

**KEY SERVICES — BUDGET CUTS**

*Motion*

**HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan)** [10.10 am] — without notice: I move —

That this council expresses concern at the Barnett government's wrong priorities in cutting budgets for key services like health, education and police rather than ending wasteful expenditure.

I am moving this motion in this place because, increasingly, there is pressure on Western Australian households and the government needs to be held accountable for that. There is no doubt that the spending by this government and this Premier is way out of control. It is demonstrated across a range of actions taken by this government, and I hope to explore those in the course of my remarks today. At the heart of this is that this expenditure is simply not sustainable. We have seen that the *2011–12 Annual Report on State Finances*, which was recently released, shows that since the Barnett government took office in this state, revenue has increased 31 per cent while over the same period expenditure has increased by 47 per cent. We do not have to be rocket scientists to work out that spending is happening much faster than revenue generation. Of course, the gap between the amount of revenue coming in and the amount of spending by this government continues to get bigger and bigger. There is an old saying that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Clearly there is not, because at the end of the day somebody will have to pay for all of this. The chances are that it will be Western Australian taxpayers.

One thing we do know is that we cannot live off a credit card. We also know that this government is currently living off the credit card.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** That is simply untrue. We borrow money for capital expenditure. Get your facts straight.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** If the minister wants to get up and make a contribution he can make it at the appropriate time. At the moment, I am making the contribution on my motion.

**Hon Jim Chown** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I could not have said it better.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** In this last year, revenue increased by only 5.5 per cent but spending increased by 10.2 per cent. In other words, spending is occurring at twice the rate of revenue income. This is not sustainable; it is seriously unsustainable and this government has been doing this for the past four years.

**Hon Jim Chown** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** In contrast—I want to put this in perspective because it is a very good comparison—in the previous Labor government's last full financial year in office our revenue grew by 10 per cent. I admit that the economic circumstances may well have been a bit kinder but not too much kinder. Revenue grew by 10 per cent and spending was only 9.9 per cent. Clearly, we were living within our means. Clearly, this government is not living within its means and is consequently placing an enormous burden on not only present WA taxpayers but also successive generations of Western Australians. When we built the Mandurah railway line, we paid for it with cash. There is no debt on that Mandurah railway line.

**Hon Jim Chown** interjected.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** There was no debt on that project. I do not know a project this government has been involved in over the past three years that has been built with cash. This government has not built anything with cash; it has put everything on the credit card. Therein lies the problem.

We know that the rate of debt is continuing to increase. Of course, it will increase if we continue to spend without any checks and balances and do not have the revenue. I worry, as do most Western Australians, about the capacity of the Western Australian population to afford the impost imposed upon them by this government. I worry about the adverse impact of the decisions being made today on the future generations in this state.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations we get a very good sense of what is going on across government. That standing committee is more than aware of the pressure that is placed on government agencies to harvest savings from their portfolios. Since it took office, this government has been harvesting savings to fund its extravagance. The pressure on agencies to find more and more savings gets greater and greater all the time. A couple of weeks ago Eric Lumsden, the Director General of the Department of Planning, told the committee that the planning department had a staff ceiling of 526 full-time equivalent

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positions, but it had been working under capacity at about 500 FTE. One thing that has become very apparent to me is that the majority of savings harvested across government agencies are being achieved by cutting staff. Departments cut staff by offering voluntary redundancies, no-one is brought in to backfill a position when someone goes on leave or vacant positions are not filled for months and months. Consequently, existing staff have to do more. They have to try to fill the gaps in services that occur as a result of the reduction in the government agencies' manpower effort. We see this all the time. The argument that these cuts do not impact on front-line services is absolute nonsense.

During hearings of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations we have asked for information about 2010–11 efficiency savings. These savings have already been made; they are done and dusted. I asked agencies during the 2010–11 estimates hearings for information on those savings. Agencies have not provided them. We have also asked agencies what savings they are making in their 2011–12 budgets. Once again, agencies have failed to provide the information. The scant information provided by agencies has been provided on the basis that until the mid-year financial review comes down, no information can be provided. I cannot believe this, but some four months after the budget has been brought down, agencies have still not decided where they will make the cuts. It beggars belief that this is how the agencies are operating under this government. This is how the government is operating. The one thing it cannot claim is that it is being transparent; it is not being accountable. It is thumbing its nose at the parliamentary processes in this state and it is certainly thumbing its nose at the Parliament and parliamentary committees. The government should be ashamed about that; it should hang its head in shame. Why does the government not want to give us any answers? It is simple; it does not want to give us any answers because what is happening in government agencies is bad; it is really, really bad—really, really bad.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** Really, really, really?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** It is really, really, really, really bad! The Attorney General is spot on; that is the first sensible thing that he has said in a long time. I agree with the Attorney General. The Attorney General and I have finally got a connection on something.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** On a scale of one to 10, are we going to 11?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** The Attorney General has put on the public record that he agrees with me that it is not just bad, it is really, really, really, really, really bad. I am very grateful that he has put that on the public record, because he and I finally agree on something of a political nature.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** If you thought I was agreeing with you, you've got the wrong idea.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** The Attorney General said it; I did not say it, the Attorney General said it. He agreed with me and I am happy for that to be the case.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** The "really bad" he was referring to was your speech!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Now, Mr President —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Let the member finish her comments and then it can be somebody else's turn.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** When one looks at the required savings across the forward estimates in the major portfolios on a year-by-year basis, say, one looks at the savings in health, education, and law and order for the 2011–12 financial year, one would think that is reasonable. However, when one looks at the required savings over the forward estimates in each of those portfolios and then adds them up, one sees a very, very different picture. That is exactly what I have done. Across the health portfolio over the forward estimates, in addition to all the savings that have been harvested thus far, another \$716.43 million in savings needs to be found—that is, from 2012–13 to 2015–16. WA Police is already strapped for resources. In fact, there was that embarrassing incident in which the Commissioner of Police in response to estimates questions provided some information to the committee and then was treated like a child by the Premier who said, "He deserved a clip around the ear". I thought it was absolutely pathetic that the Premier of this state should imply that a senior bureaucrat, the Commissioner of Police in this case, was not to be open and frank with a committee of the Parliament. I have to say that that speaks volumes about what this government is about. WA Police over the forward estimates was required to find \$160.57 million, and education has to find \$316.77 million. Therefore, we are talking about major, major, major, major league savings targets.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** He is a character in *Catch-22*, isn't he—Major Major Major Major!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Whilst we have these sorts of pressures happening on government agencies, we have seen a 28 per cent blow-out in the number of people in the Barnett government's senior executive service

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since 2008. Western Australian households have been told to tighten their belts and people cannot access services and have to wait for longer periods to access the health system—they have to wait longer for elective surgery—cannot get a bed in a mental health facility, cannot get a course in a district and so on and so forth. While all this pain is happening out there, there has been a 28 per cent increase in the number of people in the government senior executive service since this government took office. In June 2008, there were 374 people in the senior executive service across government; that has blown out to no fewer than 479 as at June this year. This represents a rise of 105 senior executives with a corresponding rise in the government's senior executive salary bill, which is estimated to be more than \$26 million. Can members imagine what \$26 million would buy?

One of the benefits of being on the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations is that I get a bit of a different perspective on what is happening. There is no doubt that directors general and heads of major organisations are being paid extra. Everyone has had a significant pay rise. It is like the Qantas model; the person in charge is bought off and then they go and take a knife through the organisation. This is exactly what is happening in these government departments and we see that time and again. There would not be a director general or a CEO of a government agency who has not received a substantial pay increase over the past four years—they all have.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** Who sets those? It's not the SAT by any chance?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I think that reflects very badly on the government. I do not think that, at one level, the senior executive service numbers should rise and that CEOs and directors general should be given pay increases at a time when services are being cut. We need to work to make sure that we save our services and I think that all this talk about the efficiency dividend cuts not affecting or impacting on front-line services is a lot of crock. I think that that is exactly what the government is doing and this government is trying to be very cute about that.

The other thing that the government has done is that in some cases when it restructured government departments, it almost doubled the number of departments; in other words, the government split education and training into two departments, each with its senior executives, separate directors general and so on and so forth. No doubt, that is a huge amount of waste.

Unfortunately, Western Australians are paying through the nose for the government's incompetence and wrong priorities.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** You're filling in the last couple of minutes.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I am sure that Hon Simon O'Brien will be able to survive the next couple of minutes given he has survived so long!

Certain ministers really stand out in terms of incompetence. I will put once again on the public record that the Minister for Energy is solely responsible for the \$600 million solar panels —

**Hon Peter Collier:** No, not \$600 million—for the fifth time!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** It was a solar panel bungle! It is in the papers—\$600 million. Then, he has another \$100 million for a bungled power project up in the Pilbara, and then with the Synergy billing system, which is also under his authority, control or whatever, he caused a blow-out of yet another about \$100 million. On top of that, there was an overrun on a couple of turbines in Kwinana. Over and above that, there was the Pilbara underground —

**Hon Peter Collier:** Is this the motion?

**Hon Simon O'Brien** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Is this the motion? He asks: is this the motion? Aren't we a bit tetchy this morning?

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Oh, boy! You are a piece of work!

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! There is room for only one speaker at a time in this chamber and not 10.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Thank you, Mr President. The minister —

**Hon Peter Collier:** Did you call me a piece of work before?

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**The PRESIDENT:** Order, minister. A point of order from the Minister for Mental Health.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** The minister should save her strength.

*Point of Order*

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** The comments that we heard from Hon Ed Dermer the other day referred to the statement, "You are a piece of work." I understand that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich is referring to you, Mr President, when she calls you a piece of work.

Several members interjected.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** Go and take a cold shower you useless piece of work.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** That is exactly the point that Hon Ed Dermer was making, so I would have thought that she would —

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** Get out of here!

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Once again, there were many interjections. The minister may have heard comments on the floor, but I certainly did not hear individual comments to that effect here in the chair. However, the point was made the other day that when a member talks about other members, they need to be respectful and courteous, and refer to them by their proper name and their proper position.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** The only point I want to make is that a lot of sensitivity is coming from the other side of the chamber. The fact is that this minister is solely responsible for about \$800 million or \$900 million worth of pain and pus to the Western Australian taxpayer—pain and pus. This minister is single-handedly responsible for that pain and pus. Yes, members heard right. The minister should hang his head in shame because at the end of the day, somebody will have to foot the bill for these mistakes; it will not be him, it will be the taxpayer.

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Finance)** [10.30 am]: I was searching through the speech of Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich just now seeking a grain of substance and I did not perceive one in all those 20 long minutes. What came across clearly, putting to one side the invective, was a mass of contradictions. We are either spending too much or we are not spending enough. I did not hear much reference to a number of matters in the motion. There was some reference in the speech to other matters that are not mentioned in the motion, but basically it was a mass of contradictions by the honourable member in moving a motion claiming, quite wrongly, that we are cutting budgets for key services such as health, education and police, while at the same time saying that we are failing to reduce wasteful expenditure. The fact of the matter is, of course, that this government has a strong record of targeting wasteful spending. I summarise just a few of those aspects. There is \$524 million in savings between 2011–12 and 2014–15 from a five per cent efficiency dividend on government trading enterprises. We have had 1 138 voluntary separations, saving \$54 million per annum and a targeted savings program freeing up \$324 million between 2011–12 and 2014–15. There was an economic audit resulting in savings of \$979 million over 2009–10 to 2012–13, including reductions in procurement spending of \$239 million over that period. All of that started with an efficiency dividend policy in 2008–09, which was a stated policy position back then of both sides of politics from the time of the very early 2008 election. Whilst saving measures are rarely 100 per cent successful in that format, we actually saved about \$1.46 billion as part of that exercise, and of course, all of that money has been redirected. Where to? It has been redirected to key priorities, including those in health, education and law and order, as the very clichéd wording of this motion runs, as well as some other very important areas that I will come to in just a moment. Plus, savings initiatives were set out in the 2012–13 budget that I had the honour to read into this place back in May. There was a two-year full-time equivalent cap whereby public services FTEs were maintained at approved 2011–12 levels, and that is intended to restrain expenditure growth and save about \$526 million between 2012–13 and 2015–16, but it excludes staff in, specifically, health, education and police.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** No-one believes that. I don't believe it.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** It is there in the record, and I do not know what the member's estimates committee has been doing with its inquiries if it has not been able to examine the veracity of that claim. I will back the Treasury and the Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee over the member's ridiculous accusations any day of the week. There was a two per cent efficiency dividend across general government—education, of course, was only one per cent—and that aims to save \$244 million in 2012–13. There is a further efficiency dividend for government trading enterprises, of course; an increase in the loan guarantee fee charged by WA Treasury Corporation on lending to government trading enterprises; and sundry other savings. There was a further

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package of corrective measures announced on 26 September this year to deliver a refocused and cost-effective public service in light of the fiscal change, the dramatic changes that we are experiencing at this time in the state's history, particularly with the fluctuations in prices for products subject to royalty, and, of course, with the continuing high Australian dollar. All of this shows a government that is responsive to the issues and priorities of the day. All of it is about cutting wasteful expenditure. Why? So we can prioritise key areas of government expenditure to, and for the benefit of, the people of Western Australia.

The honourable member referred to salaries growth. Let us look at the truth. The corrective measures I have already outlined included a number of measures aimed to rein in growth in public sector salaries, and the saving measures mentioned combined with a clear wages policy, have seen public sector wages growth reduced to an average of 6.7 per cent, compared with an average of 8.8 per cent under the previous government. That is the truth; that is the public record, as the honourable member is wont to say. With salaries expenditure projected to reach \$10 billion in 2012–13 that two percentage point difference between this government and the previous Labor government equates to annual savings of about \$200 million—again, savings that need to be redirected, and are being redirected into key service delivery areas.

This state, through its government, is committed to retaining the state's AAA credit rating. I remember that once, under a former government, the AAA credit rating was lost. This government is on track to meet all of the key financial targets in 2012–13 and in each of the out years. Both of the major credit rating agencies reaffirmed the state's AAA credit rating during the last year, because it is important to do so in the context of a debate about whether this government is wasting money or failing to save money or not saving money or raising too much or whatever it was the honourable mover of the motion was trying to tell us. The importance of the AAA credit rating, as we said in a time of a former Labor government that lost it, is that it ensures that Western Australia is an attractive and low-risk investment destination, which in turn makes public sector debt costs cheaper. While we are on the subject of debt, I was appalled to hear from a former minister of the Crown, who I would have thought would know better but apparently does not, that we are living on the Bankcard or the credit card to pay for our recurrent expenditure. We are not. I say to the honourable member that as a member of the EERC and Minister for Finance, I am privy to the forums that set these government policy areas. I can tell the member that when we came out on 26 September this year with some harsh measures that had to be taken, it was to make sure that, with all our 130 000 employees and all our responsibilities, we live within our means and are not borrowing for recurrent expenditure—not borrowing for recurrent expenditure. When the member says that we are, she is wrong. So, I thank the member for giving me the opportunity to correct her, and I hope I am not going to hear any more of that nonsense again. We are not borrowing for recurrent expenditure. The last time we had a government in Western Australia that did that—that was using the Bankcard to pay for the groceries, as the expression goes—was in the time of the Lawrence Labor government. That is when it happened, and it was something that deserved to be condemned, but it is not something that is happening now.

When we avoid that—when we refuse to get out the Bankcard to pay for recurrent expenditure—that is not a case of failing to have key priorities; that is responsible fiscal management. The debt that we have is part of a major capital works program, which is rebuilding much of the state's infrastructure, to the direct benefit of the people of Western Australia; and, yes, we are borrowing to do that, just as people borrow to build themselves a house—there is nothing wrong with that—and we are doing it on the basis of a AAA credit rating, which means that we can access the best rates to do that, to build for the future. The honourable member's concern about the future is addressed not only by that remark; she will also have a chance to show her commitment to future generations when we debate the bill to establish a future fund later, I hope, today. So I am looking forward to the support that the member professes to have for putting aside part of Western Australia's mineral wealth for the future of Western Australia.

Finally, having considered all that we have done, it is up to the honourable member to demonstrate which further aspects of wasteful expenditure the Labor Party would like to expunge. The member did not do that—there was not one detail; nothing—but perhaps another member on the other side will be briefed to give us some sort of hit list, which apparently exists, because that is clearly set out in this motion.

Turning now to the other matter in the motion, which refers to cutting budgets for key services such as health, education and police, I am delighted to be able to advise the house that, again, the member has it wrong, and I can produce the figures. I know that if there is an opportunity later in this debate, the Minister for Mental Health will have something to say about this, and the Minister for Education will certainly have something to say, not only on behalf of himself —

**Hon Peter Collier:** To correct the record.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** To correct the record. They can talk about the increases in full-time equivalents in health, education and police. But let me just give a little overview of how we have “cut”—I am speaking

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ironically here—expenditure in key agencies. From the 2008–09 financial year to the current financial year, 2012–13—it is only four years—this government has delivered an increase in recurrent expenditure in health of 39.3 per cent; in education of 24.3 per cent; in police of 27.4 per cent; and in disability services—I know that both Hon Helen Morton and I are very proud of this figure—of 66.5 per cent. In mental health, which is an area that the member presumes to be very interested in, there has been an increase in recurrent expenditure for key service delivery from \$471 million to \$655 million. That is a 39.2 per cent increase. Congratulations to the Minister for Mental Health for her drive in that area. The final area is child protection, which I know attracts a great deal of interest, particularly in this place. I have to give some credit to the Minister for Child Protection; I really do. I have worked with her closely for years and I have seen what she does in the various forums—cabinet and elsewhere—that we inhabit. Thanks in large part to her drive, in those four years child protection recurrent expenditure has increased from \$353 million to \$536 million in this financial year. That is a 52 per cent increase.

**Hon Helen Morton:** Did you mention disabilities?

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I did indeed—an increase of 66.5 per cent. The minister wanted me to mention it again, and it needs to be mentioned again, particularly when a bankrupt opposition gets in here—or, more importantly, gets out in public—and claims that we are cutting expenditure when, frankly, that is an absolute —

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** It's really got to you, hasn't it?

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I do not like people telling porkies; I do not like it when people tell porky pies.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Only a matter of 15 minutes ago I heard a member, when she was on her feet, give some very wise advice to this house about one member speaking at a time and that everybody else would have their turn. I think it was good advice. Everybody should heed it.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Mr President, thank you for calling us to order. That awful squawking was really starting to get to me.

It is an absolute falsehood to say that we have cut service delivery in key areas. It is an absolute falsehood to say that we are not tackling the problems of wasteful expenditure.

**HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (Agricultural)** [10.47 am]: I rise to particularly thank Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich for this non-government business motion today, and in the same breath I also acknowledge the comments that the Minister for Education made about World Teachers' Day tomorrow. It is probably a very appropriate point to talk about that, particularly given this motion that —

**Hon Kate Doust:** Hands up all the teachers.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** There are a few of us, Deputy Leader of the Opposition; that is for sure. I am sure that all members would very much appreciate the sort of tough, resilient people who go into our schools. These people need every bit of encouragement and support when dealing with our greatest investment, and that is why I believe Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich made a significant point when she talked about the issues associated with —

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Which point was that? I must have missed it.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** I have only 10 minutes, and I did not interject on the minister. Please bear with me and, if need be, we will have a chat afterwards.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I think everybody agrees with the rules, but you do not seem to follow them. One member at a time is on their feet and they speak, and everybody else gives them the courtesy of listening.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** The point I was trying to make was that cutting budgets for key service areas such as health, education and police, rather than ending the wasteful expenditure that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich talked about, is the sort of issue that strikes a chord with teachers, especially in their particular areas.

**Hon Simon O'Brien** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** In the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich's experience is invaluable. She made one particularly salient point when she talked about the government's unsustainable approach by way of revenue and expenditure being the root of the problem. A government cannot, over its time, have an increase in revenue of 31 per cent and an increase in expenditure of 47 per cent without it impacting significantly on state debt, which is exactly the point that needs to be made here. The people who will ultimately pay for that are the Western Australian taxpayers simply because this

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expenditure increase has been wasteful. If it had not been wasteful, I would not have a problem. But the fact of the matter is significant elements of this particular expenditure increase have been grossly wasteful. Hon Simon O'Brien referred to the issues that he thought Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich did not deal with. However, the most important point to be made from that is priorities of the day. If the minister was suggesting and believes that the priorities associated with funding education in regional, rural and remote parts of Western Australia is enhanced by the actions of the director general and the minister in cutting back on things like professional development, he and the government are kidding themselves. This motion refers to minimising wasteful expenditure. The opposition can bring to the house's attention many examples of wasteful expenditure. I do not propose to go down that pathway in the short time I have, suffice to say that expenditure on things such as Elizabeth Quay is, in my estimation, a waste of taxpayers' money at this particular time of the economic cycle.

My main area of concern, particularly in light of the fact that I mentioned that tomorrow is World Teachers' Day, is obviously education and training. It is the kids and young people in training who will be impacted the most by the recent measures that this government has seen fit to impose on Western Australians. My main concern is that rather than giving kids, no matter where they live, accessibility to education and training, and rather than removing the barriers to achieving, by going down this pathway the government is doing the exact opposite.

The State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia welcomed the recommendations of Professor Andrich in the "Review of the Curriculum Framework for curriculum, assessment and reporting purposes in Western Australian Schools", which made particular reference to kindergarten through to year 10. That report came out in 2009. I will give members an idea of the recommendations in that report to give them a sense of the inappropriateness of the decisions that have been made recently. Recommendation 2 reads —

That in introducing the National Curriculum, it is not assumed that all schools are highly resourced and that the relatively modest resources of the majority of schools be taken into account immediately the curriculum is implemented.

Recommendation 3 reads —

That explicit syllabuses, including content, be developed for the learning area components of the National Curriculum before they are implemented in Western Australia.

Recommendation 12—this is the crux of my issue—reads as follows —

That the Curriculum Council continue and extend its support of professional development for teachers in constructing assessment tasks, analytical marking keys and in the multiple uses of assessments.

Further, recommendation 13 reads —

That the need for continuing professional development in content knowledge in the learning areas be explicitly acknowledged

What is central to the issue in the development of teachers is that professional development in regional, rural and remote parts of Western Australia has all of a sudden ceased. People are not allowed to travel. There can be no travel whatsoever to look after staff. If the government is going to promote that sort of learning and support as advocated by Professor Andrich, why on earth is it putting in place a structure whereby people are being paid \$100 000 to sit in an office in, say, the Albany district—which is very much a part of my recent professional experience—and told that although their job is curriculum implementation, they cannot travel to share with staff their expertise or provide staff with professional development? That is why they are in that district office or that locality in the first place. I do not understand the idea of removing professional development from schools. As a response, I suggest to the government—this comes from some of my former colleagues—that at the end of the day, all cuts go back to the heart of classrooms. As was stated by one of my colleagues —

“every time there is no one available to give me advice as a teacher I am slower to respond and adjust while I start personally chasing the info I need.”

Who will benefit from that? No-one. The kids will not. The other day when the director general was talking about these cuts, she said that they will not impact on students. If they impact staff, and they in turn do not have the capacity to pass on the information in an expeditious fashion, of course students will suffer—and those in regional, rural and remote parts of Western Australia will suffer more than literally anywhere else. This government cut the number of regional district offices in the first place. We do not have staff numbers; and for those offices in which there are staff, the recent cuts—this is about priorities—are basically telling schools that although someone who can help them is sitting in an office in Albany or Esperance, they cannot have access to that person unless they make a phone call or drive to the office, whether they live in Katanning, Narrogin or wherever. The government said that its priorities in the education system are appropriate, but then it started

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doing all these sorts of things. Will someone please explain to me how that will benefit the kids in our care? Mr President, having been a high school teacher you would know that there is no benefit and that we need that professional development. When the whole system is in a state of change—there are a lot of fantastic things happening in our education system at both the state and federal levels—and that change is to be worked on with the whole system to benefit from it, funding must be made available. It is about priorities and it is about spending money appropriately. It is not about reducing that intake. I am sure all regional members will agree with me.

**HON MIA DAVIES (Agricultural)** [10.57 am]: I rise to add to the debate on behalf of the Nationals. A motion like this raises concerns for the Nationals; indeed, when the Labor Party casts itself as a responsible economic manager, alarm bells start ringing. When it was in government, the Labor Party balanced its budget by slashing regional spending. It simply forgot that people lived beyond the metropolitan boundary.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** That's not true.

**Hon MIA DAVIES:** It is absolutely true.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members!

**Hon MIA DAVIES:** This is what we can expect should the Labor Party sit on this side of the house after the next election. If Labor were to win government at the next election—Hon Simon O'Brien spoke about this earlier—I would like to know what it will slash and burn in the areas of health, education and police, which are listed in the motion, to balance the budget. We know that it will slash and burn the regional budget. I am particularly worried, in light of recent comments by the Leader of the Opposition and other members of the Labor Party, that it will wind back royalties for regions, which will then disappear completely. It will be the first target because it is an easy target. We can say goodbye to royalties for regions under a future Labor government. I will go through some of the programs that royalties for regions is delivering to support and deliver services and infrastructure in health, education and police and ask whether or not they are a wrong priority and whether Labor supports these spending programs.

In the area of police and emergency services, we have introduced \$80.3 million worth of upgrades to the community safety network, which is providing digital radio telecommunications that can be used by police, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority and the Department of Corrective Services. That will make sure that our police and emergency service workers can remain connected and do their job while they are working in remote and regional areas of the state. This really important investment is in new infrastructure to completely replace the police regional radio network in the region, which will support the police to do their work on front-line services. It is very important and something that the police raised with us as we were going into government. We are supporting them so that they can do their job. In conjunction with the Minister for Commerce, it is also backed up by the regional mobile communications project. Instead of going out and creating two separate networks, we are creating networks that are working together—actually leveraging off mobile phone towers with the regional mobile communications project and the community emergency services network. That is actually saving taxpayers' dollars, as we are delivering that really important program right now. So I ask: is this a wrong priority? Does Labor truly support our police and emergency service workers? That is one program that would disappear if we saw the demise of royalties for regions.

We heard some comments on education. There is a very strong spending program under royalties for regions for our regional schools and residential colleges. There is \$100.5 million allocated to key schools across the state. I am talking about Esperance through to Derby, Karratha, Collie, Merredin, Northam, Narrogin, Katanning and Denmark.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon MIA DAVIES:** We are allocating \$42.6 million to these key schools to help them prepare for the transition of year 7 students into high school. There is \$51.9 million allocated for regional residential college upgrades. I was delighted to join the Minister for Education and the Minister for Regional Development in Merredin for the opening of the new residential Merredin College. This is a new K-12 school in Merredin. It is a fantastic investment in the wheatbelt. There is now a fantastic top-of-the-range facility in the eastern wheatbelt providing boarding and world-class facilities for our teachers and for students to attend school in Merredin. It is what I hope to be the start of a really fantastic model for delivering education services right throughout the state. It was certainly an exciting day when we were out there to see how proud the community was. The residential college has been built but the accommodation is overbooked and we will have to extend—I would like to see it extended—the number of beds available because parents have voted with their feet and shown that they are



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prepared to send their kids to a fantastic facility in the wheatbelt to board and get their education. So I ask: is this a wrong priority? For me royalties for regions has assisted this state government to deliver some fantastic facilities in my electorate.

I now refer to investment in the Government Regional Officers' Housing program. We have invested \$200 million to build 400 houses for our essential workers—that is, public service workers such as police, teachers and health workers. We know that it is absolutely essential to have quality housing in the regions so that we can attract and retain government and local government workers. Staff housing has been built through the country local government fund at the direction of our regional director.

**Hon Adele Farina:** There are some regions that don't get any housing at all.

**Hon MIA DAVIES:** Yes, there has been a focus in some areas for housing under the GROH program. I would really hope that the program will continue to roll out; however, we have committed to and are building 400 new houses for key workers. I ask again: is that a wrong priority? Will it be continued on? I know that many more workers right throughout the state would like to have their houses upgraded. If we see the demise of royalties for regions under a future Labor government, will we be able to deliver on this fantastic program that is rolling out these 400 new houses? Quality housing is incredibly important.

I would like to finish on health, as this is where I have seen some significant investment, particularly from my perspective as a member representing the Agricultural Region; however, I know of other significant investments right through the north of the state and into the goldfields. The Southern Inland Health Initiative was allocated \$565 million and we are looking at delivering more doctors into the region. At a time when there is a shortage of doctors nationwide, we are seeing an increase in doctors. We are talking about increasing primary healthcare services. We have state-of-the-art telehealth services going into and currently being used in our hospitals. Staff are feeling more supported and more confident because they have access to specialists in various hospitals around the state and in our major teaching hospitals. When there is nursing staff but no doctor on call during an emergency, they will have the opportunity to be supported by a neighbouring hospital or by someone in Perth who is on call 24/7. That is creating a great deal of confidence in our health system as we try to revitalise and rebuild some of our key hospitals and health services right throughout that region.

Royalties for regions has also funded one new and two replacement turboprop aircraft for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Anyone who has lived in regional WA knows that this is a lifeline for people. We cannot have specialist services in every single hospital. There are occasions when people need to come to Perth and they are flown to Perth. As recently as last night there was a call on an emergency helicopter—not the RFDS—for another dreadful accident on the patch of road between Merredin and Southern Cross. I actually drove on that road in a truck over two weeks ago to have a look at how dangerous that section of road is, and we will be having some further conversations to see if we can put some investment into that area to make it safer for road users. The new medical jet that the RFDS now has at its fingertips, also supported by Rio Tinto, has fundamentally changed the way we can respond to emergencies right across the state. The three-hour rule means that someone injured in a serious accident causing trauma must receive specialist medical care within three hours. That has reduced the time right across the state that it takes the Royal Flying Doctor Service and our health professionals to deal with major accidents. It is certainly a fantastic initiative and one of which I am very supportive.

The last matter is the patient assisted travel scheme. There is an extra \$57.6 million going into increasing subsidy rates for those who are undertaking and funding cancer treatment and have to travel to the metropolitan area to access specialist services.

**Hon Adele Farina:** Except it's not enough to cover accommodation costs.

**Hon MIA DAVIES:** But again it has actually made a start.

**HON MICHAEL MISCHIN (North Metropolitan — Attorney General)** [11.07 am]: I should start by echoing the sentiments that Hon Peter Collier makes from time to time about Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich and the opportunities she provides for the government to point out its achievements in several key areas of its responsibility. I cannot help wondering whether she is strategically supportive of the Liberal-National government in the wonderful work it is doing; so I thank her for that opportunity.

The area of wasteful expenditure is a matter that Hon Simon O'Brien touched on. He made the point, and it remains, that not one piece of so-called wasteful expenditure has been pointed to. However, it is interesting to note that in the budget before the current one, this government provided a \$600 million payment towards the benefit of non-government organisations in the social service sphere. Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich commented that no-one had thought that was a good idea, which I think came as a bit of a surprise to all the recipients of that fund of money.

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**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** I don't think I said that.

**Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN:** I will point it out to Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** I think you've got yourself all confused, and you've even started to confuse us. Just try to concentrate.

**Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN:** In any event, the Labor Party finds itself in a difficult position, I grant it, because at the same time that it has to support campaigns by its union masters for increased payments for public servants and for the hire of more public servants, it concedes that there has to be some economies in expenditure.

Several members interjected.

**Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN:** It cannot have it both ways. We either have a bloated public service with everyone being paid top dollar, or we actually have to restrain expenditure in some fashion.

In any event, I want to deal with the area of alleged default on the part of this government in the motion, which states that the government has its priorities wrong in cutting budgets for key services such as, amongst others, police. I want to spend a few moments outlining what is being spent on the police budget. The WA Police budget for the 2012–13 financial year comes to \$1.11 billion. That is a 25.6 per cent increase in funding to police since the Liberal–National government delivered its first budget in 2008–09 and more than double the roughly 11 per cent growth in the population of Western Australia during that time. The Liberal–National government has added 150 additional police officers and 120 auxiliary police officers over the past four years and is on track to recruit a further 200 police officers and 30 auxiliary officers between now and 2013–14.

Several members interjected.

**Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN:** I hear some noise in the background. It is really like an illness with Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; she simply cannot restrain herself. I heard some mumbling about the government not being able to meet the police target. The fact is that compared with all those boom years under the previous Gallop and Carpenter governments, there has been a significant increase in the number of police officers on the beat under the four years of this government.

The Liberal–National government has undertaken a range of significant capital infrastructure investment over the course of its term. Presumably, that is also regarded as wasteful by a Labor administration. Spending for new facilities includes \$93.27 million for the Perth Police Complex, which commenced construction in 2010 and will open in 2013. There is \$20.9 million in the budget for the Cockburn Central Police Station, which will start construction in 2013 and will accommodate up to 120 police officers and staff. The Fitzroy Crossing Police Station opened in October 2012 at a cost of \$11.17 million. The Mount Magnet Police Station is planned for completion at the end of this year at a cost of \$8.2 million. The Mundijong Police Station will be completed by March 2015 at a cost of \$8.2 million. I looked at some figures and I accept entirely that the decision whether to open and close police stations is one that is largely that of the commissioner and the functional reviews that the Commissioner of Police carries out. From my calculations from the materials I have, over the course of the Labor government it closed 14 stations and police posts, most of which were in regional areas. The opposition complain that we are cutting back, but only nine police stations and posts have been closed in Western Australia under the Barnett administration. Those have been the subject of functional reviews by the Commissioner of Police. We have opened quite a number of police stations, including one, I should add, in the North Metropolitan Region in Yanchep. Even though that is in the electorate of the shadow Attorney General, he did not manage to succeed in having a police station opened in Yanchep under the Labor administration. However, one has been opened under the Liberal–National government. It is a great asset and fulfils an enormous need in that region. So much for the Labor Party's commitment to infrastructure!

Hon Mia Davies has already dealt with the community safety network, which will replace the current police regional radio network, with a trunked and a conventional digital radio network to enhance delivery and coverage. She has already gone into that and how much of is being funded by the royalties for regions program.

The WA Police's asset investment program is worth \$140.6 million in the 2012–13 budget. I am sure this information is available to Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich as she is on the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, which looks into these things. However, she does not seem to appreciate the facts that are before her. A strong program of building and upgrades has continued over the Liberal–National government's term of government. In the 2013 budget police were allocated \$16.18 million to continue upgrades to police stations in Mirrabooka, Morley, Warwick and Scarborough and to begin upgrades in Narrogin, Merredin, Midland, Curtin House, which has not had any upgrades since it opened in the early 1980s, and police headquarters. A further \$6.4 million is allocated to forward estimates for refurbishing the Augusta–Margaret River and Eucla Police Stations. I ask rhetorically: are those wasteful expenditures or do they lend a lie to the suggestion that there has been a cutback of services in these essential portfolios?

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I will not go into the detail of the legislative program being conducted, but \$2.9 million has been allocated to the public sex offender website. Since it commenced operations on 15 October there have been something like 16 000 hits. That was in its first week of operation. An amount of \$4.3 million has been allocated over four years to deliver 48 advanced traffic management concept cars, including 20 to support the traffic enforcement group, 14 to support traffic in the metropolitan area and 14 to support traffic in regional Western Australia. An amount of \$8.8 million has been allocated over five years to permit police to double the number of police general purpose dogs and to acquire and fit out two riot trucks to assist police in dispersing and arresting troublemakers at out-of-control parties. Given the debate in the other place on the government's proposals to address that social blight and the ALP's opposition to it, such was its intellectual bankruptcy it never suggested any alternative to the government's suggestions on how to address the matter.

**Hon Ken Travers** interjected.

**Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN:** The opposition will have the chance to put it out again.

Several members interjected.

**Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN:** I have a matter of seconds left. All the government agencies are facing significant budget pressures due to dramatic declines in iron ore prices and GST revenue over the past year. In spite of this, in October 2012 the Liberal–National government agreed to fund approximately \$26 million of budget relief to police to exempt WA Police from any employment cap; to permit the continued recruitment of police officers to meet our election commitments; and to assist police in meeting the costs of the most recent enterprise bargaining agreement and costs associated with Government Regional Officers' Housing.

As for the commissioner's comments, I do not want to get into the detail of that. However, as I recall, it made front-page headlines back in the days of the Gallop and Carpenter governments when public servants went out and expressed their personal opinions on matters, and I think that the then Labor governments were against that.

**HON ADELE FARINA (South West)** [11:18 am]: I start by outlining some of the needs in my electorate. Homelessness is a big issue in Bunbury in the south west. A growing number of people are living on the streets, including youth, because we have no facilities for emergency housing for youth in Bunbury and the south west. Welfare agencies in my electorate are screaming out for more funding from government. There is a chronic affordable housing shortage with more than 1 300 people on waiting lists and waiting times to access social housing of, on average, 128 weeks. Wait times for maintenance for people in Homeswest houses are blowing out enormously. I had one disabled woman come to me who needed an arm support to get out of bed and the Department of Housing simply told her that when it gets one freed up from another house, it will install it in her place. That is completely unacceptable. This woman is disabled. It was not a want; it was a need that she had.

There is only one women's refuge in the whole of the south west and it caters for only five women. Women are being turned away in their droves. They are sent to refuges in Perth when they can find places or when possible they are put up in motels, but largely they are being turned away. This is an unacceptable situation. Efforts by the refuge to secure funding so that it can better meet the demand in the area have been ignored by this government.

One women's refuge in the whole of the south west, which provides for a maximum of only five women, is completely unacceptable. Mates Mens Support Group in Busselton, which provides residential services and anger management counselling for the male aggressor in domestic violence situations, rather than having to remove the women and the children from the home, cannot secure funding from this government to keep going.

The Bunbury Intown Centre had its funding application, for a social worker to help clients get the support they need to get back on their feet, denied. The Barnett government has axed all school attendance officers in the South West education region. That is forcing schools to find resources, which are already stretched, to deal with truancy issues themselves, and they are losing the battle. The department's own figures indicate that 31 per cent of students in the greater Bunbury area are at risk. Many of the schools with limited resources that have to deal with a range of social, family and behavioural problems, are losing the literacy and numeracy battle, and they cannot get the support they need from the department in terms of additional funding and resources. Our regional offices have been gutted by this government; so our schools cannot turn to the regional offices for support. Community health nurses are so critically under-resourced that they are not able to follow up families who have missed health checks. As a result, problems that could have been diagnosed early leading to treatment and programs being put in place are being left undiagnosed, to the detriment of the child. Critical assessments as to whether the parents are coping and the child is at risk are not being undertaken. Adults are being put in beds in the children's ward at the Bunbury regional hospital because of the shortage of beds. Children are then being left in the emergency department of the Bunbury regional hospital because the beds are taken up by adults in the children's ward. There is a chronic shortage of beds at Bunbury regional hospital. The adult mental health service and the alcohol and drug unit are struggling to keep up with demand for their services. As a result, they are not providing services that meet the needs of their patients because of a lack of resources to do so. Inpatient

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drug and alcohol facilities are critically needed in Bunbury and the south west, but this government has invested zero dollars into this critical need. More funding applications for in-home treatment programs have been refused. The South West Healthcare Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service is critically underfunded. A business case was put to the minister last year calling for an immediate doubling of funding to enable it to deal with the demand at that time. They required an investment of \$1.6 million. What did this government provide? A piddly \$200 000. We cannot get answers to the questions about how much additional funding the service might be granted this year.

Last year there were 29 confirmed suicides in the Bunbury coronial jurisdiction, yet not one additional bit of funding has been provided to assess and address the problem. The Val Lishman Health Research Foundation released its research paper into suicides in the south west, which identified significant gaps in service delivery, yet this government has done nothing to address these problems. It is continuing to assess and talk to people but it is delivering absolutely nothing. South west students who need to access school dental therapy services have to wait at least six months. Adults attending the Bunbury general dental clinic have to wait two years for treatment. One dentist position has been vacant since February this year and the clinic has no dental specialists. Police numbers in the south west have not kept pace with population growth; we are critically under-resourced. Due to significant locality allowances provided in the north of the state, we are constantly struggling to fill vacancies. Response times are blowing out—if people get a response at all—and the community is very concerned about this. The Bunbury Police and Community Youth Centre has been without a police officer since January this year. All youth at-risk programs had to stop because there was no police officer to provide the programs. Implications for the youth at risk and the wider community are significant, yet the Barnett government has sat by and has failed to address the problem. The list of needs goes on. I could stand all day and I would only be scratching the surface of what the needs—not the wants—are in my electorate. These needs have been completely ignored by this government, which has its priorities all wrong. Rather than address these critical funding shortages, the government has instead cut funding for the key services of health, education and police. Annual efficiency dividend cuts are taking their toll on service delivery. There is no fat left in those budgets to be cut, yet the government continues to expect these departments to find savings. Rather than fund critical service-delivery areas, the government has imposed further cuts on these areas while they have overseen a 28 per cent blow-out in the number of senior executive service officers since 2008—that is an additional 105 senior executive positions created under the Barnett government, which comes at an estimated cost of over \$26 million. We now find that 11 government departments have been created to do the job done by six agencies. With each newly created department comes additional operating costs, accommodation costs and a new set of senior executives. I could go through all the detail but time will prevent me from doing so, so I will skip that. We have seen a huge blow-out. Members would think that if we need to rein in spending, one would look at that senior executive service and try to contain it rather than doubling its numbers, and provide that funding where it will make the most difference—at the front line where it will help communities desperately in need. Clearly, the Premier does not care that front-line services will suffer while he pads up his government with highly paid executives.

The list of waste is ongoing. I find it extraordinary that almost half-a-million dollars of taxpayers' funds through the royalties for regions program is being spent to advance political advertising of that program in the run-up to the next election. What a disgrace! There are infrastructure needs and services in the south west and the whole of regional WA that need funding, and this government has chosen to spend it on self-promotion and political advertising rather than delivering projects, infrastructure and services to the regions where they are desperately needed. Having promised that it would deliver services to regional WA, it is now using that money for self-promotion and political advertising. It is a disgrace. Members opposite should come to the regions and explain why they are not having their services and infrastructure projects funded. It is because the government is choosing to spend that money on self-promotion instead.

In addition, this government has made a commitment to pull out over \$1 billion over four years from the royalties for regions fund to put into the future fund it has created, and that money will be spent in the Perth metropolitan area. Perhaps Hon Mia Davies could explain why people in regional WA should have any confidence in this government delivering and meeting the needs of regional WA when it is more than happy to rip out over \$1 billion over four years from royalties for regions and plough it back into the metropolitan area, and why it is more than happy to spend critical infrastructure funding, which should be spent in the regions, on self-promotion. This government has its funding priorities all wrong. Critical infrastructure and services that are needed across the state are not being delivered, while over \$1.5 million is being spent on advertising for the Bigger Picture campaign. How does that help people in the community who are in need of service delivery and infrastructure provision? It does not do a damn thing for those people who are in need. This government needs to get its funding priorities right.

**HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [11.27 am]: This morning my colleagues have outlined where we believe this state government is going wrong with its priorities. It has

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been interesting to hear about the diversity of issues that they have canvassed today and their concerns. I will start by saying to Hon Mia Davies that it is not the Labor Party she has to worry about in terms of its continuing support for the royalties for regions program. We have seen in the media that if the Liberal government is re-elected in its own right, she may as well pack her bags and forget about royalties for regions in the future. It is not us that she has to fear; it is the members sitting on those benches opposite, and if she has not woken up to that, she has some serious issues. It is certainly not us.

I take up the point that Hon Adele Farina has made. It is a crime that the National Party abuses royalties for regions and uses it for political gain. Quite frankly, it is a total waste of expenditure—which is more than \$100 000—to spend it on the fripperies of campaigning. If I were a regional constituent I would be asking, “Why are you not doing something else? Why are you wasting money on those types of items to promote yourselves?” That is just one example of waste. We have seen a range of examples of this government becoming so consumed with the spin and the central business district that it is ignoring what is happening in the suburbs, and we are not seeing that benefit. Quite frankly, as we go into an election, the people of this state need to ask themselves, “Has the government done things to build this state right across the board? Has it built the communities and shown real leadership?” I think when people go to the polls they will look around their own suburbs and notice the services they are not receiving and they will look at the monuments that are being constructed in the city and answer no to each of those questions. That is the answer I hope they will come up with because the Labor Party believes the government has abandoned people and has gotten tied up in the spin—its 500-odd spin doctors; its millions of dollars in advertising and media—and that is a real waste.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.