognising what they do for communities and repaying some of those bills. We look forward to rolling that out to all those volunteer organisations and celebrating with them when they go and fill up the car that they use to attend meetings or fire sites; it will just relieve a bit of financial pain.

The government will continue its investment in the Royal Flying Doctor Service—\$4 million this year—to keep those crews and the jet going. Thank God we have that service; those of us who travel extensively through the country regions are always a bit conscious of: if we have a prang out here, what happens next? The RFDS is a pretty critical part of that.

There is also some fire crew protection spend coming up. Most members will be aware of the fire that occurred in Albany in, I think, January last year, when one of the fire crews got caught out, two people were burnt, and one of them lost their life. This is about implementing some fire crew protection in the fire trucks so that we can minimise those risks; it is just totally unacceptable. There was a lot of fallout from that; we need to go and look at that and fix it. Volunteer firefighters who turn up to a fire to protect their neighbours and their community should have as much protection as we can offer them. It has not made this budget, but something I would like to see increased investment for in future budgets is mobile phone towers in the black spots where those sorts of things often occur. That fire was out at Two Peoples Bay, and I know that one of the issues was around communication. A mobile phone tower out that way would obviously add a lot of economic benefit to the community there, but also, if we look back at the challenges that that fire crew faced during that event, mobile phone coverage would have been very, very useful. I have thought also about the Salmon Holes fishing spot, which is not that far from Albany but is a bit of a black spot for mobile phone communication. I would like to see further investment in mobile phone towers around there. The community of Elleker, which is just west of Albany, has had some mobile phone black spot problems. If we fix that and improve the capacity for communicating at Salmon Holes, that would be really good. When a guy was washed off the rocks at Salmon Holes, the local marine service responded, within, I think, 13 minutes, from the time they got the phone call that someone had been washed off. However, it took a fair bit longer than that for the marine service to get the phone

call because someone had to get out of Salmon Holes and run up to where they could get mobile phone coverage and report the incident. It would be really beneficial to reduce those communication issues with more mobile phone towers throughout the regions. I think there is an issue with mobile phone coverage in some of those potential tourism hot spots such as Quobba, north of Carnarvon and Kalbarri, that are a bit dangerous, so we should be looking at expanding the mobile network there.

I have only a little further to go but if members have urgent parliamentary business, I am sure they can sneak out.

Hon Peter Katsambanis interjected.

Hon COL HOLT: Thanks mate, you are listening!

I want to come back to the agriculture package we have talked about a bit. We made some statements during the election campaign about investing in agriculture, and the ag package announced in the budget is that commitment in real terms. We have been saying for a long time that agriculture has played a very important part in the economics of this state and will continue to do so. It will be even more important if we take into consideration the growth of our Asian neighbours and how we capitalise on the potential of our markets to the north. That will grow probably quicker than we think, so we should invest in agriculture now to capture some of those opportunities and markets. There is probably a lot more to do around water and agriculture. At the moment our horticulture districts are pretty good but there are probably areas that need real expansion. We have made some investment in the Ord and we have talked about investment from dewatering mines in the Pilbara, which I think is going very well. At the moment it is fodder for cattle. But the potential growth of food for people in the north of our state should be tackled. We should be investing now in those opportunities and into diversifying our agricultural base.

We have heard in this house a lot about what has happened in the eastern wheatbelt and the hard time farmers there are having probably more often than we would like them to have. It is probably getting to the stage where the climate change challenges will continue so how do we support them?

Hon Darren West: Climate change is real, is it?

Hon COL HOLT: I have never been a climate sceptic, so you are barking up the wrong tree there, brother!

Hon Darren West: Okay.

Hon COL HOLT: I think that there are some new challenges for people in those agricultural areas and how they continue to farm and potentially do something a little different there rather than relying on the same sort of thing. They are decisions they will have to make, but let us make some investment into what agriculture in the state will look like in the future.

Some investment is needed into the beef centre in the Kimberley, given the turmoil that industry has gone through due to the banning of the live export trade. Does Hon Darren West have any comments on that? No.

Hon Darren West: I am aware of the live export trade decision.

Hon COL HOLT: We also need funding for the sheep centre —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon COL HOLT: No; I am not. I have unlimited time thanks to the President's earlier ruling.

Sorry; I was distracted. A beef centre in the Kimberley and a sheep centre in Katanning are some of the initiatives we are looking at. Let us diversify our agriculture economy so that we can make the most of our opportunities and provide a diversified base for our farmers. I will not go into much more about the agriculture package, except to say that we said we would invest in it, and we will. We will be rolling that over in the next four years.

We will continue with incentives for our workforce in regional Western Australia. Members may remember that during the last government some great changes were made to the district allowance paid to people living in remote areas, almost to the point where it is now a desired location. Obviously, that has flow-on effects for other parts of the workforce. I am thinking about police in particular. Some commentary was made today about the lack of police and that we need more. That is exactly right. We also need to think about where our police are located. If we can keep providing incentives, as does this budget and as have previous budgets, I am sure that police recruits who go to regional Western Australia especially will see policing as a much more favourable career. We should keep providing those incentives. Obviously, the increases to district allowances in the north of the state have caused some issues in areas in the southern part of the state where we are finding it harder to get police to go to. We have been working with the WA Police Union and we are pretty happy to invest again to

increase the location allowance to get police officers out to those now perceived harder-to-fill locations. While we have fixed one problem, we have created a bit of an issue that is unforeseen, so we will fix that with the police regional incentive scheme in this budget, and that will continue into the out years.

Hon Adele Farina: Are you going to improve government regional officer housing for police officers in Bunbury?

Hon COL HOLT: They should raise it with me and I will see what I can do.

Hon Adele Farina interjected.

Hon COL HOLT: The member has, but they need to come to see me if they think it is an issue.

Hon Stephen Dawson: You won't pay any attention to Hon Adele Farina.

Hon COL HOLT: Well, let us face it.

Hon Adele Farina interjected.

Hon COL HOLT: That is right; it is a desired location anyway.

Hon Adele Farina: It has been, but it has not been for a while.

Hon COL HOLT: It is a desired location anyway. Does the member not think so?

Hon Adele Farina: It creates a disincentive.

Hon Stephen Dawson: If it wasn't, there would be no police there. It's a lifestyle.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Members! I think only one member has the call at the moment, and that is Hon Colin Holt.

Hon COL HOLT: Thank you. I will continue—sorry about that. I am nearly there. I have two pages of scribbled notes to go. I want to talk about our investment into the regional arts package, which we have made a large commitment to. We are aware that living in the regions involves more than education and health, even though that is very important. Other components of liveability in regional Western Australia that people living in Perth perhaps take a little bit for granted are access to some events and the touring shows. Access to art exhibitions are one thing but art is critical industry within regional Western Australia. It is not all about digging holes and exporting iron ore or growing a crop, baling it up and taking it out; there is a whole industry around arts and tourism in regional Western Australia.

Hon Adele Farina: It's not all about performing arts either.

Hon COL HOLT: No. In fact, this package will be about stimulating the regional art networks that create that rural flavour, culture and fabric of our communities. The south west is a great example of how that can really benefit communities and drive up some of the visitor numbers and the local economy. Denmark is a classic example. I am sure Hon Adele Farina spends a lot of time in Denmark enjoying the culture and the arts of that community. We are talking about invigorating it further and making it a real showpiece for those communities by providing an injection of investment so they can capitalise on those opportunities. I know that does not roll out for another year but again, we have not got all the answers in terms of what should be done in this space. When we put out our discussion document on investing in the regional arts, some components to it supported some of the regional entertainment centres like those in, from memory, Bunbury, Albany, Mandurah, Geraldton, Broome and Kalgoorlie. It also referred to what we can do to support those local arts groups. Do members remember the answers to those? I know that the Department of Culture and the Arts is working on those sorts of processes and engaging with some of the players in that space. Country Arts WA is an example of a leader in that space and is engaged in some of that work, and I look forward to working with those guys to see how we might best use that arts package to deliver those outcomes.

Hon Adele Farina: Are you going to talk about the SuperTowns?

Hon COL HOLT: Which part would the member like me to talk about?

Hon Adele Farina: About the nine SuperTowns that are not too happy that there is no funding coming to them.

Hon COL HOLT: Funding is coming, and there is access to funding. I will talk about that if the member likes. Those SuperTowns now have a planned framework and some funds that put them in a well-placed position to tap into any funding that comes along through other means, because they will be able to present the best scenario and the best argument for funding. A regional grants scheme was announced in this budget, and there is a regional infrastructure funds pot, and they might get some money out of the federal government for some regional infrastructure programs. The federal government might even put funds into regional WA, and not consider the airport a region. This framework provides those towns with the opportunity to tap into all those

funds, including federal government funding. The federal government also runs regional investment programs but it does not seem to get outside the cities. One of its programs funded television screens at the Geelong Football Club. Its regional investment fund also helped fund the access roads around the Perth Airport, which is good, but when the federal government was asked if that is really regional Western Australia, it said yes.

The SuperTowns program gives those nine towns the ability to argue for more funds than what is provided by the state government or the royalties for regions funding. It gives them the ability to argue at a federal level when and if the federal government ever brings out funding programs; these towns get another chance of dipping into that. I am sure the Regional Development Authorities throughout those regions would also provide another funding opportunity for those SuperTowns.

Hon Adele Farina interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Liz Behjat): I have the call; I gave it to myself. I remind those members on my left making continual interjections during this debate who are yet to make their contribution to these budget papers debates that I am sure when the time comes, and it is their opportunity to do so, we will look forward to their contribution. It would be appreciated if members could continue to listen to Hon Col Holt and give him the attention he deserves.

Hon COL HOLT: Just to complete that SuperTowns story, imagine six years ago when there was no investment in those towns. They would have no chance to tackle any funding opportunity that came along because there has been no investment in them. If the member were in government, would she give extra funding to the SuperTowns program?

Hon Adele Farina: It is not about what we would do when we are in government. It is about -

Hon COL HOLT: I am just asking the member. Would she?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Hon Colin Holt! Members!

Hon COL HOLT: I did invite that interjection. I am sorry.

I will talk about one last program, which is the Foodbank initiative or the school breakfast program that is funded to a small degree out of the royalties for regions budget. Foodbank is a great program that should be supported. I would like to see some more funds in there to upgrade some of its facilities. The Geraldton facility I think is okay, but Albany needs a bit of a fix up, and Peel has just been done. At least there is some investment in the school breakfast program, and that is again another great use of regional investment funding. It is about communities looking after each other, and we should be investing in those sorts of things.

I think I am just about done; would you believe it? Has anyone worked out how far the coins have gone while I have been talking? Probably not.

In closing, we came into government for the first time in 2008. At that time there was a real focus on investment in regional development. If members go to any community in regional WA, they will see the changes that have occurred in not just a physical sense but also in the attitudes and aspirations of those communities. This budget again shows that that investment will continue and there might be a different focus and some changes as we go along, but this budget again recognises that regional WA is an important part of this state. As we go forward members will see the results of some of those programs that I have highlighted in this budget and we will continue to see the fruits of that investment in the years to come.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural) [8.17 pm]: I thank Hon Col Holt for his contribution and despite him asking for leave, there is no way we could have left the chamber during that speech no matter how important the urgent parliamentary business. The Nationals have some right to feel proud about some of their achievements over the past four years, but I will talk more about those in a short while.

Members will have read *The West Australian* and noted an article by Gareth Parker, its state political editor, who called this budget a dog. Gareth Parker is being very harsh on the dogs of Western Australia. When we think about dogs, they actually help people a lot. We have working dogs, guide dogs, and sniffer dogs. All dogs everywhere make a good contribution to the lives of people in Western Australia. We have dogs that provide compassion and comfort to their owners and many other people. Dogs guard their owners from prospective intruders and other things. I can tell members that this budget does not do many of those things at all. Gareth Parker should rephrase his criticism of the budget but, in all seriousness, this is an awful budget. If members look at *Hansard* from last week, they will read in members' statements that I predicted that last Thursday would be a bloody day for Western Australia, and indeed it was. I will go through the reasons for that in a little while. May I just add at this point that I am not the lead speaker of this debate. I should have said that earlier but I was

captivated with Hon Col Holt's speech and it caused me to lose my train of thought. Thank you, Madam Deputy President, for allowing me to throw that in there.

It must be very embarrassing for members opposite, the 21 heroes according to Nick Goiran. I am sorry but Hon Rick Mazza was not included in that list of heroes. He is over here with us in the non-heroes group. However, the 21 heroes on the opposite side of the house who Nick Goiran named the other night in Parliament —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Can I remind the member, when he refers to another member, to use the term "honourable member".

Hon DARREN WEST: I am terribly sorry, Madam Deputy President (Hon Liz Behjat), for that. Hon Nick Goiran referred the other day to the 21 heroes on the other side of the chamber. I reckon they are not feeling like heroes now because members of the public of Western Australia have been scathing about what the government delivered to them last Thursday.

Hon Jim Chown: That's what you want them to think but the reality is very different.

Hon DARREN WEST: I am going to back up this comment in a few minutes. I have a couple of bits of paper with me that indicate the people of Western Australia are not at all happy about what the government delivered, and I intend to refer to them. Bear with me. Keep the interjections sensible. If they add to the debate, I am happy to talk to members about them. But when they are just snide remarks across the chamber, I will just keep talking, if that is what I can do, Madam Deputy President.

I will start out with the big issue—the solar power feed-in tariff scheme. What a beauty that was. A contract was signed several years ago. The then Minister for Energy said, "What a great thing this was. We're encouraging investment in renewable energy. We'll give you 60c a kilowatt." The federal government chipped in its little piece and made the first kilowatt free. I must say with some regret now that I did not go ahead with my solar power panels. We sat down and did the sums and it worked out that if we put in a small system that would cover some of our needs, the federal government would cover a third or half of the cost as the first kilowatt was free. A lot of more astute people than I am said, "Hang on here a minute, if we buy a bigger system of six kilowatts that will supply power for our house and supply some power for the neighbour's house next door, we can get up to 60c." That was the talk at the time and inevitably those people signed contracts —

Hon Jim Chown: As a Labor member are you happy to have the people you supposedly represent subsidise this program?

Hon DARREN WEST: I ask Hon Jim Chown to keep his interjections sensible, please.

Hon Jim Chown: Well, respond to the interjection, because a lot of figures are wrong.

Hon DARREN WEST: The figure was 60c. When people sat down and did the sums, they found that it was a good deal. The figure came down to 40c and people thought, "Well, that's still a good deal, I'm in." I made the point that it was a good deal for people who had the disposable income at the time. I was not talking about single parents struggling with three jobs and bringing up two kids. They were not the people who subscribed to the scheme at that time. The people who subscribed to the scheme had some disposable income and were in a position to go to their bank and say to their friendly bank relationship manager, "I've got an idea that I might invest some of my money into solar panels, and here is the business case for me doing so. What about lending me the rest of the money?" The bank looked at the proposals and said, "Yes, that's a sound business practice. We support sound business practices, so we will back this." Can members imagine what those 75 000 people thought when they heard last Thursday that the scheme was pulled—it was gone? We had the debacle on Friday with the Treasurer saying, "We're sticking to our guns. We're not doing it. We're not changing. These decisions are made. We've got to get on with it."

Then we had what I call the latest federal intervention. There was clearly a call from either Tony Abbott or his advisers with the comment, "What the? Please explain. You'd better do something about this." I think this tariff was changed for reasons other than the trotted-out line from the government that this is good for the people of Western Australia. I think it was changed because there would be carnage on 7 September in Western Australian seats. We all know that there is an election for a new federal government in Canberra, and we all know that the race is very close. We also know that our federal colleagues have a really good chance of winning. I think this tariff change was of much concern.

Another article in *The West Australian* is headed "Federal Liberals fear being burnt by WA solar heat". That is a good play on words written by Daniel Emerson. The quote lifted from that article reads —

... the Government quite rightly deserves the hiding that they're getting ...

That was not a quote from a Labor member of Parliament; that was not a quote from a journalist; that was a quote from the federal WA Liberal Don Randall. It was Don Randall who said that and the quote was printed in *The West Australian*.

I will go back a little way, if I may, Madam Deputy President, to some quotes that were made about this scheme. On Thursday, 27 May 2010, Hon Peter Collier, the then Minister for Energy, said —

I am delighted to outline details of a residential net feed-in tariff scheme that will give householders a greater incentive to install grid-connected renewable energy systems ... It will also increase the affordability of investing in a renewable energy system, with householders receiving a payment for 10 years.

That was said in 2010. The article in the newspaper goes on through a series of changing rhetoric from members of the government. I will spare members that, as I am sure they have heard it all in the party room or read it in the press.

On 9 August the now Treasurer, Troy Buswell, said —

Our view is that the feed-in tariff is another example of a government program that is not affordable in the current environment. Circumstances have changed. I understand people are going to be far from pleased with the outcome but we have a broader responsibility ...

I do not know what government members' electorate office phones were like but my staff were not doing very much else on Friday morning but taking calls from irate and angry householders who had invested in solar panels. He goes on —

Hon Jim Chown: That's old news; the problem's been rectified.

Hon DARREN WEST: I asked Hon Jim Chown before to keep his comments sensible. He is having a bit of difficulty doing that.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! If any member needs to be reminded of the rules of debate in the house, it will be the Chair who does that. I invite the member to continue the debate but to address his remarks only through the Chair and perhaps not respond to interjections from that side by inviting them.

Hon DARREN WEST: Certainly, Madam Deputy President, and I thank you for that.

I have lost the place I was reading from. I will not start again, as I think members get the idea. The advice from the Treasurer is —

... we have a broader responsibility to the totality of the community.

I thought those were very interesting words coming from a man who I believe does not have the broader interests of the totality of the community at hand, but we will take his word for that. He said —

The advice we've had is what we are doing is allowable within the constraints of the contracts.

I have to question the morality of a man who would say something like that. These contracts were signed in good faith by people who had borrowed money and entered into them in good faith believing that they would be paid for in 10 years, and the Treasurer said, "We're allowed to do this. Look, we don't really care how ethical or immoral it is, we're going to do it." Then the best quote of all is from Monday, 12 August when Premier Colin Barnett said —

Quite simply we got this decision wrong and we have to fix it.

He was right about that bit. He continues —

We're sorry, we'll cop it, we'll pay for it.

The other thing I like about that comment is that the Premier will not pay for it. The people who will pay for it are the taxpayers of Western Australia who will have to prop up \$50 million in the budget. I think it is \$50 million, \$51 million or \$58 million; it is a lot of money. Members can think about their own personal wealth and work out by how many times they need to multiply that to get \$51 million. Think about people who buy a house. The average house probably costs about 30 grand in stamp duty, so that is a lot of houses that people will have to buy if stamp duty is going to pay for this. It has just been totally hashed all the way through. I have read letters to the editor in the paper and one was from a lady who lives in Dianella or Inglewood. She says that she has voted Liberal, has worked in Liberal offices and has been married to a Liberal member, and she cannot believe what the Premier is getting away with. I read that in the letters to the editor. One letter to the editor as a

rule of thumb—I know as my family has been involved in the publishing business—usually represents about 5 000 views. I reckon that more than one letter went to the editor of *The West Australian* about this solar feed-in tariff.

I know that government members over on the other side are arcing up a bit about the issue, but they would have to feel a bit embarrassed. I would bet that none one of them is feeling like a hero at all about this solar feed-in tariff debacle. That is what it is. It is a debacle. It is costing taxpayers \$50 million because the government wanted to get rid of it, and then it wanted to keep it. The government is not really sure about what it wants to do really. However, thankfully, those people who signed a contract in good faith will get to keep their 40c feed-in tariff and they will get a return on their investment that the government promised them and that it wanted to take away. But now, because of pressure from the government's federal counterparts, it has had to give it back. I am pleased about that. I am pleased that the pressure came on the government about such a poor decision. What I am not pleased about is that it took the heat off the other poor decisions handed down in the budget. It took the heat off the decisions that are things the Liberal Party told the electorate before the election but had absolutely no intention at all of delivering on. It never told us about a lot of these charges; it sprung them on us on 1 July.

I will start off with the \$2 charge at train stations. Why do people pay tax if they cannot have a basic transport service? Every other city in the world has a basic transport service.

Hon Jim Chown: Because they're subsidised 67 per cent by other taxpayers in the country!

Hon DARREN WEST: We pay for it, mate! We pay for it already! People who pay tax and revenues to the state government pay for it! The Liberal Party is not in business, it is in government. It is in the service delivery business.

Hon Peter Katsambanis: You pay \$2 to park at the train station now!

Hon DARREN WEST: No-one ever had to pay to park at a train station; now we have to pay to park at a train station.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: The Premier says, "It's only two bucks a day." If we add that up, that is \$400 or \$500 a year. People have had enough. People have kids in school and mortgages, rates, electricity bills, water bills, increased car registrations and increased third party insurances to pay; where does the government think they are going to get another 450 bucks from? Where does the government think these people are going to get this money from? Not everybody has thousands of dollars in the bank. Most people do not have a lot of money in the bank! Most people are relying on their credit card to get them to pay day; most people are chasing the bills around the fridge and seeing how they can pay them, and you lot keep throwing another \$400 or \$500 here—it cannot go on. It is not sustainable. The state budget is not sustainable if the government is going to keep hitting people up like it is. It has to stop spending. It has to slow down and live within its means. There is one way to make money: spend less than is earned. I wish someone would tell the Premier and Treasurer those words—spend less than is earned. It is a mad, free-spending, out-of-control government that has bred a debt monster. We have a debt monster now and I love the graphics. When the Liberal Party came to government there was a lot of talk about —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Simon O'Brien): Order! Hon Darren West has the call.

Hon DARREN WEST: When the Liberal Party came into government there was a debt of \$3.8 billion. I can remember hearing the screaming during the 2008 election campaign. I think the slogan that hit the biggest chord with the voters was: "After eight years of boom, what have you got? You've got nothing but a big fat debt—\$3.8 billion"; we are now looking at \$28.4 billion at the end of this budget period. We have affectionately named him the debt monster, and over the next few months members will see some really good graphics of the debt monster. He has grown from a little debt monster to a big, big, big debt monster—the debt monster is \$28.4 billion. He is a beauty; he really is becoming a monster! What concerns me, as I have said in this place quite a few times before, is that one day the ratings agencies are going to look at Western Australia and say, "We're concerned about the level of debt in Western Australia; this is an unsustainable business model that the Western Australian government is running, and we are going to review the AAA credit rating." All members have heard me talk about this before. Australia has a AAA credit rating from all three agencies—it is one of only eight countries that does—but some parts of Australia are not doing particularly well. It is no secret that Tasmania has been in a spot of fiscal bother for a while, and the incoming Premier of Queensland, Campbell Newman, during the Queensland election said that the Queensland economy was akin to that of Spain, which is running at about 150 per cent debt to gross domestic product; in Australia we are running at somewhere around 11 per cent or 12 per cent. So, if Queensland is like Spain and Tasmania is in a bit of pain—I could make a

limerick from that but I will not—it is a pretty good effort to keep the national economy at a AAA credit rating. The strongest—powerhouse—state, because of our wealth in resources, gas, agriculture and other businesses, is Western Australia. If the government cannot keep the Western Australian economy with a AAA credit rating, I do not need to say any more about that. I think the effects of that will flow on for years and years to come.

Hon Col Holt: Will you take a sensible interjection?

Hon DARREN WEST: Is there such a thing?

Hon Col Holt: What do you think of the agriculture investment?

Hon DARREN WEST: I am getting to that. Thanks for that. Yes, I have that on my rather comprehensive list, honourable member.

We have heard a lot about broken promises, and we get one daily, if not weekly. We get broken promises about transport infrastructure, which Hon Samantha Rowe spoke about in great detail very eloquently earlier on in the session, and the promised country local government fund has gone. I will talk more about royalties for regions in a while, because I am a fan of royalties for regions and I am very sad about what has happened to that. We have had the solar tariff debacle. Utility prices are a beauty utility prices will not rise beyond the consumer price index. The Premier uttered that on radio; I happened to be listening and I thought, “Oh, that will be good; that will give people some relief. I’m pleased to hear that.” Like everybody else, when my power bill comes every couple of months, I have to pay it. Although it encourages me to turn things off when I am not using them, having to pay these huge rises in utilities that occurred before the carbon tax or the clean energy future bill was passed is still an impost on my life. We found out today that council street lighting is going up 11.8 per cent. That is around five times CPI, so there is another broken promise. These are coming out daily. Hon Alyssa Hayden is sitting there with her computer open; if she is interested, she should go to www.brokenpromises.org.au to find the litany of broken promises that her government has made to the people of Western Australia, and will not fulfil and never had any intention of fulfilling.

I will talk about another one that I just reckon is really poor form. In my electorate some communities have overcome any xenophobia that was in that community and have embraced the intake of migrants and those on 457 visas into their communities. I am talking about communities such as Katanning, which proudly boasts—I did not research the figure, but I think I am right—in the order of 70 different nationalities and cultures. There is a large meat-processing facility there that is predominantly staffed by people on 457 visas. They came to Australia to seek work and to bring their families and to have a better life. How are these people, who are working in an abattoir for the Western Australian Meat Marketing Co-operative—they are not on 100K—going to come up with \$4 000 a year to send their kids to school? I reckon that is plain discriminatory.

Hon Peter Katsambanis: If it was up to your candidates for Hasluck and Swan, they’d be sent back home. Your party is out there tonight campaigning against foreign workers—your party!

Hon DARREN WEST: What if they people on 457 visas have five kids?

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: So is the member! Do not go getting on high moral ground about this one! The Liberal Party started all this!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Although recognising that all interjections are highly unruly, there is a limit. Try to keep it down to one at a time because when we have multiple interjecting parties, the member on his feet can get lost and Hansard does not have a hope, and that is whom I am trying to protect.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: What about if they have four kids? That is \$16 000. How are they going to pay? I hope they do not; I hope they tell the government where to put it. I hope they tell the government where to put its \$4 000.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: I think education is a basic right of everybody.

Point of Order

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am sitting right in front of Hon Darren West, and I am struggling to hear what he is saying.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Simon O’Brien): Thank you.

Hon Michael Mischin: Lucky you!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: When interjections descend into a cacophony so that no-one can make out what is being said, we do lose. It is a valid point of order, and I will ask Hon Darren West to direct his remarks to the Chair.

Debate Resumed

Hon DARREN WEST: Yes, the Attorney General beat me to the punch by a nanosecond. I thought the same; people should be pleased they cannot hear some of the things I say.

But these are indeed comments that I know the government does not want to hear, because of course we are very critical of this budget. We knew this was going to happen. The Treasurer has had his hand down the back of every couch for weeks now.

Hon Peter Katsambanis: Why don't you say something positive?

Hon DARREN WEST: I am looking forward to Hon Peter Katsambanis's contribution.

The biggest killer of under-45 males is suicide. I am led to believe from some information that has been circulated today that there are indeed cuts to mental health services. I think that is a travesty. This is an area in which we should be investing more and more money, not less and less money.

I will just use a little anecdote of my own to point out the way this government works. In my electorate, I have an unfortunate family with six children. Sorry; they are not unfortunate. They are a very lucky and very beautiful family. But they are unfortunate in that their house was burnt down. I spent a day on the phone trying to find some alternative accommodation for them, with some success; I think that is all sorted out now. I called the minister's office. I thought, "I am a member of Parliament, not just an ordinary Joe, and I would be able to get some sense out of the minister's office." I called the minister's office, and I explained the situation and how we might want to see whether we could bump these people up the list a bit, because this family has six kids and it had no house. Foodbank Geraldton organised an appeal and provided food—Hon Colin Holt referred earlier to the fact that Foodbank Geraldton is about to have its tenth anniversary, so I think it goes back to before 2008—and the community rallied around and a lot of people donated money and beds and food and everything this family needed. But when I rang the minister's office, I was told on the phone, "We hear a sob story every week." I found this shocking. I reckon it typifies what happens when people do not care. When people in government are over having to deal with other people and sorting out their problems, I think the government has a real problem. I think the government has really lost touch with the community when I can hear that down the phone from a staffer. I am not going to say who it was, and I never will. But that is symptomatic of the level of care for the community that we are finding under this government.

I turn now to tourism. I reckon the agricultural region has huge potential for tourism. The agricultural region and the wheatbelt have the highest number of day trippers out of Perth of any region in this state. I think that is for two reasons. One is that it is nice and close to Perth. But I think it also says a bit about the quality of the accommodation in the agricultural region and the wheatbelt. The tourism budget has taken a real hacking. It has taken a real slash. It has been cut by a significant amount of money. I heard once at a tourism conference—maybe it was a slightly jaundiced view—that investment in marketing tourism can result in a return of up to 10 to one. I heard also at that conference that there is one job for every \$60 000 that is spent on marketing in tourism. The government has pulled \$1 million out of the tourism budget. Members can do the maths on that for themselves.

We cannot underestimate the value of training, and of technical and further education, especially in regional areas. Regional areas have a lot of young people whom we are trying to retain. We would like them to stay in the area and do apprenticeships and trades and get certificates in all kinds of courses. We would even like to think that we might be able to set up some sort of tertiary education facility for them. But TAFE funding has been cut by seven per cent. There is also no funding for the Muresk Institute. I think we will have to wait a bit longer for these things. I am pleased to say that there was an election announcement by the federal Labor government—which is often accused in this place of not investing enough into training—to put a significant amount of investment into training. Let us hope there is not a change of government at the federal level so that we might get the funding in that way.

I have just found another comment that I meant to make earlier when I was referencing Gareth Parker and his very, very unkind quote attributed to dogs. I think that if we were to call this budget a dog, as Gareth Parker did in *The West Australian*, people should think of a very large, wet dog, with terrible breath, that has been eating a lot of Pal. I say that because that is the sort of dog that this budget is. That is what I think, and I meant to put that in earlier when I was talking about dogs.

All these things that I have talked about are not the worst thing about this state budget. I will come now to what I think is the worst thing about this budget. This is something that I am truly concerned about. I raise this because

I have always been a believer in royalties for regions. But, sadly, royalties for regions is finished. It is gone. It is all over. Royalties for regions is now a blast from the past, according to this budget.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: I have done a lot of digging around, and I will get to the detail of that later. Members opposite can chuckle, but when I am finished, they will see what I am talking about. I want to talk about royalties for regions. Royalties for regions is an idea that has been floating around for a very long time. All credit must go to the Nationals, because they picked it up and marketed the concept with a great catchy slogan that the people bought. People loved it. Royalties for regions has delivered a lot of benefits to regional Western Australia. I have been involved in royalties for regions, and never once have I wavered about the value of royalties for regions. I have defended royalties for regions on our side of politics, and the shadow Minister for Regional Development will attest to that. I got the guernsey of being his parliamentary secretary because of my absolute passion and belief in royalties for regions and my belief that there should be some level of funding equality.

It is with dismay that I read this, but I want to tell members what happened, and I will make a comparison between the Nationals and the Greens, the two minor parties, if we like. Members will need to bear with me and take in these figures. In 2005, in the Legislative Assembly, the Nationals got 3.69 per cent of the primary vote and the Greens got 7.57 per cent. So the Greens vote was over double the Nationals vote statewide. In the Legislative Council, the Nationals got 2.19 per cent of the primary vote and the Greens got 7.5 per cent. So in 2005 the vote for the Greens was three times higher than the vote for the Nationals.

Then came along royalties for regions—this great marketing campaign, fantastically done. The punters bought it. It was a winner. Everyone believed this was the way of the future and they should vote for it, and they did. In the Legislative Assembly, the Nationals vote went from 3.69 per cent to 4.87 per cent, and the Greens vote went from 7.57 per cent to 11.92 per cent. So the vote for the Greens was well over double the vote for the Nationals. This was in 2008, the royalties for regions election. In the Legislative Council, the Nationals vote was 5.32 per cent, and the Greens vote was 11 per cent. So again the Greens vote was well over double the Nationals vote, even with royalties for regions. So the Nationals are disproportionately represented in the Parliament on the raw number of votes. But that is a debate for another day.

Now comes the last one; now comes the good one. Members should get their pens ready and write this down. In 2013, in the Legislative Assembly the Nationals got six per cent of the vote, and the Greens got 8.39 per cent of the vote. So the Greens took a fair hit in that election, which is well documented, and the vote for the Nationals increased, albeit by a small amount. In the Legislative Council, the Greens got 8.21 per cent of the vote and the Nationals got 4.88 per cent of the vote.

Royalties for regions is responsible for this increase. Even though I think royalties for regions has been a great thing for regional Western Australia, it has been a much better thing for the National Party than it has been for regional Western Australia. The National Party now has five members in the Legislative Council—we still have a gerrymander in the upper house, but I can argue both sides for that—and it has six members in the Legislative Assembly, plus a rat; and the Greens now have two members. So we have 11 members and a rat, versus two, even though the Greens get more votes. So the National Party has been very, very clever in pitching this marketing campaign in ways that will do it the most good.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: These figures do not lie, Colin. These figures are the case.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Simon O'Brien): Member, I know that in the heat of battle we say all sorts of things. It has just been pointed out to me that there is reference to a member in another place in an offensive term. I am suggesting that you acquaint yourself with the relevant standing order, which is intended to make sure the debate does not become inflamed because of derogatory remarks being used about members or colleagues. I just point that out to you and ask you to bear that in mind as you continue your remarks, please.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Mr Deputy President. That is all I have to say about that matter—about that individual; I am terribly sorry. What I was getting at is this has been a very slick marketing campaign —

Withdrawal of Remark

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Mr Deputy President, I, too, heard that particular remark. I was not sure, because the number 11 was being thrown up, which is a number that might relate to a particular party representative in this place, or a party's representation in the Parliament, exactly who that reference was to, but it could be one of two people. I suggest that no matter whom it was referring to, it was of such unparliamentary standard that the member should withdraw that remark rather than get to his feet and say that that will be it and

he will not talk about it. I seek that he withdraw that remark and the reference to that particular member immediately. He knows whom he was referring to.

Hon Sue Ellery: Did he rat or did he not rat?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Simon O'Brien): Order! I am ruling on a withdrawal of remark. I think the derogatory term was used as a noun, not as a verb, as the Leader of the Opposition well knows. I have already raised this point with the member currently speaking and he has acknowledged what I have drawn to his attention and has indicated that he will take that on board. I am not sure that I heard a further reference of the type that I just referred to or whether the member is referring to a term that had been used prior to me raising the point. However, it is the Chair's responsibility to resolve conflicts between members in this place, or to avoid them in the first place, and that is the purpose of this standing order in part. If members would direct their attention to the relevant standing order, standing order 43 states —

A Member shall not use offensive words in debate, including offensive words against either House of Parliament, any Member of either House, the Sovereign, the Governor or a judicial officer.

Furthermore, standing order 45(2) states —

A Member may object to the President that the words used by another Member constitute unparliamentary language, so long as the objection is taken immediately after the words have been used.

Standing order 45(3) states —

If the President determines that the words used by a Member constitute unparliamentary language, whether or not an objection has been raised by another Member, the President shall direct the Member to withdraw those words and may require an apology.

Standing order 45(4) states —

Any withdrawal or apology made by a Member must be made without explanation or qualification.

In view of the fact that Hon Peter Katsambanis has asked for a withdrawal or remark that specifically picks up on standing orders 43 and 45, the best way for this matter to resolve itself now is if I invite Hon Darren West to respond accordingly and withdraw the term so that we can move on.

Hon DARREN WEST: It is duly withdrawn.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I think we have all learnt something from that. Let us now proceed.

Debate Resumed

Hon DARREN WEST: I point out that this marketing campaign and this fund have been used over the last four years for the benefit of the National Party. I think that is a real shame, because we had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and, sadly, that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity has now passed us by. I will tell members why. On 24 October 2008, the then newly elected Minister for Regional Development said —

“Planned expenditure for regional projects and services will not be accounted for as Royalties for Regions funding, but any additional funding over and above the planned expenditure will come out of the Royalties for Region funding.

“This will ensure these projects are delivered.”

“Today's agreement —

He was referring to the agreement in 2008 —

ensures that the Royalties for Regions fund will enhance the regions through the delivery of new funding over and above the limited funding amounts contained in the forward estimates earmarked for regional infrastructure development by the previous government.”

That is what was said. It was to be over and above; that is how it was sold to the electors and that is how it has been sold to the development commissions and the regional development councils. It was to be new funding above and beyond, but what do we find now? Now we find that royalties for regions is propping up all kinds of government expenditure. We have \$300 million of royalties for regions money for the agriculture portfolio, but the agriculture budget has not increased in real terms. So \$300 million of royalties for regions money has gone into agriculture, but \$300 million of consolidated revenue has been pulled out of agriculture. That is not over and above the funding. I do not see how we can still say today that, other than for political gain for the National Party, there is any such thing as royalties for regions. Although the honourable member gave us the analogy of

the coins, I point out to him that a million seconds is eight days, but a billion seconds is 37 years, so it is three-quarters of 37 years' worth of seconds, not gold coins. Can members follow that, or is that too Russell Coight? Three-quarters of a billion dollars is going into health. That is not over and above the funding. We have always had a very good health system in the wheatbelt. We have had one of the best health systems in the world for several decades. We should be very proud of our health system. We have always had 23 hospitals servicing 70 000 people, and that is something we should be proud of. In the past we have always had doctors and specialists. We have had better health services in the past than we have now, so I do not know how we can say that we have spent three-quarters of a billion dollars over and above that funding.

The other thing I can tell members about royalties for regions—I picked this up the other day—is that the country local government fund is finished, and the country local governments are terribly pleased about that. There was criticism about the country local government fund because it was targeted at the Minister for Regional Development's seat in the wheatbelt. We had 43 local governments. I was chair of the Wheatbelt Development Commission, so I know most of the CEOs and presidents. The country local government fund did favour my electorate because there were so many local governments. That was okay; we made the case that that was fair enough as we had been missing out for a while and local governments had a lot of projects that they needed to fund and some initiatives that they wanted to catch up on. It was a good thing. I actually argued for it. But now it is: "See you later, mate. The minister has gone somewhere else." The country local government fund has gone from \$94 million in 2011–12 to \$6 million in 2015–16. It will have a devastating effect on local governments, which were expecting this money. They were told that the money would still be coming. We said that we would match that and keep it coming if we got into government.

A government member: You lost the election.

Hon DARREN WEST: We lost the election; that is right. The people believed National Party members; they had faith in them and they trusted them. And what did they do? They threw it all away. They betrayed all of them, and local governments will back me up on that. They truly believed that the country local government fund was coming.

But this is where it gets good. I had a bit of a sniff through the budget. Surprisingly, I went straight to regional development and then to agriculture and then to the Wheatbelt Development Commission. The 2011–12 actual for the Pilbara Cities initiative was \$24 million and the forward estimate in 2015–16 is \$122 million. The Minister for Regional Development has moved from the wheatbelt, for which the funding has decreased from \$94 million to \$6 million, to the Pilbara, for which the funding has increased from \$24 million to \$122 million. Tell me that is not a pork barrel. That is exactly what it is. This mob is using this fund for its own political gain—no more and no less. It is an out-and-out disgrace. The worst of it is that it was such a good idea, it had such potential, it was a winner for regional Western Australia and everybody agreed with it. But what have they done with it? They have used it for themselves. It is not their money. It is taxpayers' money; it is general revenue. That is what I said about royalties for regions; it is going into Hon Brendon Grylls' electorate. When National members from the Agricultural Region and South West Region go back to their electorates and people ask them what happened to the country local government fund, they can tell them that Hon Brendon Grylls has taken it and spent it in the Pilbara—"Sorry about that". They might be able to talk about that when they go to the country local governments.

I have eight more minutes; I have a feeling that those opposite will probably not be all that keen for me to seek an extension, although I have plenty more I can say. There is a lot to talk about, and —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Simon O'Brien): Order, members! Hansard has responsibility for taking the member's words down, so give Hansard a chance.

A government member: The interjections are the best part!

Hon DARREN WEST: I hope that goes into the *Hansard*—"The interjections are the best part!" I will remember that during the member's contribution; I will make a few best parts myself!

I think I have touched on that issue for long enough, and it is now very clear to me when I read through the budget papers, but I am dismayed that that is what has happened to the royalties for regions fund. It comes out of mining royalties, it was a great idea, and well done for that. It was great electorally, great politically and great for the punters, and people on this side like it. I do take some objection to Hon Col Holt's remark that there was \$20 million in the regional investment fund. That is true, but he should go for a bit of a drive around Geraldton and have a look at what happened there over eight years of the Gallop and Carpenter Labor governments. More money was spent in Geraldton over that time than the current government has spent through royalties for

regions. There was the southern transport corridor; we deepened the port; and we created an iron ore industry in the midwest that was not there before. I do not think it is very fair to say that the Labor government put no money into regional development. I think members opposite all know better than that. When we drive around the city of greater Geraldton now, everywhere we drive we can see evidence of what was spent in the period between 2001 and 2008. I think we have every right to be proud of that, just as members opposite have every right to feel proud of their achievements through royalties for regions. There have been some good initiatives; I have made that acknowledgement.

Hon Paul Brown interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: Geraldton Hospital? Hon Paul Brown should not worry about that; as a member for Agricultural Region, he will know that the hospital is at capacity, but he will also know that there are empty beds over at St John of God Healthcare. Why would we build another hospital when there are empty beds in the city? Why would we do that? There are empty beds in Geraldton, and the member will learn that there are other places in regional Western Australia that need money spent on health as much as, if not more than, Geraldton. I do not advocate not building stage 2 of Geraldton Hospital; it was always to be built, which is why the hospital was built in stages. There is excess capacity at St John that is not being used, so why would we have one hospital empty and spend another \$120 million on a new one? We would not do that. Anyone with any business acumen or a business brain would think, “Well, hang on; there’s capacity in the town. Let’s use the capacity that’s in the town that was put there by another government. Let’s not bag them for not doing the job properly, let’s use the capacity and then make the case for another hospital.” I know that the government has not, over four years, built stage 2 of Geraldton Hospital, and I would suggest that it will not build it over the next four years, because it is going to spend \$122 million in the Pilbara. It will be spending money there; it will not be spending any more money in Geraldton. I do not think the Minister for Regional Development really cares about members opposite and their electorates; he is trying to create a little empire in the Pilbara.

Hon Paul Brown interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: It is not a bad thing at all. The member’s unintelligent interjection was that we should build stage 2 of Geraldton Hospital; I have just pointed out why we should not do that and that we should spend money in other areas of higher importance, and now the member is agreeing with what I am saying, so I am not quite sure what his point is.

I would like to talk about another issue. As members will know, I spend a lot of time working in the area of regional development, and proudly so. I think it is very important that people in country areas are treated equally with people in the cities, and that is why I stand in Parliament and talk about transitioning year 7s and how it affects us adversely. I am pleased to note that the National Party has finally acknowledged what I was saying after a trip to the affected areas—that I might have been onto something, and that that was not fair. I am hoping that members opposite will be able to convince the minister that people in Beacon deserve equal opportunities to those in other areas, because homeschooling is not a very good option. There are better options, and they include keeping year 7s in the local primary school when there is no better alternative. I will not talk about that anymore; I have had plenty to say about that.

I also note that Hon Col Holt said that budgeting is a bit hard. That is clear, is it not? Budgeting is very hard for this government. It is very hard for the Premier and the Treasurer, who are just running around as quickly as they can, shelling out as much money as they can, spending money on the Muja power station when everybody said it was not a good idea and spending money on a new stadium that most Western Australians are not going to use, but it is good to have a new stadium; I would have done a cheaper, more modest version. We have Elizabeth Quay; that is great. It will not affect me or the people in my electorate very much, but we have it. The thing is, we have to have all these things, and we cannot afford them. We are running up debts; the debt monster is growing every day. He is going to be \$28.4 billion in size by the time the government gets chucked out. The other thing about the debt monster is that he is going to eat a lot; he is going to eat \$1 billion a year. That is what it is going to take to feed the debt monster when the government gets chucked out. When we are back in government, we are going to say, “Well, thank you very much, Mr Buswell. We’ve got this big debt monster snapping at our heels, wanting \$1 billion a year of taxpayers’ money”. It will take \$10 000 per person to feed —

Hon Mark Lewis interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: It is a lot more; I will get back to the member on that one. Like many ministers when they are asked a hard question, I will have to give him the answer tomorrow. I will check that one out for him tonight. The point I am making is that \$1 billion a year could have bought a Fiona Stanley Hospital, but now we are going to have to spend that on feeding the debt monster that the government made. That amount could have built so much; it could have built roads all over the state. We could have the tier 3 rail system fixed and we could

have special services back in country hospitals. We could have all kinds of things with \$1 billion a year, but now we have to pay it off, with interest.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Interjections must not drown out the member on his feet, and the member on his feet is Hon Darren West.

Hon Nick Goiran: Perth Arena—go on, tell us about it!

Hon DARREN WEST: Okay! Who put the car park under Perth Arena? Hands up—who put the car park under Perth Arena?

A government member: You did!

Hon DARREN WEST: No, we did not. We did not put the car park under Perth Arena. Who did? Why did the cost of Perth Arena blow out? Someone put a car park under Perth Arena, and guess where those funds went? They went to the debt monster. The debt monster got the Muja money; the debt monster has everything that the government is doing, and we are going to have to pay \$1 billion a year to feed him.

Mr Deputy President, I wish to seek an extension, but at what point —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: When your time expires you can seek an extension.

Hon DARREN WEST: Okay; I did not want to be too late, because I have some more really good stuff!

Hon Col Holt talked about the benefits of telehealth. Like many things Hon Col Holt says, I agree with that. Telehealth is wonderful, and I know firsthand of situations in which people very close to me who live in remote locations have made use of telehealth.

[Member's time extended.]

Hon DARREN WEST: I thank you Mr Deputy President (Hon Simon O'Brien) and members for their indulgence. This issue is very near to me. Members of my extended family have been in remote locations and have needed to be diagnosed by telehealth. I can tell members that this is one of the great ways forward for our future, especially those of us who live in country and remote electorates. The capacity of the signal feed has been the limiting factor in telehealth diagnosis. Anyone who has had a phone conference, has skyped or has had a teleconference of some sort will be familiar with the signal dropping out, the words being delayed or the jolty, staggered, thunderbird movements that people display when they are on the other end of the telehealth line. The cause of the limitation in telehealth advances has not been funding; it has been the network capacity. If we all agree that telehealth is the way forward, especially in regional and remote Western Australia, and that we can diagnose all kinds of things from physiological disorders such as broken arms, sprained ankles and dislocated shoulders, we could diagnose many more complex ailments in areas of mental health, such as substance and amphetamine abuse, much more broadly if we had a world-class, fast connection between the telehealth person, who may be in Fitzroy Crossing, Goomalling or Margaret River, and the specialist, who may well be in London. Why would anyone who believes in telehealth oppose a national broadband network?

Hon Col Holt: No-one is opposed to it.

Hon DARREN WEST: Yes they are; members opposite want to build it out of copper and we will not have a world-class national broadband network that is even faster. At the moment our internet speeds are slower than those in Slovakia. For all kinds of good reasons, I think we should have faster broadband internet speeds than Slovakia has. It is better for business, and for all kinds of communications, especially, as the member said, for mobile phone communication. We will not need phone towers if we have access to data and can transmit broadband further from towers if we have a bigger feed. We could alleviate a lot of our road safety problems. People could be diagnosed online. The court system could use the national broadband network to sentence prisoners, especially remand prisoners, in faraway locations. If members are seriously in favour of telehealth, they should be getting in touch with their federal colleagues—like it or not, they have a chance of being voted in on 7 September—to get them to correct the potential error of their ways in regional Western Australia and get behind the national broadband network. It is in Geraldton now and Geraldton people are already getting the benefits of it.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: No; 42. Australia's is 11 per cent of GDP.

Several members interjected.

Hon Sue Ellery: You are competing with each other.

Hon DARREN WEST: They are coming an equal third; I think I am still winning.

Point of Order

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am trying to listen to the fabulous contribution Hon Daren West is making; however, I am struggling to hear him. Members on the other side are being very boisterous and I ask that you allow Hon Darren West to speak in relative silence.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Honourable members all agreed to extend the honourable member's time, so they deserve to listen to his remarks! The other thing I will point out while there is a break in proceedings is that when an interjection is made, if the principal member speaking does not respond or engage, it is not up to the interjector to keep on and on saying the same thing over and again. Interjections should be short and sharp if they are made at all and should not be continued indefinitely. The honourable member has caught his breath.

Withdrawal of Remark

Hon DARREN WEST: I too have a point of order. I was asked to withdraw a comment and I heard the same comment uttered from the other side of the chamber to me, so I ask that it also be withdrawn.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I heard no such remark, but if a remark was made of that nature, I invite the member to withdraw it.

Hon DARREN WEST: It was about something jumping from a ship.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Hon Darren West.

Hon DARREN WEST: That is very unfortunate. I heard the remark and the person knows exactly who made it, and I think the person who made that remark should man up and withdraw it, as I did when I used the term in relation to someone who left one political party and joined another. I do not think it is fair that it is used back at me. It shows a distinct lack of —

Hon PAUL BROWN: Mr Deputy President —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Is this on this point of order, Hon Paul Brown?

Hon PAUL BROWN: I think the member is referring to my remark about someone in Canberra being a rat from a sinking ship. If he took offence to that, I withdraw my remark.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Hopefully, that is the end of matter. Thank you.

Debate Resumed

Hon DARREN WEST: I did mishear the remark, but I heard that word, which was a word that I was told to withdraw, so thank you.

I have done a lot of work in the area of health. Members will know of the wheatbelt health initiative. We have a memorandum of understanding with a working group—the Wheatbelt Development Commission and the WA Country Health Service et cetera—which was a group of people with some very good minds and experience. It set up the template for the Southern Inland Health Initiative, which I support and believe in. It is not all rosy out there, I have to tell members. Northam Hospital, which was referred to before, is still an area of great need and I hope that in the coming months funds are used to shore up the service there. A 24-hour wheatbelt general practice super clinic is to go into Northam, funded by the federal government, so I urge the state government to get behind it.

The issue of SuperTowns came up before.

Hon Paul Brown interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: They have gone; it is all over; there is no such thing. There is no \$84 million; it is all over. I believed that process was flawed from the start. I had some input into that and watched that process with some dismay. It involved a lot of talk. Once again, it involved a lot of pork-barrelling and did not achieve a result, so it has gone: "See you later". No National Party members are represented in that.

The other issue that I acknowledge is a very good program and in which I had some involvement also is the regional mobile communications project, which resulted in 120 new towers being installed around Western Australia. It was a great initiative; areas such as the wheatbelt and the Pilbara were noted pick out for political gain. The emergency services radio network, which was in need of an overhaul, was improved at the same time, and that was a good outcome. It was run independently by the Department of Commerce, and all stakeholders were involved. I was on that committee and I think that was done well; it was a good outcome and the government should be proud of it. I do not have any service on my phone so when the government puts up the next round of towers it can stick one in the Jennacubbine area. The other place where I do not get very good

service is Dunsborough where I go on holiday, so I would like a tower near Dunsborough, around Quindalup somewhere, so that when I am on holidays I can check Facebook. That would be terrific.

Finally, I refer to the \$300 million investment in agriculture. Hon Colin Holt asked me whether I had any comments on the live trade and I have, funnily enough! The impacts of the cessation of the live trade are well documented and a lot of pain was felt by people who had done nothing but the right thing. Meat and Livestock Australia failed in its duty to ensure animal welfare standards in Indonesia and that was plain for all to see on *Four Corners*. The government had to act. If we hold an organisation responsible for regulating itself and it does not regulate itself, we need to act. I know a lot of people who felt a lot of pain out of this, and they were good, hardworking people who had done nothing but the right thing and had nothing but the best animal welfare standards in mind for their stock. They were let down by a few, and that is how it is. The federal government acted very hastily, which was criticised, and some of that criticism was warranted. The whole thing could have been handled differently. However, I am happy to say that I am organising a group of people through the Ambassador to Thailand, whom I met and had lunch with when he was in town. I then took him up to the farm, and I think there are great days ahead for the live cattle trade in Western Australia. There are some tremendous opportunities in Asia that we need to get a heads up on and look for rather than sit back and grizzle and sook about what happened in Indonesia and the subsequent outcome. Although tremendous pain was borne by people who should not have had to do that—I acknowledge that—there are better days ahead. May I assure Hon Col Holt that if there is anything I can do to improve the live cattle trade out of Western Australia in a humane, Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System-compliant and safe way that the community accepts, I will do everything I can, and I know we all will do that. I do not like to be portrayed as someone who is “anti” the live trade; I am not. I am “pro” the live trade and we need to investigate all opportunities and markets. I will be liaising with all members opposite about how things go in this pursuit, and there has been some recent press about it.

Hon Paul Brown interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: There has been some press about it. If the member reads *Farm Weekly* he will see it in there. A lot of cattle are going to Queensland. The director of the office of foreign investment in Thailand has been here and had a look around and is interested, so there is some good news over the horizon for the live trade and we are doing all that we can to fix it.

Let me get back to the main point I raised earlier. What a shame about the royalties for regions program. We could have done so much if we all got together and worked back. Members opposite had bipartisan support, the act was passed with the full support of both sides of Parliament in the belief that there would be a once-in-a-generation opportunity. Most people in my electorate believe in royalties for regions. They think it is great, but they do not feel as though they have had the benefits and they feel as though the chance might have passed them by. I would be very interested to see whether the Nationals are able to retain their 11-plus-1 despite getting fewer votes than the Greens, who get two. I will be interested to see whether that is retained because it has been very very cleverly marketed, and money has been very well targeted to maximise benefits to the National Party. What a shame we did not get anyone else involved.

Hon Col Holt: Who was talking about the mobile phone towers being a great thing?

Hon DARREN WEST: That was good. We are talking about 120 towers out of about two points for \$3 million. In the main, it has not been a success; it has been a wasted opportunity. If members look at these budget papers, and I know members opposite are not happy about what has happened with all —

Hon Col Holt: Where were you? For four years nothing ever came out of your mouth.

Hon DARREN WEST: I was not here for the last four years. I have just got here. I have not made comments in this Parliament because a person is not allowed to come in here unless he is a member of Parliament.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Simon O'Brien): Order, members! Let the honourable member get a word in edgewise.

Hon Col Holt: You were probably appointed by the Minister for Regional Development.

Hon DARREN WEST: I certainly was, the member knows that. I used to work with him and Hon Martin Aldridge on royalties for regions and I thought it was a fantastic initiative. I was right behind him but it has not fulfilled what I and the electorate had hoped for. I will be interested to see how it goes when it comes out now and everybody will start working it out and put two and two together as I have done or, if members like, 94 and six, and 24 and 122. If we put all those figures together and work out what is going on with this initiative, people will lose faith in the royalties for regions program. It is a real shame that in 2008, members opposite did not sit down and have a longer chat with Alan Carpenter. I reckon we would have got really good royalties for regions for four years. But as I said, we had a mob that was totally inept in opposition and sold a good message to the

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 14 August 2013]

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Hon Samantha Rowe; Hon Col Holt; Deputy President; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Katsambanis

people: Eight years of boom and what have we got? And people went, “Yeah, fair enough. I am for that.” They got into government at the last minute with a slice of luck, and the rest is history. The debt monster was born and look at him go; he has gone from \$3.8 billion to \$28.4 billion. Members opposite need to be ashamed of themselves trying to pass this budget, and to pass off all its poor decisions and all its failings onto the families and the working people of Western Australia. That is ordinary. This government should be helping people and not slugging them at every single opportunity to make up for its failings and silly decisions, its broken promises and thinly-veiled schemes to pork barrel its own electorates, and to prop up its own silly ideas like Elizabeth Quay and the grandiose Rolls Royce stadium. I have not even talked about the Ord River scheme. The government got \$300 million for the Ord, and Bob Katter is right; we did not sell the Ord to the Chinese, we gave it to them. Bob Katter is spot on the money with the Ord. We did not sell it to the Chinese; we just let them have it for \$300 million.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: They would have done well with \$300 million. Instead, that \$300 million is now —

Several members interjected.

THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order members! One at a time.

Hon DARREN WEST: Members opposite are very quick to point out the result of the election. The seat of Kimberley did not go so well for the government. We have a fine member for Kimberley in the other place, Hon Josie Farrer. So the people did not buy it in the Kimberley, but I have made my point. The budget is a shocker, Gareth Parker is unkind to dogs, and I just hope that the government can do better next time.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Peter Collier (Leader of the House)**.