

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON COL HOLT (South West — Parliamentary Secretary) [5.06 pm]: Before question time I was just about to talk about the Great Southern Institute of Technology, and I will give some examples of actions taken by the previous Liberal–National government and what the new government needs to work on to ensure that regional communities are places where people want to move to and remain. Not everyone who moves to Perth sees Perth as the ultimate destination. I visited the Great Southern Institute of Technology yesterday where I was given a rundown of the campus and its activities. I was extremely impressed with the professionalism that campus portrayed and the role the people running the institute see themselves playing in the education sector of the great southern. The institute undertakes a lot of activities not only in the great southern, but also elsewhere around the state and even interstate. It is pursuing opportunities it needs to pursue as an institute, but it is also providing great educational outcomes for those students who want to engage in the institute of technology system.

I would like to draw members' attention to the institute's annual report, which I am sure has been tabled or will be tabled. I encourage members to look at the breadth and depth of the activities of the Great Southern Institute of Technology, which I am sure are carried out around the state by other technical colleges. Under the key performance indicators reference is made to student contact hours. In 2009 the institute planned for 855 000 student contact hours, which seems quite incredible to me. It achieved 971 000, about a 113 per cent achievement. In 2012 it planned to achieve approximately 1.134 million student contact hours and it achieved 1.142 million contact hours. That seems an incredible amount of engagement for an institute in meeting key performance indicators and shows me what a vital role it plays in education in our regional centres. When touring that facility I was quite impressed with how it is maintained, how the teachers engage with the students and how they obviously have to be able to deliver flexible learning outcomes for students with a range of ages and backgrounds and to be able to play a vital role within the education sector. That is another reason people can live and be educated in a region without having to necessarily go to Perth.

Earlier I talked about secondary school education and touched on school-age education. One great challenge I would like to work with the Minister for Education on is developing more special education programs into regional Western Australia. There are children with a range of special needs but also children with extraordinary ability. I will briefly touch on the gifted and talented education program, which I have spoken about before in this house. We took a policy document to the last election on how we would like to expand the GATE program into regional Western Australia. I will share with members some of the background to that. I might have done it before, but I will touch on it again. There are 16 schools throughout Western Australia that offer gifted and talented education programs, covering a whole range of streams from the academic streams, such as mathematics, science and humanities, to language and arts programs, such as arts media, dance, drama, music, music theatre and visual arts. They are all part of the gifted and talented education stream. There are 16 schools within Western Australia that offer one or two of those streams in the GATE program. However, until this year, only one of those schools was outside Perth. Of the 16 schools, 15 are in metropolitan Perth and one school in Bunbury just started an academic program this year. It is great that the program has been expanded into Bunbury. It offers only an academic stream and has 13 students at the year 8 level. This information might need to be updated, but at the time I put this information together, 13 students were engaged in that program in Bunbury. There is no reason why this program cannot be expanded into many more regional high schools.

I will give members some background to this. Most of the students who would be identified to take up the GATE program come through the Primary Extension and Challenge system in which children are identified in primary school. Statewide, 75 per cent of the students in the PEAC program are in metropolitan Perth and 25 per cent are from regional Western Australia. As a rule of thumb, why are 25 per cent of regional schools not offering the GATE program? I know it is more complex than that because the schools are spread across regional Western Australia and we probably cannot offer a GATE program to each regional school. However, we should be targeting some key schools and regions and targeting a range of the streams that are offered. I can think of some models that would be rolled out very easily. The visual arts or dance programs are about having a coordinator situated in the school. Albany, for example, could have a coordinator in the school who engages with technicians and members of the local community and invites them as guest tutors. That is what occurs in many of the metropolitan schools in the arts streams. It is about a coordinator bringing people from the arts to teach art skills to the children who are enrolled. I would like to work with the minister to implement a program so that our children with a special talent are offered a GATE program in regional Western Australia. On the other side of the coin are children with special needs. Many deaf children, for example, do not get support in many remote schools. I would like to see whether we can work together to implement those sorts of programs in the future.

I want to talk about a couple of other things before wrapping up. I have talked about some of the key ingredients for why people might want to live in a regional community, which are the basic needs that we all look for such as employment, health and education services. They are at the top of the list of reasons that people choose to live in certain places. However, there is much more to the reasons that people choose to live in regional towns and even in the city. Many of those reasons are wrapped around the liveability of the community, including the sporting facilities and events or the whole gamut of cultural events that people want to experience and enjoy. Through Eventscorp funding and royalties for regions event funding, the last government did a very good job of making sure that people living in our regional communities have at least some improved access to those programs being offered. I am sure, and would hope, that some of the regional members have taken the opportunity to go to the local community resource centre and watch the podcast of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra or have visited a touring performance that has been funded to take its performance into regional Western Australia. The Minister for Tourism recently announced a whole new suite of regional events. There are 55 of them in total. Usually just a small amount of funding goes to local groups to help run their local event. I am sure that everyone agrees that one of the greatest things in any community is to work with, see, be involved in and enjoy the local events that local groups organise. These events are run by the locals and it is great to support them in what they do for their community. Often they do it because they enjoy doing it but they also do it for the enjoyment of other people in the community. The list of 55 events—I will not go through them all, although I know some members would like me to—are spread from Kununurra to Esperance. They include the Mowanjum Festival at Derby; the Dardanup Bull and Barrel Festival; the Karri Valley Triathlon at Pemberton; the Cable Beach Polo Festival in Broome; and the Bridgetown in the Winter Festival, which is coming up. Members should go to that festival. It is a unique event. All the buildings are lit up with blue lights at night-time and it is quite good. The Truffle Kerfuffle is held in Manjimup, and the list goes on. I encourage members to make the most of those types of events that the government is funding and will continue to fund. They provide really good outcomes for us.

I will make some personal reflections and thankyou. I recognise that a number of members will be leaving this place. I acknowledge Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm, Hon Linda Savage, Hon Jon Ford, Hon Ed Dermer, Hon Helen Bullock, Hon Giz Watson, Hon Alison Xamon, Hon Philip Gardiner and Hon Max Trenorden for their contributions to this chamber and the Parliament and people of Western Australia. Thank you for your passion and the abilities you have brought to this place. I hope that I have not missed anyone except Hon Norman Moore, who obviously needs a special thanks for the outstanding years of service he has brought to this place. I think all of Western Australia owes him a great big thankyou and gratitude for the insurmountable service he has given. I have been here for four years and I cannot imagine serving for the length of time Norman has. He is still as passionate and energetic as ever, I am sure. I congratulate and thank Hon Norman Moore for his contribution.

I will finish off with a personal reflection. I have been here for around four years, and now we are going to embark on another four years. When this journey began for me in 2008, my boys were 12 years old and about so tall, I reckon! We had to buy them suits that were probably three sizes too large so they would grow into them and we would not have to buy them new ones every week! Four short years later—short for us, but not for them, obviously; that is 25 per cent of their lifetime—they are 16-year-old young men who are now taller than I am and who are undergoing the transition through year 11 to become the men they are going to be. My daughter, Ebony, at the start of my journey here, ran off into the sunset and then came back—which was awesome! She bought a house, she bought a business and she got married, and she is still only 22; she is a young girl in a hurry. My other son has spent the last four years that I have been a member doing an apprenticeship in Karratha; he is two months away from finishing his heavy diesel mechanic apprenticeship and he is not even 20 yet, so the world is going to be his oyster in a very short time.

I wanted to use those little personal examples to bring home to members in the chamber and anyone else listening that life goes on outside these four walls and that our focus should always be on the life that exists outside these four walls. We should strive to give our kids and the kids of everyone else in the community the greatest opportunities we can, through our work in this place. That is what drives me every day, and I hope it drives you, too.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [5.21 pm]: I support the Address-in-Reply, and in doing so I would like to express my appreciation of the quite outstanding job that His Excellency the Governor continues to do in his role, and the contribution that he, supported so ably by his wife, Tonya, continues to make to the functioning and dignity of the community here in Western Australia.

There have been many changes since the last time we sat, before the day on which we received the Governor's speech; a very long time indeed since late last year, before the general election. Since then, we have had the opportunity to welcome some new members who have filled casual vacancies, and I welcome them again and express my anticipation of working together with them as they embark on their parliamentary careers. Indeed, after 16 years I have come to what will probably be at least the halfway mark of mine! Of course, a number of

members are retiring, either through their own volition or perhaps through the vagaries of confronting the electorate, as we all have to at the time of a general election. In due course a number of new members will again fill those vacancies and the whole system will go on and on, as it should.

A general election produces many surprising outcomes, and for everyone here there are new challenges to confront, whether they are new duties to perform, or the challenges of moving on. Sometimes it is hard to deal with the forces that impact on us when we are in public life; if one has done anything in politics, one will have suffered wounds and will have acquired scars. We all collect some bruises along the way; I know I have. If a member has not yet collected any of those scars, do not worry: you will! I have found it best, though, to receive the bruises and setbacks with equanimity. I look forward to continuing to work with members in this place, and whether they are moving on or remaining here to acquire some more scars, I wish each and every one of them all the best for the future.

I would like to associate myself closely with the sentiments expressed just now by Hon Col Holt when he made some observations about his first term in this place and the changes that had occurred with his children. A lot of us know what that means; when we look through those words, it is not simply the fact that someone who was 12 is now 16. It is all about whether a parent is there all the time, as much as they would like to be, for their child going through those critical years. It is about making sure that you get a balance between the calling that you have as a member of the Parliament of Western Australia, and the absolutely pre-eminently important role of being a parent of a young Western Australian. All of us who have been here for a while know what Hon Col Holt was alluding to; we all get it and we all identify closely with it, I am sure.

I want to take members back to an event around four years ago, on 16 May 2009. There are a couple of reasons why I remember and celebrate that date. The first of those is that it was my birthday. Nothing extraordinary about that; I have a birthday around the same time every year, but on this occasion it occurred several months after an event in my life which made it an active question as to whether I was going to have another birthday, so I was very pleased about that. I remember on that Saturday morning going through the ritual of sitting down with my wife, reading the paper, having a coffee and enjoying the Saturday morning swap of the news and planning the day, at a time when others were up a lot earlier and were a lot busier, because there was an election on that day. But for once, I did not have to be up before sparrow's, working all hours on an election, because this was a referendum. The referendum was about daylight saving, so the second reason I am very, very pleased to remember Saturday, 16 May 2009 is that yet again, Western Australians overwhelmingly rejected the daylight saving question that had been put to them. The third reason I liked 16 May 2009 is that there was another electoral event that day—a by-election, in my region, but my party did not have a candidate. So again, I was enjoying the morning paper. The by-election was held in a place members might have heard of: Fremantle. Without any effort on my part at all—I was sitting at home, reading the paper—the Labor Party was, for once, defeated in the state seat of Fremantle. We did not have to lift a finger. That is another reason why I particularly enjoyed Saturday, 16 May 2009.

Just as an aside, it is interesting that, up until that day, in all previous elections that I am aware of, the ALP would typically put up some union hack as its candidate and would win the seat. On this occasion in 2009 it put up someone who was a moderate, well-respected local businessman in Fremantle with a well-established family and an Italian surname, and he lost it for the Labor Party for the first time. Subsequently, at the recent election, it put up another union hack and won back the seat. That gives me cause for concern. Perhaps Martin Whitely and Alannah MacTiernan do not have it right at all; maybe there is salvation for the ALP in its union roots.

Fremantle is a theme that I want to talk about in my remarks tonight. It is a theme that I want to return to as I canvass government activity and success in a number of different areas. In doing that, I will go back to about 1970, when, as a young child, I moved with my family to Fremantle from north of the river and became a south of the river boy through and through—a Fremantle boy through and through. It had always been exciting to go to Fremantle to look at the port or to see some of the other things that were a bit different about this particular suburb, because it certainly was different. It was different from Claremont; it was different from Perth itself—or town as we used to call it. It also had some new attractions to go with the old. It had a thing called a Coles New World supermarket, emphasised by the fact that there was a really pathetic three-dimensional rocket ship stuck up near the Coles New World sign on the front of the building. It was a very good and innovative supermarket; it was a sign of changing times. There was also, to my mother's delight, a brand-new Myer emporium—a huge brand-spanking new square building, bringing civilisation to the west. It even had a Harrods or a Selfridges look-alike food hall at one of the entrances to the store. That Coles New World has been replaced by other shopping options. I think it dropped the "New World" some time ago, although Coles still has supermarkets here and there. The Myer food hall is long gone—that was, apparently, a failed experiment—and, sadly, Myer itself has packed up and left. That is a significant change for Fremantle. In a world of change, that is a significant thing for a town such as Fremantle. What does it really mean? I hear occasionally from people sentiments such as "Freo is

dying. All the shops are closing.” Betts and Betts went the other day. That is something I have heard; I do not know whether Betts and Betts has gone, but I have heard that Betts and Betts has sold up.

Hon Liz Behjat: It’s just Betts now.

Hon SIMON O’BRIEN: It has dropped a Betts. It is halfway gone if it is already just Betts, as my friend and colleague tells me! There is not even a Betts now, apparently, in Fremantle; it has gone. I am told that there is a lot of other retail space in Fremantle. I hear people say—I do not like to hear this—things such as “I don’t go into Fremantle anymore to shop because it’s not safe.” I can tell members from virtually a lifetime’s experience that that is probably not the case; in fact, if anything, it is probably safer now than it might have been when I was a child. But it does show that people have either suffered, or observed others suffering, some incident, perhaps an isolated incident, which of course has a marked effect on them—something caused through antisocial behaviour or an unfortunate crime committed against them.

Just yesterday at my request I had a meeting with the Mayor of Fremantle, Dr Brad Pettitt. I have a lot of time for Mayor Pettitt. Even though he is a greenie and a bit different, I have a lot of time for Mayor Pettitt and I support him in what he is trying to do. I will tell members about some of the things he is trying to do. We were joined, at my request, by Tim Milsom, who is the CEO of the Fremantle Chamber of Commerce. I asked to meet those gentlemen because I wanted to pursue something that we have all been working on for some while, and that is how we set the right course for Fremantle and, more to the point, how a parliamentary member with the best interests of the place at heart, who associates closely with it, has personal links to the place and has suddenly found that he has a bit of spare time on his hands, can contribute in a constructive way to ensure that Fremantle transitions to the place that it needs to be as we move through the twenty-first century. Make no mistake about it; Fremantle is a place that is ripe for redevelopment now. It is overdue for it. It is crying out for it, and it is going to get it. I just want to make sure that it does not happen as some sort of hotchpotch, whereby buildings and other infrastructure are put in place that will be perhaps in the wrong place for the next 60 or 100 years. That is why I want to work closely with other community leaders in seeing the way forward for Fremantle.

Let us look at where Fremantle is now. I am told that when Mayor Brad Pettitt was born in 1972, the place had about 31 000 or 32 000 people. During the last decade the population declined somewhat to around 26 000, but now it has picked up and, by my estimate, it would have cracked 30 000 now, observing that it was nearly 30 000 in the figures published in 2011. We are just up to where we were 40 years ago. Does that mean that the place has not really changed much? No. On the contrary, it has changed quite dramatically. How has it changed? The make-up of the workforce that inhabits the area and the demographics of the city have, of course, evolved over the years. I do not propose to give a demographic breakdown, but the information is surveyed on an annual basis. We can see that there are changes occurring. The sorts of changes that have occurred over the years have been in response to a range of stimuli, such as the changes in practice in moving maritime freight. A late nineteenth century river-mouth port such as Fremantle used to rely on a lot of manual labour living locally or, indeed, adjacent to the port. That labour would be required to manipulate a whole lot of loose cargo at ship side onto nearby rolling stock or into local warehouses. None of that happens now, of course. Since containerisation, most stuffing and unstuffing of containers occurs in places well removed from the immediate wharf site; indeed, that is the whole purpose of containerisation. We have seen a massive change in what has happened with the evolution of maritime trade, but there have been other changes as well. Fremantle, like every other place, is not immune to experiencing change, but perhaps because of its location and its role, it is a little different and a little special.

The other thing that has happened lately is that about 20 000 metres of retail space have disappeared. So in addition to space that is standing idle because landlords cannot get tenants who are prepared to pay some of the outrageous leasing costs that are being sought for some of the commercial retail sites in Fremantle at the moment, other tenants have upped stumps and have moved out. I have mentioned Myer. A substantial number of square metres was involved in that building. But others have moved out too. The Mayor of Fremantle was bemoaning the fact that if he wants to buy any form of boxed goods, as he calls them, he has to go out of Fremantle to get them. I remember not only as a child who first moved to Fremantle with a Coles New World and Myer-struck mother in tow, but as a young married man living locally, that if people who lived out of the CBD needed to buy something substantial, such as a new fridge for their new marital home—I still have that same fridge —

Hon Alyssa Hayden interjected.

Hon SIMON O’BRIEN: It has seen some action over the years, too. If people needed some furniture, or if they needed some other large bulky goods or electrical goods and so on, what they did was go into Fremantle. That was the term we used—“I’m going into Fremantle”—and everyone understood. That is what people did. People do not go to Fremantle now if they need those sorts of goods, because they cannot get them in Fremantle. There used to be a big Parry’s store in Fremantle—a really big one. That has gone—it has long gone. Myer I have

mentioned a couple of times. There are any number of stores that have gone. Why is that happening? What are the forces? The fact of the matter is that as the time has progressed, other competitors have opened up that are just as handy to people in terms of access and that may in some cases seem to be a bit more shopper friendly—places like Garden City in Booragoon, which is now a mega shopping complex, and places like the South Street–Stock Road precinct in O'Connor, where there are massive emporiums selling all manner of what Mayor Pettitt would call boxed goods.

Hon Alyssa Hayden: Bulky goods.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Yes, bulky goods—electrical items, furniture and what not. So there is a lot of competition there. Fremantle has to seriously consider, after considerably more than a century of pre-eminence locally as a retail service centre, what role it will play in the future and what levels of retail will be required to enable it to do all the things that it needs to do as a community to attract and retain a population that will of itself sustain an ongoing viable commercial retail presence. I want to make sure that that does happen, and that is why I will be working with the council and the chamber, and other parties, to make sure that we achieve that.

The council of the City of Fremantle has released a number of strategic plans and economic development strategies and so on. One of its goals is to set a target of 1 500 additional dwellings in the central city area of Fremantle. I am not talking about the whole municipality. I am talking about the central area of Fremantle. Another of its goals is to provide about 70 000 square metres of A-grade commercial office space, and about 20 000 square metres of additional retail floor space. Members will recall that I mentioned that there has been a significant loss of retail space in the Fremantle CBD in recent years.

In addition, the Fremantle council is looking to encourage a range of industry sectors, building on existing attributes, assets and skills. That will include arts and culture. Fremantle has some issues to work through there. There is a controversy in Fremantle about the provision of leases for artists—commercial working artists—in the J Shed precinct and whether they will be allowed to continue to operate in that environment or whether they will be forced out. In the larger scheme of things, some might see that controversy as a sideshow. But I see it as a very important matter, and I will be pursuing that matter, perhaps even publicly, in due course. That just shows us the challenges that a city facing redevelopment has to come to grips with. Of course Fremantle is already seen as a leader with its arts centre. The Fremantle Arts Centre near Hampton Road, near the corner of Skinner and Tuckfield Streets, is very famous and very well established. There are other arts centres throughout Fremantle as well. There is an important role for government to play here. I know that it was very warmly welcomed when I, as the then Minister for Finance, announced that the government would be relocating the entire headquarters of the Department of Housing to Fremantle in due course as one way of assisting in stimulating the resurgence of this particular centre.

Clearly, there is a role for the maritime sector to play. There is also a role for new investments in education. I was speaking with the Minister for Education just today about some initiatives in Fremantle that I look forward to pursuing with him and discussing more fully after this debate. But there are also questions about property development, and about the future of tourism in Fremantle. Fremantle is now a different place from what it once was. If we want to keep the things that make Freo Freo and that make it valuable and that make people want to live there, and if we want Fremantle to be different—as it should be—from some of the other new suburbs, which just seem to be mass produced off a production line, all to a very similar formula, we need to acknowledge that Fremantle has always been different and it has different potentials. I have seen in the course of my life a change in mood from where everyone went into Fremantle during the day to shop and to hang out and to walk over what was then called High Street. It is now called High Street Mall. There were so many pedestrians in the middle of the road when it was High Street that they gave up on traffic in the end and just paved it over. I remember those days when everyone went to Fremantle. Schoolkids used to hang out in Fremantle on their way home from school. But no-one went into Fremantle after dark, because it was a bit rough. Now of course the trouble is that not enough people are going into Fremantle during the day. But at night, the whole thing has totally changed. If members have not been to Fremantle of an evening—any evening of the week—lately, they should go and have a look at the strip and at the vibrant nightlife, the restaurants, the bars and the cafes. Yes, Fremantle is in a state of evolution, and it is going to continue to evolve. We need to support Fremantle to make sure that the special attributes of Fremantle are retained and built upon.

Yesterday, I deliberately picked a time of 12 o'clock for a light lunch with his worship, the Mayor of Fremantle. He said, "I'll put on some sandwiches." I thought, "Fair enough." Something rather interesting happened. It was interesting because I think somewhere in the civic chamber there might have been a miscommunication as to what sort of meeting or, more to the point, what size meeting would be held. There were only three of us on deck in the event. Maybe the girl at the office who sent the order over to Culley's Tea Rooms—another famous Freo institution in High Street—got the size of the meeting wrong. It was a bit like that scene out of *Father Ted* when Mrs Doyle says, "I've prepared sandwiches, Father", and comes out with a platter that is piled up so big! We had

a large number of sandwiches. I think the entire staff of the municipality of Fremantle probably ate well that afternoon! We decided to have our sandwiches out on the first-floor balcony by the committee rooms. While we were doing that, we heard a disturbance downstairs. There are some public toilets in St John's Square at the back of the library, opposite the church. It is quite a thoroughfare. The mayor apologised and said, "We get this every single day", and off he went. Next thing you know, Mr Milsom and I were sitting there mid-sandwich and we heard the mayor remonstrating with some antisocial elements downstairs. This is late morning on a Monday, if you don't mind.

Hon Jim Chown: It wasn't a Greens protest, was it?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: It was close. It was better organised than that!

The mayor, to his credit, showing civic concern and genuine leadership, went down to confront these people, probably not for the first time. He said, "It is not on that you are here blocking the passageway. Families need to walk past and you're sitting here getting on the grog and getting argumentative. That is not the sort of thing we want here. Move along and behave yourselves because otherwise you're letting Fremantle down." I thought it took a lot of guts to do that. They actually said, "Yes, yes; we'll move on." He came back. In due course we heard the sound of raised voices, and then ultimately the sound of a siren. Why did it have to get to the stage where someone got hurt, when everyone knows that is what happens every day of the week in St John's Square with the same offenders? Everyone knew what was going to happen. Where were the police? We now have available prohibited behaviour orders. They have already been used—I believe about 15—including one in Fremantle, but not to one of the people involved here. Why are those orders not being employed? Where were the police before something happened, when everyone knew something was going to happen?

I have spoken with the honourable Minister for Police about this. She is very receptive, as she is with all members, to reports and concerns being expressed about this. We are going to see what can be done. There have been other police operations in Fremantle. If, in a CBD environment, we cannot get an appropriate climate, in broad daylight, under the mayor's nose, literally, where people are safe to sit and enjoy the sunshine or a coffee in St John's Square, between the church and the town hall, then we are going to have a problem. That is why I have spoken to the Minister for Police, and I indicated that I will be speaking to her again. This city needs some support in this area. From what I can see, it is not getting it. Okay, I am not going to only use that as a point of criticism. The reason I raise it is to say this is recognised and I want to make sure we make arrangements to fix the problem. It cannot be that hard to intervene, if we have people behaving in this sort of antisocial fashion almost by clockwork in the same location every day. Yes, I know it is a CBD area. Yes, I know it has a range of services that attract people who might have all sorts of issues. Yes, there are courts just around the corner. Yes, there are the regional offices of a number of service agencies, state and federal. Yes, I know there are places that attract some people with a range of issues, because they hand out free food and other support mechanisms. But given that that is the case, all that infrastructure needs to be supported by a social infrastructure that also maintains the peace and the dignity of the locality.

Another thing needed is the resolve to ensure this great city of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries becomes a stronger city, an evolved city, in the twenty-first century. I do not want to hear people say, "We don't go to Fremantle in broad daylight because we don't think it's safe." I do not want to hear any of my constituents say that, because it should not be the case. By and large, it is not the case, but perceptions are important and if you are the person who gets accosted by some drunken antisocial element outside the public toilets in the square, it will have a disproportionate effect on you. It might encourage you to make sure you go somewhere else in future. I will talk with the police minister again. I have already said that I am talking to the Minister for Education. He has been very receptive. I have mentioned that the housing area needs some support in Fremantle, and it will get it. Or, if not, I will want to know why. We need to do a range of other things to identify the factors that militate against the successful renewal of Fremantle. I have said before that Fremantle is ripe for renewal—there is no mistake about that—but any redevelopment has to be in sync with the bigger picture. That is no reference to any other advertising program or information program. There is no point doing a whole lot of redevelopments in isolation, and there are a lot of things happening in Fremantle at the moment. I think the secret to all that is closer engagement with the state government and, to some extent, the federal government—certainly with the state government. I will talk with a range of ministers because there is a range of consultative mechanisms already in place between different government agencies and the local council and businesses and so on. I do not think they are necessarily achieving what they need to achieve. I want to ensure that they do. As I said earlier in my remarks, I do not think we have the option of having a disjointed redevelopment that does not achieve its potential and lets us down for the next generation or two. We have to get it right. That is why I will be talking directly to ministers who, like that person the mayor had to speak to, are at risk potentially of letting Fremantle down. I am not going to stand for that.

Before I conclude, I would like to raise a couple of other matters in reference to some retiring members of this house. In order to facilitate that and some other business that needs to be conducted today, at this point I seek the leave of the house to continue my remarks at a later stage of this day's sitting.

[Leave granted for the member's speech to be continued at a later stage of the sitting.]

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm

HON PHILIP GARDINER (Agricultural) [7.30 pm]: I am privileged to stand to speak in reply to the Address-in-Reply. In doing so, I thank each of you for joining me in the chamber tonight. I do not expect you all to stay, but thank you for being here at the beginning. I would like to cover a few things over the four years in which I have been involved in this chamber. I will talk a little bit about the quality of the experience, I will talk about the political aspirations with which I came, and I will go through some of the things I talked about in my inaugural address. I will talk about the work we did on the estimates committee, and then refer to Max, who, unfortunately, is not here, because he says that he has gone beyond that now. But I would like to refer to some of the things that Max has done. I will talk a little bit about agriculture—in fact, that is probably going to be the main part of the substance of what I will say tonight—and then talk about the suitability of a career in politics and what it requires, some of the good things and maybe the unattractive things, some improvements to the system and conclusion. That is why I am not suggesting that you need to stay the whole way.

Four years of being in this chamber is really what I feel is a service to the people in our electorates, which we all do. Having been removed from it, you suddenly realise that it is just like a large family, and every member is really a part of your family. The pressure that was released upon not being re-elected was actually quite huge. It is a privilege to serve the people in that regard, because one takes it on personally, considers it and tries to act in the best interests. In the course of the four years, I have endeavoured to cover issues without any sense of prejudice, without any sense of agenda or without any sense of power ambition. I think I can live with myself for achieving that basic start. But it is about trying to add more quality to our system if we can so that we try to get the best outcomes we possibly can, which is something towards which I have worked. In the political system, it should not be all about doing things so that we can get a job as part of the system. That is one of the things that has always concerned me.

It is an adversarial system, as is our court system. It is really our business. We talk about competition to get the best results. It is all adversarial, yet, really, often the best conclusions come around when we work with our so-called adversary rather than always trying to fight. I have found that when I have done that and when I have been involved with others in doing that, the quality of the outcomes is always better, especially from me, because I always find what I think can be improved.

In politics there is an issue of loyalty. I have always felt that I am loyal, but I am never blindly loyal, and that is the difference. It is when blind loyalty takes over that the whole system falls to a reduced level, because we do not get the fresh ideas, the fresh exchange and the contest of ideas so that we can pull out the best solution. It is something I have believed in all my life: blind loyalty is a failing, not a quality.

Over the course of the four years—I did count them up, I am afraid—I have delivered 115 speeches across a wide range, be it estimates and revenue and expenditure, water catchments, environment and conservation issues, Loan Bills, genetically modified crops et cetera or criminal law amendments for out-of-control gatherings, rail freight and so on. But all that speaking in the house here really does is put it on record, and the record does not necessarily get enactment; in fact, it probably has a marginal contribution towards getting enactment. So, maybe in the four years I have wasted a lot of time feeling the desire to just address the issue to try to see whether we can make a contribution towards it—it was not to try to get any sense of kudos or anything like that—but I am not sure that it achieved a great deal, I am afraid.

Over those four years, when we have achieved things, it has been with two of my staff—that is all I have—who are just outstanding and who have contributed in an enormous way to assist me to address the various issues that came through our door. As we know, whatever comes through our door is the agenda—that is the business—and we address it. But without those two close colleagues and friends who have worked with me on these issues, we would never have achieved what I think was quite a significant achievement in the four years that I have been here. It has been from tier 3 rail to finding a contract in the library that people, either in government or in the private sector, could not find, until Brian Christie, my research officer, found it. This document was meant to have been made in 1966, but it was not in the folder with the 1966 documents; it was in the folder when it finally got to 1969, I think it was. But no-one else could find it. So, forensically, that is exciting, and I found that to be exciting, because that helped us to bring something to the table—not that it was appreciated; it certainly was not appreciated, because the minister to whom I talked about it said, “The government is not going to honour this contract”, when it was a contract that was signed, stamped and everything else, but I will come to that later.

Phil Bellamy, my electorate officer, worked on a whole host of issues whereby I could delegate him to do a lot of the things that I did not make the time to do. He was able to address them in a way that gave him scope to do so and was consistent with the values which I had and which got results—not all the results we might have achieved. One of them was about the land clearing issue. He took on case study after case study—I think about 10 of them—to try to demonstrate to the Department of Environment and Conservation that we could deal with a land clearing conflict between DEC and the farmer, who should have the same agenda and the same outlook, and they do, but there was a massive conflict because of the way that had been dealt with historically. He got conclusions that had hitherto not been reached. Upon leaving, we have those conclusions, and I hope others will be able to take advantage of what has been achieved from that.

The political aspirations I came with were zero. I came into politics in only 2007 when I was in a contest against Wilson Tuckey for the seat of O'Connor in the federal election. That was because I was angry about a number of the issues that Mr Howard had in the federal Parliament, and that included the climate change issue and the national broadband network—I have forgotten what they were now, but I was angry enough to put eight months into campaigning against Tuckey, with the help of some of my former National Party colleagues. But we failed, even though we got the biggest positive swing in an election that Labor won. As a conservative party we got, I think, the biggest or second-biggest swing. That was interesting. I then went back farming until Brendon Grylls said, "Look, we're looking for someone to stand second on the parliamentary ticket for the upper house. Would you mind standing just in case we get the balance of power", not thinking that that would ever happen. I therefore did a bit of work for the state election in 2008, but it was really carried by that great advertising campaign the Nationals had of 11 and 48—11 candidates for the lower house in regional areas and 48 in the city. In my view, that was the key component which took the Nationals up. It was then complemented and supported by the idea of the royalties for regions scheme. Royalties for regions was not a fresh idea. I have since learnt that someone wrote a letter to *The West Australian*, who worked in Max Trenorden's office, said that the royalties for regions idea was about at the time Max Trenorden was around. It is therefore not a new idea, but the timing was right for it. If anyone wants to dispute that, they can talk to me later. Really, I had no particular aspiration; I never have in any job I have had. Whatever has happened has just happened. This was just a measure of the quality of the work.

In my inaugural address I talked about a number of issues. One was about the importance of this chamber as a house of review. I must say that under the leadership of Hon Norman Moore I felt that this was a genuine house of review, as much as we could have it in an adversarial way. I took that feeling even more into the committee stage. I was grateful to be appointed to the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, which I felt was a committee established, like all committees, to hold the executive accountable. I did not care whether it was Liberal, Labor, Greens or whatever it might be; I felt that was our task. I felt that it was not our task to defend ministers or to be rude or critical of them for the sake of the politics. That was not the point. The point was just to make sure that the best ideas got up and the best solutions could be carried out, as far as one could do that in a committee sense. I was also fortunate on that committee to have an outstanding chair in Hon Giz Watson and some good members. Hon Ken Travers and Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich were forensic in the way they sought answers to questions. Hon Liz Behjat came in and asked a crucial question about Ashton Foley's résumé. When she asked that question, no-one responded, except for me. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up because it was so complete and thorough and I thought: is this for real? Nonetheless, one should never lose the point of that inquiry, which I will also come back to later.

One of the other points of my inaugural speech was the social infrastructure issue. I was of a very strong view on that because of a personal experience I had when doorknocking in Geraldton. Geraldton has deep social issues; I noted that even when I was doorknocking there at this last election. A suburb called Spalding has a road off which there are a couple of other roads. I was told not to go down there because it was too dangerous. That is just the thing; I needed to go down there, so I went down there. In that road there were Aboriginals with no sense of direction. It was a very sad place for anyone to live, except that down at the far end there was a house with a good, tidy garden. I knocked on the door and introduced myself to the occupants. We talked a little and the husband said, "There are drugs down the road" and he pointed to where the drugs were. Then his wife said, "Look, how about housing?" Continuing, she said, "Our house value has dropped from about \$350 000 to about \$270 000 over two or three years, mainly because the housing commission owns just about every other house in this little precinct." In that little precinct there was total dysfunction. I therefore thought: why should it be that the housing commission should be causing the depreciation in value of someone's private home by their own actions? I therefore met people at the housing commission and had a couple of goes talking to them, but they said, "No, this really is for the City of Geraldton." I went to the City of Geraldton and spoke to people there. They were pretty keen to hear about it. They knew broadly about the status of it, so I wrote a letter to the City of Geraldton. The trouble is the reply came back from the CEO, though I spoke to him by telephone later, trying to find ways of not attacking it directly, and he suggested I get the people to write to make a case for why it is so bad. I have not been able to do that yet. It is just that the difficulty in all of that is we have to have that

perseverance to keep on going to get a solution, no matter how easy it is for anyone to lift a telephone and talk. I can blame myself for not making that final telephone call, but it is just that social dysfunction in Geraldton is deep. I am told now it is even deeper in Mullewa—not that I have been there—as a result of the merger of two shires. I will also come to that later because I do not think it is wise for local government shires to merge in any sense, especially when it comes to dealing with social infrastructure.

The other area I spoke about was genetically modified organisms. At that stage, I said I was happy for there to be GMOs as long as we had the measures to ensure that the resistance to glyphosate was not increased. I spoke to our minister and I spoke to people in the industry about the risks of increased resistance to glyphosate because of the increased application of glyphosate that would take place with farmers sowing GM canola. The whole idea of GMO is that glyphosate allows farmers to go into their canola crops and get the weeds out. They use glyphosate more dominantly, but that is the only knockdown chemical we have. We do not have any fallback position. It disturbed me more that the most highly respected person on herbicide resistance, a chap called Professor Stephen Powles, wrote a letter in support of GMO. That is fine, but he did not mention that there was a difficulty with continued use of a potential increase in resistance to glyphosate. I had meetings with him and so on, but I could not get any real support to strengthen the way for Monsanto to ensure that GMO was used so as not to increase glyphosate resistance. Monsanto had a schedule that farmers had to fill out and so on but it needed to be strengthened; you could have driven a cart through it! Do members think I could get any support for that? That was a point in my inaugural address on which I still failed.

The final thing is global warming. I have a very strong view on global warming. The reason I am strong on it is that the science is clear to me that carbon dioxide is increasing, and it is clear to me that carbon dioxide leads to a warming of the atmosphere. It is not the only aspect though. That is where people make a mistake. It is only one aspect; it is probably a third of the influence. There are all sorts of other things that conflict from time to time to cause the changing climate or changing temperature. However, in my view, to take the risk and ignore it is foolish of mankind, and we are part of mankind. All we have to do commercially is make sure we can adapt and roll with the way the climate unfolds. That is going to be very difficult to predict, because it is a very complex area. But to ignore the risk and not do enough is foolishness on our part. That is why I feel so very strongly and why I say to people who say it is rubbish: please consider the risk you are taking.

When I look at those four things in my inaugural speech, I think that I might have assisted with the house of review but on the rest I have failed, I am afraid. I mean that I have tried to make a contribution but in terms of moving things forward in a meaningful way, I may have failed.

Let me come to one of the house of review things that the estimates committee did well. I will not spend long on this. I found that we could achieve much more in that committee, with Hon Giz Watson, Hon Ken Travers, Hon Ljiljana Ravlich and Hon Liz Behjat, than in many other parts of government. That was because I found that public servants are, basically, easy to deal with. When they were given free rein, they acted, in my view, responsibly—in the interests of their department and in the interests of finding out things and, mostly, transparently, but not always. It is easy to identify when people are trying to hide things and it is easy then to know what to watch out for. I found that experience on the committee very, very useful. We made some changes to the district high school issue and we certainly made changes to the Peel Health Campus issue, but there is a big change that is yet to see the light of day. For those of us who are continuing here, we must consider what that report states about the profits that were being extracted from that hospital on its turnover. Of its \$100 million turnover, \$13-odd million was being taken out, plus a dividend. That is a very big amount to extract. That is all based on charges that the private sector can charge as set by the Department of Health. There must be a lot of excess costs in the government hospital system that should not be there. I know in health—I have just been through some of this—we have to be very careful: if we are cutting costs, are we cutting care? That is the trade-off all the time. A lot of work needs to be done in that area to ensure that our health system is operating in a cost-effective way, because if it is not, it will drag us all down in the long haul and we will not have it because it will have become too expensive. This morning's paper states that a big percentage—I have forgotten the percentage; it might even be 16 per cent—of total federal government expenditure is spent on health. We have to be careful that we do not allow it to continue to get out of hand. I found being on that committee a very pleasurable experience and we made some differences through offering and suggesting ideas to the bureaucracy.

Let me talk a bit about Hon Max Trenorden. He said he is not here because he has not been re-elected and he has finished. He is not resentful in any manner or form. I wanted to say something about Max and I have looked to try to find out what information I could get on what he has done. He has told me a few of the things he has done, but nothing I have really satisfactorily describes what he has achieved. He is a chap who was born in 1948. His partner between his two marriages had a tragic accident. He was an insurance agent and he was very involved with the Northam community, as a town council member and an Avon Community Development Foundation member. When he served as a member of the Legislative Assembly from 1996 to 2008, he was shadow minister

for a number of different portfolios, but he was never a minister. He has been on many standing committees and I think he was a chair of an international standing committee. He mentioned just in passing that the Scandinavian countries that attended that meeting in South-East Asia thought he did a great job. He said he did not want to come here and talk about his own job. That would be hard for him to do and I can totally understand that. I have very much enjoyed sharing a room with him and seeing his perception of the issues that we tackled, which were quite broad issues. They were beyond where we were with royalties for regions and we tried to make a difference in the bigger picture.

Let me come to the main part of what I would like to talk about, which is agriculture. I am sorry to say that I regret what has happened in agriculture, in part under my watch. I was not in control, but agriculture in Western Australia has deteriorated in its financial and emotional resilience. I happened to serve with Monty House when he was Minister for Primary Industry. I was a member of some of his committees and chair of the Wool Strategy Group in those days. I thought that his model of having industry member committees in the department arranged by product was very effective. It makes us understand how difficult it is to change some of those things. With wool we went to India; we understood the importance of developing a relationship with a set of buyers from one country. We eliminated the differential for wool prices between the eastern states and Western Australia. The eastern states used to always talk down our wool, but we went to India and sent wool lots across to India for processing. They proved that in every way our wool processed the same as that of the eastern states. As Hon Ken Baston would know, that led to the elimination of that differential from which Western Australia had suffered for years.

The great vision we had then was to export a lot of wool to India. We had wool marketing groups around the state, particularly around the south-western part of the state. We got them all together. The arguments took place and positions were taken; they did not want to share information. In the end, we could not get anything working. I could blame myself partly for that because I did not put the time into it. We have to work these things through with the individual relationships, and maybe I did not have the time to give to that. But when it all fell apart on the Western Australian end, India was fine. It wanted our wool and shipments to go over there. I decided that I would demonstrate that we could do it by exporting our own wool across to India, which was very, very satisfactory. We have to build relationships with these people. It took us three years before we got a premium for our clip, but the premium we got for the clip represented the fact that our wool processed better, apparently, than any other wool they had. But we could not go and ask them for the results. They would process each clip individually and give us the results. Once we saw the results and they said how good it was, we could not say, "Listen; now give me another 50c a kilo." After three years, I said, "We are having a difficult time here. Can we negotiate a price around this level?", and we did.

This state needs to build relationships of that kind. We should have already been building those relationships with Indonesia in particular, which is our big grain and live cattle market, and the Middle East, which is another market for grain as well as live sheep. For those who do not like live exports, that is fine, but they are differentiated markets. For any farmer, to have a differentiated market is the panacea for their product. It is so hard to get in agriculture. When we have it, we need to treasure it and nurture it so that we do not lose it. From Western Australia's point of view, we need to establish government-to-government relationships so that when any issue comes out of whatever product in an importing country, we get a call at the government level so that we can then work with the private sector on what to do about it. The worst thing is to have shocks, as we have seen. We can reduce a lot of that shock by ensuring that we have visits to these countries three or four times a year. It does not have to be the minister; it can be someone delegated who can understand interpersonal relationships and someone who is not always finding things out, because if we are doing that, we are wasting our time. We have to have a relationship. That is what international trade is all about. I know it firsthand from working with India and when we were marketing wheat to Egypt, of which I was part, as well with the Australian Wheat Board. Relationships are critical, but we need to regard it as a Western Australian market, because that is what it is, and manage it.

I have also found largely in this chamber and with the people I have been talking to over four years that agriculture is the least well understood of almost any industry. I assumed with the Nationals it would be well understood, but when I came in to work this morning there was only one muddy car in the parking lot and that was mine. That does not mean to say I am the only farmer, but it reflects the fact that a lot of people talk about how they farm or how they are connected to land and all this kind of stuff. Are they writing the cheques now? Are they doing the management accounts now? Those are the people we need to have. We have Hon Nigel Hallett in this place who still does that. I do not know about Hon Brian Ellis; he might do that too. They are the kind of people we need to have to understand agriculture, to breathe it and feel it. I know a lot of people say that a person does not need to be that close to agriculture, but I am coming to the conclusion that maybe a person has to be, because I find it so weakly understood. That is why we have had great difficulty, not just in Western Australia, but in Australia, in coming to terms with developing a strategy for agriculture.

Before I start with some of the premises we have about agriculture, we should all be aware—I used the word “catastrophe” during the course of January or February this year—that there is a catastrophe out there; not because we are losing production—production is the easy thing to increase—but because of the margin and the profitability of agriculture. Why do we think that young people are not coming into agriculture in the way they should be? It is because they cannot see a future in it. Even when I was being brought up in Moora, I realised that it was best for a person to go outside of agriculture to build their net worth, if they could, before they came back to it. Jenny and I had two boys. We did not encourage them to stay on the farm. They loved it but we did not encourage them to stay on there because we felt it was better for them to build their net worth outside first and then to come back if they wanted to. A lot of people think the same way. We need to have a vibrant agriculture that will attract those young people back so they can grow their industry, and that is happening extremely rarely at the current time.

I go to some of the premises we have about agriculture. Firstly, we have this view that agriculture should be economic rationalist. Of all the industries we have, what is the most economic rationalist of them all? It is probably agriculture. We do not want to take subsidies; we are too macho for that. The feeling of some farmers is that they will almost go to their deaths without taking a subsidy. We have to wake up though. Sometime we have to wake up because nearly all the other countries in the world—or maybe all; I have not checked, to be quite honest—have got some form of serious subsidy. We have four per cent of our gross farm income being contributed by government—four per cent, remember that number. What do members think that the rate of subsidy in the United States is? It is about 27 per cent or 28 per cent. What do members think Europe’s is? It is 37 per cent or 38 per cent. Is that a level playing field? We say we do not want people being subsidised if they bring food into Australia, because we get cheap oranges from California and so on, but it makes no difference where the market is. If we export wheat to Egypt and the US is subsidised at 26 per cent, it is the same difference; we will not get our wheat in there. So how do those who are economic rationalists expect us to compete? We all heard through those who went to Corrigin the example of people from different walks of life in the community, the machinery dealer, the agronomist, the farmer, the IGA storekeeper—people in the country are “resilience out”. Resilience is what we always attribute to farmers in Western Australia and probably in Australia. It is one of those great things. Our tradition is, “Yes, we can tough it out. We are strong on the land”, and all that kind of stuff. Do not forget there are women there as well, and women often do not have the same strength as men to handle the hardships that take place. They often see sense and say, “Darling, get out of this. This is not going to work.” We must not focus on our policy, which is the only policy we have had for the past three or four years, of having foreign investors coming in to take the family farmers out. That has been our only real policy. We need to look at what is damaging the family farm businesses. Do not forget that economies of scale are not endless in any form of farming; they are not there. They go so far and then stop and decline. Therefore, do not think that those people who finally come in will stay there forever. There is also the land care issue. Do members think these people will care for the land in the same way as a family farmer? They only will if the family farmer has no money to do it and mostly out there right now, they do not. Land care in a way binds the farmer to his land because he put so much effort into the land care, the weed control, the fencing, the water management or the rocks or whatever it might be, that to leave the farm is one of those very difficult things. It is like the severing of a relationship. That is one of the difficulties we have, but the family farmers are the ones who do the land care. I do not have any confidence in the corporate farmers doing it in the same way. I have just talked about economic rationalism. I think we have to seriously question it and wake up to ourselves about whether that is the right philosophy to run in agriculture when it is not the case almost anywhere else in the world and certainly not in other industries, including mining.

Then there are the risks of agriculture. Why should agriculture get any special consideration anyway? It is just another industry. What differentiates agriculture? The differentiation point for me is the question of which other industries are directly affected by the weather and the climate. Are there any others? I do not think any other industry is directly affected by the weather. They are indirectly affected. I was involved with selling barbecues and heaters. If there was a warm summer that finished in May or June, the heating season, when the margins were quite big, was constrained. If the cold extended through spring into early summer, the barbecue season could not take off. They are indirect effects that we saw through the sales line. But the direct effect of the weather is only felt by agriculture. If we assume that is the case for the minute unless we can think of some other industry, that is the big risk for agriculture. We always say we hope it will rain or we hope the frost does not happen or something like that. Whenever we use the word “hope” do we know what it means? It means it is totally outside our control. What can we do to give us some control over the weather? That is why I am so keen on climate risk mitigation insurance, along with Hon Nigel Hallett and Hon Max Trenorden. I have been working on this since 2001, when I think I had my first meeting with National Australia Bank, and then other banks. I have been following it through, and I do not believe that it is not the right strategic agricultural solution for Australia and, in particular, Western Australia.

What about the other risks, including the Australian dollar? We cannot do much about that, but at least that is manmade—or man or woman made; it is humanly made. The market sets it and we have to manage our way around it. We can either sell forward or buy forward to try to manage our risk; but that is something we have to accept. That is a macroeconomic policy of which we are all aware, as is the Reserve Bank. It is not related only to interest rates, as we all know, but they may help a little. The same can be said about prices. Basically, the price for grain is an international price and we can trade it as well; therefore, we can manage our own price risk, more or less. However, if we do not manage our weather risk and we get a bad weather event, which means that our production is less than we thought it would be, but we have already sold it forward, we have a serious problem with our price management. That is because without some insurance on the weather, we cannot have sufficient insurance on the price of the product or the commodity; therefore, the weather is the first thing we should be addressing. That is the only way we can give some surety in managing the price risk to the grain producer in particular or to any other market that has an internationally traded commodity in which we have some depth to trade.

Then, of course, we have government action, which we have seen with the live sheep and live cattle trade. It is not just the live animal trade—it is on all sheep and all cattle, whether they are going to the local market or the overseas market. That is causing the same serious revenue consequences. It is just like Wayne Swan's budget: when the revenue side goes, there is a problem. On farms, the revenue side has collapsed, because the livestock prices have collapsed due to government action.

Finally, there is the premise of communities. Communities in regional Western Australia are, with few exceptions, resting on the economics of agriculture. That means all the funds from the royalties for regions program that have gone into government plans for expenditure in regional communities are all fine and it is appreciated, but the trouble is royalties for regions is not fixing the foundation issue. The foundation issue has to be the resilience and profitability of agriculture, which then demands services in the towns, to which other occupations will come and grow the towns. It is not going to happen all the time because agriculture will have some limitations unless we get new varieties and so on to increase yields and all that kind of stuff. But, as the towns decline, we see what happens; the towns rest on agriculture. Climate risk-mitigation insurance could be called community risk mitigation insurance. It means the same thing to me.

Let us come to some of the realities. We talk about markets. We have to have a market for whatever we produce. I realised 30 years ago that innovation in agriculture is so good that it keeps up with demand. In other words, the more we innovate, the more we produce and the more prices stay low, and that does not give us profitability. In a way, our technological innovation is so good that it always allows us to overproduce and, therefore, it is only a very rare and catastrophic climate event in another part of the world that forces the price to go up sufficiently. It is only if we have a good year here with climate that we can make something from it. The other thing about food prices is that people are not going to be very happy about food prices rising. That is the obvious way to increase revenue coming to farmers. How many governments will be happy about that? We can manage it a bit in Western Australia, because we have a high standard of living. What about Egypt and other countries that import our grain? We have a real difficulty that is intrinsic in there, and that is why we need to have a differentiated market, as we did have with the shipment of live sheep and cattle to Indonesia and the Middle East. That is very precious, because it breaks out of that difficulty, but it is hard to do.

We also need a lot of luck in agriculture. We can talk about good farmers and bad farmers. I despair when I hear that kind of rubbish. The bad farmers were weeded out ages ago. The good farmers are often those who have had a bit of luck. I know a farmer who bought a property near Cranbrook. He already had a sizeable business in Wongan Hills. After paying a high price for the property at Cranbrook, he sowed canola over the whole property, which happened to coincide with a perfect year for growing canola and a very buoyant price of something like \$600 a tonne; the next year the price came right back to \$250 or \$300 a tonne. That allowed him to pay off most of that property in one hit. Is that luck, good management or good farming? I have gone the opposite way. I have gone big and it has been a bad year. Is that good management or good farming? In our assessment of what is good farming, I think that luck plays a very important part. Eric Smart was lucky enough to find a property in Mingenew and was able to get through the first few years. He almost went broke, but then he had a good year. The northern wheatbelt had two droughts, in 2006 and 2007, and a lot of those guys would have walked off if there had been another less than average year, but they got the best year they have ever had. Is that playing the averages? I agree that farming is about playing the averages. However, people will go beyond the averages to try to pick up something to pay for a land purchase or capital expenditure, and sometimes it comes off.

The other difficulty with agriculture, of course, is cost, which continues to rise. The cost of chemicals has not gone up that much, but certainly the cost of fertiliser has gone up and labour is in continuing shortage. Farm consultants have a role in all of this, because they are keen on efficiency, and that means: big paddocks with straight lines so farmers do not have to do all the turning; taking out the trees, if they can; and then buying the most efficient machinery. However, that is a capital expense, which again has to be covered. The bank is lending

to farmers for that, but if the farmers have a frost event that wipes out part of their crop, they cannot repay the bank. Part of the reality of making farming a business, which is what people talk about, is that in Australia, where most farmers own their land and also farm their land, it is really about buying and selling land. That is how some of these people have managed to grow: they have bought cheaply and been able to sell profitably later on, if they do sell. Some people have done that. One of the biggest landowners in the state told me just the other day that he got out of farming because he was going broke. He said that he kept the land and that the land has appreciated—in this case, the land did appreciate, although it must be going back now—and then there are farmers who are going down and falling away. The business of land is one of the underlying reasons for some wealth when land prices go up.

Let me turn to the strategy that I think can provide an economic foundation. I ask Hon Ken Baston to forgive me for doing this. I know of his role and how deeply he is involved in this. The first foundation plank is a crop risk-mitigation insurance scheme. The costs of that have always been regarded as being too high. They are partly too high because the margins in agriculture are very limited. If we can arrange it so that the uptake is there—the government may have to consider supporting a plan to have an uptake with a subsidy or rebate of the premium, and having the banks on side who insist that a number of their clients take out crop risk-mitigation insurance—there is a chance that the uptake will be big enough to get it working. I have not found any other country in the world that has got crop risk-mitigation insurance off the ground without a government subsidy of some kind. It does not have to be continuous; we just have to get used to the idea.

America is developing technology in this area that is putting it so far ahead of Australia, it is dangerous hearing it. We cannot get that far behind America. It has Doppler radar throughout the country, which measures the rainfall—not these jolly weather stations. A fellow who talked to us about it said that they have insurance policies that, for \$5 a hectare, would provide a certain payout if 1.6 inches of rain was received during the month of August for a corn crop. That is fine. Come August, there was no rain until 31 August, and they got 1.6 inches or two inches, and therefore they got no payout. The yield was seriously damaged as a result of that dry period. The most interesting thing he did then was to say that they are not talking about a rainfall event; they are talking about soil moisture. If they have a measure of soil moisture, they know what is happening to that crop—if it is drying out or what is happening if it is good and so on. They changed it. They synthesised, which they were able to do from the run-off, the soil type and the rainfall, what was happening to the soil moisture. We do not get any of this absolutely perfect but we do get it to the point at which it can be much more realistic than having weather stations around the place. The Doppler radars throughout the United States pick up exactly where the rainfall is on a field-by-field basis. We have to fill in the gaps of the Doppler radars so that we can measure the climate. We have a pretty good measure of the temperature for frosts. With that information, they can provide the payouts that match what has really occurred.

The other thing to take into account is the plant growth stages. The Americans measure it by what happens during each plant growth stage—that is, the growth of maize—and we would do the same thing over here with the growth of wheat. That is where the benefits need to be assessed. These have not been done independently. I have done it but I cannot convince others totally of it. It needs to be done. The strategic growth that would take place in agriculture if a climate risk-mitigation insurance strategy was in place would turn everything around. It would mean that if someone was buying a property next door and they knew what their payments would be but the biggest risk, the weather risk, was covered, they would have a chance of making sure they could get the revenue to make the payments to the bank. If a farmer does have a bad season, he will get the payout from the insurance company. The same thing occurs when buying capital equipment. Strategic planning is so much more in place if a farmer has his biggest risk managed. That is one of the reasons it is so important. That will bring the youth back into farming because they do not want to be exposed to the naked risks that are currently there with climate. Land prices will rise once again because the biggest risk is covered. Agricultural land prices in America are very, very strong. Here they are very weak, apart from some properties taken out by large overseas purchasers. Those key strategic benefits would occur if a mitigation scheme was in place.

When Hon Max Trenorden, Hon Nigel Hallett and I went overseas before December to visit these insurance companies, we wondered why it had not occurred before. It is only when we start talking to these people that different avenues and opportunities open up. Hon Col Holt referred earlier to opportunities opening up in agriculture. What we have not done properly is find out what some other parts of the world are doing in these areas which are strategically so fundamental. This visit to reinsurers is leading to something that I think has great prospects for Western Australia. The more insurers who come into it the better, but each company will be different. Multi-peril crop insurance—I have used that term frequently—is a particular product. The difference between that and what can be done with a climatic synthesised insurance policy is that there is no loss assessment in the latter but there is in the former, and that is about another 20 per cent of the cost. That is what we have to try to eliminate. We need to get the best technology to make it work.

The second part of the strategy and what is about to be in place is a transitional Western Australian Rural Adjustment Finance Corporation facility for two or three years. That is what the federal government has effectively offered the state government. I asked a question about that earlier today. Farming is a game of windows. The window opens and then it closes and once it closes, we live with the mistake or live with not doing what we might have been able to do when the window was open, for 12 months. Seeding and sowing a crop occurs from mid-April but certainly through May and the latest it can be done, depending on the area, is probably mid-June. That window is still open right now but for any of those who have been constrained—I do not know whether they are not putting on sufficient fertiliser or not using chemicals—will be affected unless they get the sufficient finance to make it work. What a tragedy it would be if this year was the most wonderful seasonal year with no frost but some people who might have been able to get some of that money in time to put their crop in could not because it was our fault.

The third part I wish to talk about is markets. I have spoken about government-to-government relationships. I do not think I need to go into that anymore because I have covered it.

Infrastructure is the fourth part. All members know how determined I have been about the tier 3 rail and how it made so much sense to me. The Ord River is a project that is successfully working with an investor who has plans to put the infrastructure in place. We must have the infrastructure. That is why we have been able to compete with the Ukraine, Brazil and other parts of the world because they do not have the storage and handling facilities or the roads to carry the trucks or the railway lines to carry the grain to port in time. Infrastructure is just as crucial to agriculture as it is to anyone else. While on the tier 3 rail, there is something that I should mention that I referred to earlier; that is, the Merredin transfer fee. The government has an obligation under contract to pay CBH about \$3.50 per tonne. That was part of an agreement in 1966 in which the state government said, "We're running out of money to build a dual railway from Merredin to Fremantle. We can build it to Northam but no further." There is only a standard gauge railway line between Avon and Merredin, so the government told CBH that it would cover the cost of transferring the grain from narrow-gauge wagons to standard-gauge wagons. That was the genesis of the \$3.50 Merredin transfer fee, because all those lines in the eastern wheatbelt lead up to Merredin, and then it all comes down the standard-gauge railway. That was a 50-year agreement—it finishes in 2016—but it also has a rollover provision for another 50 years if either party wishes. The other thing is that when the rail was sold to Genesee Wyoming Wesfarmers in 2000, there was no reference to the Merredin transfer fee in the documentation. All the parties have gone through all the documents and there is no reference to the Merredin transfer fee in them. In the intervening years somehow it has switched across to the growers paying the \$3.50 to CBH. The way it worked meant that CBH did not know where the money was coming from, because it was paid into a transport fund. CBH assumed that it was the government paying it in, but it was not. The marketers actually deducted the \$3.50 from the freight, or it did in those days, and that is what the marketers put into the fund, so all CBH was getting was a cheque. What we have is the government actually owing money to the growers in the tier 3 zone for the wheat that has been carried for the five years or so for which the transfer fee was in place. It is there for another 50 years, which means that the government has an obligation of probably about \$35 million, if I have done the numbers right on a discounted basis, to pay to CBH. That is alive. It is a stamped, signed contract that government has. No minister—I am not referring to you, Hon Ken Baston—should, as has occurred, say that this is not a contract. Every contract that a government goes into is a contract unless it can be renegotiated as something different.

I will not go into other parts of the agricultural strategy apart from just two points. The first is about cooperatives. I know that Hon Jim Chown is very anti-cooperatives in the sense that he wants CBH to sell and to corporatise and so on. We have to wake up and understand a little bit about what cooperatives are. Cooperatives work when the members and the beneficiaries are the same. We did have an Australian Wheat Board that was a cooperative before it became a corporation in 1998 or 1999. The revenue of the Australian Wheat Board was all going back to the growers of the grain, apart from the costs. It was the same thing with CBH. What is more, cooperatives do not pay tax. So cooperatives provide either a low-cost service, as in the case of CBH, or high revenue, as in the case of the Australian Wheat Board. If CBH were corporatised, the shareholders would very quickly become different from those who are using the service. The shareholders would then have to be paid a dividend, and the costs, plus tax, would escalate enormously. We have to wake up about where cooperatives work and why they can be successful. We also need to be wary. The one danger with cooperatives is that they can become too serving of their customer base—their members—which can lead to inefficiencies. However, I think this could be easily fixed if there was something in the law that said that cooperatives need to have some independent consultants come through and review certain things such as efficiencies once every two years or something like that. The benefits of cooperatives are enormous. In my view, the storage, handling and now freight carried out by CBH is of great benefit to grain growers. We do not have any dairy cooperatives here now, because I think Challenge Dairy Co-operative Ltd failed. There needs to be a second opinion, if members like, to help cooperatives ensure that they do not get trapped into overservicing their customers.

Finally, I think we have been falling badly behind in climate change preparedness. We have to reopen that with the federal government. It is quite possible, especially if we have climate risk mitigation insurance out in the eastern wheatbelt, northern wheatbelt or wherever, but if climate changes to a point, it must be reflected in higher premiums such that those people change their land use or stop growing what they are growing out there.

I will go away from agriculture to something that is more at home for many of us. I want to talk about the suitability of a career in politics. It is interesting. I actually feel that it is very dangerous to have career politicians. The reason it is dangerous is that they have to compromise themselves in the meantime. Those people who have been here for some time may disagree with that. I always look back at Gorbachev and wonder how he did it. He must have bitten his nails for a long time before he got to a position where he could make a change, and did so. That is the argument for how career politicians can work; they have to play the game, not dispute the leaders and not contest the ideas if that is the way the system has been framed to work. I do think it is useful to get a broader perspective from people outside the political parties. The question is how to do that. A former colleague of mine, David Clarke, who was the managing director of Hill Samuel Australia and then Macquarie Bank, was a very good man in so many respects. He was going to stand in the seat of Wentworth at one stage. I forget who was retiring from that seat. I remember him remarking to me that his name had been in the paper as being a possible candidate but that he had not had one current parliamentarian ring him up and say, "David, it is a great idea; come on in." I think there is a danger in that. The question is whether I would recommend to my business colleagues that they should come into Parliament because they can make a difference and so on. I would be very hesitant, because what they are used to is so different from what one has here, unless one is committed to agreeing with the system and has a plan to stay for 12 years. That may be the perspective one would have to have, but it is something I would be wary of recommending to business colleagues. I am sorry that I am saying that here, but in my view parliamentarians need to be able to listen and to critically analyse, which I think we could do much better than we may have done, and should be able to change their minds without fear. We are never going to get it right all the time. I think we do need to change our minds without fear. There is a book called *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*. Some members might have read it. It is a book about philosophy. I read it many years ago. The most interesting thing it talked about was the relevance of rhetoric to a philosophy or value. In a way, rhetoric is one of the most important ingredients in being in a chamber like this. I do not think it should be based on rhetoric, but that is the way preselection works. Attracting people with real life experience who have gone through a lot of it will not be an easy job unless we introduce some changes into the system. I will talk about a couple of improvements that might benefit the system.

I suggested to Brendon Grylls—unfortunately, I did not make this suggestion until the last 12 months of my time in this place—that our party have a value statement about what we stand for. Parliament is often criticised because of the way we behave in the institution. That is partly because there is no corporatised system of working out what values we should have as a party and how we should behave and treat others. I know that there is goodwill; indeed, I have felt it, even today, from many of you. Corporations work out how to treat people in a professional way, how to treat others in a professional way and how to keep businesses coming back. If they make a mistake, they look at how to compensate for that mistake. All political parties need to go through a process like that. When I was with Macquarie Bank, such a process cost half a million dollars. We do not want to spend that much, but it certainly benefited us at Macquarie Bank. I think it would be worthwhile for all parties to consider that model. Preselection is another issue about which I have previously spoken. Preselections rely on resumes, which we all know are the least reliable for determining a person's performance in a job. They then rest on a five-minute speech, which is equally unreliable. Of course there is politicking to get the votes. That is different again, but when it comes to making an assessment of the good, the bad and the ugly of an individual candidate, we need to go to the third phase. The third phase, which would take more time but may help to get a better selection, involves bringing in a professional headhunter or human relations person to ask questions of referees to draw out the good, the bad and the ugly. A lot of it is in how the question is asked and how the follow-up questions are framed. We would need a professional to do that, but that would expose those who are voting to how it is. That would remove a lot of the politics and would get more merit into the system.

In conclusion—I thank members so much for staying and being with me—we are all ordinary people, as I have said before. It is a wonderful thing that the whole system works. The ceremony, I think, is an important part of elevating our ordinariness. I am happy to be leaving. I feel for my constituents, but I am happy to be leaving in the sense that I am very keen to go back to looking after those about whom I care and whom I love. Over the last four years the farm has declined to some extent despite the best efforts of the people who are there.

I have enjoyed being here on many occasions. I have enjoyed a great deal the friendships around me. I appreciate that very much. Hon Norman Moore, I value very much the work you have done to preserve this chamber as a house of review. I am sure that you, Hon Peter Collier, have the same sense for that. I have appreciated working with you when our paths have crossed.

I have enjoyed the interaction I have had with members of both the Labor Party and the Greens, especially on our committee. That is partly because when we are trying to keep the executive accountable—which, I guess, is government—we often have the same perspective. I have enjoyed that. That does not mean to say that I have not liked the government; it is just that we all need to be held accountable. I refer to what was said by a forebear of mine, James Gardiner, who was a member of Parliament in the Legislative Assembly in 1901. In his inaugural address he said —

My ambition, in common, I feel assured, with other members of this House, is just to serve the State first; and I bring to this task the highest possible ideal. I have seen instances of environments lowering an ideal considerably. I hope they will not in my case. I want to serve the State as well as I possibly can. After the State comes my constituency. If I let loyalty to party, or personal ambition, or anything else of a personal nature, interfere with my desire to serve the State to the best of my ability, then I hope that when I face my electors, whether it be in a month's time or at the end of my term, they will give me every evidence that I am not a fit and proper person to represent them in Parliament.

I independently agree with that and aspired to that, but I failed to be re-elected; hence I guess I qualify as not being a fit and proper person. I admire those words enormously. They are a wonderful example.

Finally, I thank those with whom I have been especially close. To begin with, Mr President, thank you very much for presiding over a chamber with fairness and delivering everything that was deserved in the course of my involvement here. I thank the people who have worked closely with me professionally—Brian Christie and Phil Bellamy in Moora—and before that, Danny Degoda and Dahlia Richardson, but especially the former two. I found them an enormous strength. They could not do enough to assist me. They were forensic, they were brave and they dealt with issues when I could not deal with them. No bad consequences have arisen from the work they have done. I am very grateful to them.

I also thank some key people. Nigel Hallett is not here tonight. Nigel is one of the last farmers left in Parliament. I wish him the best in continuing the work that he and I have done with Hon Ken Baston. Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm—Matt—I have enjoyed a lot of our conversations, as I have those with you, Hon Ken Travers.

To my former National Party colleagues, the “R4R” got you and me in. Keep maintaining it, but remember that it is now government policy. Max, who is not here tonight, was a tremendous friend all the way through. I learnt a lot from his perceptions of how government and public service works, the improvements that can be made and the broad set of policies we worked on together.

Finally, I thank my family. We all know we can never do without them. To have Jenny here tonight after getting back from England an hour ago is wonderful as it is having our two sons, Charles and James, who gave me every support in the last few difficult days. They were wonderful. I also thank Colin, president of the Nationals branch in Moora. He is such a fine man. I guess it was the early nurturing of a wonderful mother and the unconditional love that she always offered that built an intrinsic, almost unconscious strength in me throughout the time I have lived. I am very grateful for that. Thank you, Mr President.

[Applause.]

The PRESIDENT: Best wishes, Hon Phil Gardiner.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [8.49 pm]: I thank the house for leave to interrupt my introductory remarks. I want to conclude, as I indicated before the dinner break, quite quickly with something along the theme of what Hon Phil Gardiner himself concluded with. The summary, though, of the substance of the matters that I have been addressing concerns the future of Fremantle. I hope members now have a little more understanding of where this important part of the Western Australian community and of Western Australia's heritage and history now sits, are aware of the importance and the significance of the crossroads that that community now inhabits and will join me in encouragement to make sure that we maximise the potential of that great town into the twenty-first century. I would like to thank and acknowledge the effort of the Fremantle Chamber of Commerce, headed by its president, Ms Ra Stewart, and its chief executive officer, Mr Tim Milsom, and the mayor of Fremantle, Dr Brad Pettitt, and his colleagues. I look forward to working with them to continue to pursue the goals that I outlined earlier. Already, over the dinner break, I had the benefit of contact from one or two ministers wanting to know how they can be more closely engaged, and that is greatly encouraging. I thank them for that, and I look forward to reporting to the house about progress in this matter in due course. Of course, I would not want to have to come to the house again to report anything else, and I am sure the government will be supportive of that.

I wish to conclude by acknowledging departing members, some of whom go back a long way. Hon Giz Watson came in with me—I never know whether we should call ourselves the class of '96 when we were elected, but that is what people from another place called themselves. We are probably more correctly described as the class of '97. It has been quite an interesting 16 years. Giz, could I just say thanks for sharing the journey with us. It is

something that we share—an experience—and no-one is going to take that away from us. I wish you all the best in the future, together with your colleague Hon Alison Xamon, who has been with us for a term. It was quite a remarkable feat by her to be elected for the East Metropolitan Region. She has applied herself very diligently, and I wish her well in the future.

I have not worked closely with a number of members from the Australian Labor Party who are retiring, simply by virtue of the fact that I have been pretty busy doing ministerial duties over the life of most of this term and our paths have not crossed in the way that they perhaps would cross with one with whom I share a committee involvement and so on. But to each and every one of the members who have served with the ALP, whether you came in on 22 May four years ago or, in the case of Hon Linda Savage, for example, to fill a casual vacancy, I wish you the best in the future.

I want to single out just a couple of members for mention—firstly, Hon Phil Gardiner. Phil, we met when you were a member elect, I think, and I was the new Minister for Transport. I was going up to Geraldton to turn a sod, because I am a hands-on sort of person. I asked you to come along, and you did, and it was great to meet you. We have worked together on a range of things ever since. I appreciated the sentiments that you expressed. As I said in my response to some of Hon Col Holt's remarks earlier this afternoon, I share the sentiments and the genuine feelings that were behind, in particular, your closing remarks about the support of family, the impacts of those relationships and how we rely on them. I understand all of that, as we all do. We value the fact that you do have those close relationships and have had those supports. Those of us who are lucky to enjoy similar supports know how important they are. I wish you, your family and your associates all the best in the future.

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm is also retiring next week. I have had a bit to do with Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm over the years on a number of committees, and we have applied ourselves at great length and, indeed, on a couple of occasions, at great distance in pursuit of committee activities. I just want to say that I have valued our association very much indeed; I hope it continues. That association has been forged not only by what goes on here in this chamber, but also by what happens in committee offices and interview rooms in all sorts of places in pursuit of committee inquiries. That is something that, again, we will both share forever. I thank you and your wife for sharing some of those occasions with us, and I wish you all the best in the future.

Similarly, Hon Max Trenorden is also leaving us. He is not here now, but I wish him all the best. He has a significant period of service to the Parliament over very many years—in both houses, of course.

I also, with regret, note the retirement of Hon Jon Ford. I would like to hear a valedictory speech from Hon Jon Ford, and I hope we get to hear one in the days of this term that remain. I was here when he made his maiden speech, and he impressed me then with his sincerity. He made it quite clear that he had a strong personal commitment to what he described as social justice. Over the ensuing years—some 12 of them—we got to find out exactly what that meant and how genuine it was. I think that Hon Jon Ford served well in a number of capacities in this place with commonsense born of an interesting and complex background and life experience, and thereby he enriched the experience for those of us who were here to share it with him. Just as I enjoyed his most recent speech, I think—it might have been his last speech—about some things concerning James Price Point, I would like to hear some concluding remarks from him. I hope I get the opportunity to do so, but that remains to be seen.

Finally, I would like to make reference to my very good friend Hon Norman Moore, who came to this place only in 1977.

Hon Norman Moore: A career politician.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I will not give members his curriculum vitae, because members can look it up if they want to, if they do not already know it. But what members will see is that some Liberal members, including me and some Liberal members who have been in this place and who have long departed, have taken more than a few leaves out of the book of this very distinguished parliamentary member. I can remember once—probably at the start of my second term—continuing an altercation outside the chamber, probably not very far outside, with a certain member. Our then Leader of the Opposition said, "I think you'd better go outside and cool off for a bit." I did, and that was good advice as well. When I saw him a bit later, I had cooled off, and of course had come to my senses and realised that it could have resolved itself in a much less satisfactory way! I said to him when I caught up with him, "Thanks very much for keeping us on the straight and narrow there," and he said, and I quote, "That's what us old blokes are for."

A term or two later I gave some similar advice—this actually happened—to another new colleague in similar circumstances who also thanked me for guidance on whatever the matter was, and I could not help myself and automatically said, "Oh, that's what us old blokes are for." So, there is the proof. There is plenty more that can be taken from the experience of this member. We need parliamentarians who have corporate memory to make sure that the traditions and practices of the Parliament endure; to make sure that the good things are remembered

and adopted; and that mistakes, to the extent we can, are avoided. Certainly, that has been one of the benefits of this long-serving and most distinguished member. He has been in his day a range of things. He has been a cabinet secretary back when the cabinet secretary was a member of Parliament. That was in the time of the Court government. Most members of this place have not been here long enough to remember the Court government. I am not talking about that Court government! I am talking about the previous Court government of Sir Charles Court. That was when he first sat in the cabinet room, and he sat in the cabinet room as a minister throughout the entire period of the second Court government, and of course he served in the Barnett government as well. He has been the Leader of the Government, he has been the Leader of the Opposition and he has been the Leader of the Government again.

I have previously told the house the story about the old furniture we had with the drawer on the inside lid of which had been scratched the initials of the various leaders of the house. There was Hon Joe Berinson, Hon George Cash and a whole lot of very distinguished members who served in that office. When we came back here again onto this side in 2008, I believe his only addition then was when he went to where he had already scratched his name eight years before and put “x 2” next to it. His is an almost unique contribution, I would suggest, and one that has been valued by all members on both sides of the house. Gone now is any suggestion of cantankerousness or of overly authoritative leadership. All of that is out of the window because we all appreciate the strength that he has brought to the position. I said in my remarks earlier today in this speech that I appreciate the scars that we get automatically when we go through life. When members have been doing this for 36 years, they have accrued some scars along the way as well. I have been around over the years and witnessed events that have caused scars to Hon Norman Moore. I have seen the way he has dealt with and responded to them, and I have admired his character, his integrity and his guts in the way he has gone about doing it. I will not go into any of these occasions. He might remind us of some when he makes his own speech in due course, but I have seen the tough and principled person he is, and I can personally vouch—if anyone requires it—for the character and the contribution of this individual. I have also had the benefit of that experience at a personal level with a valued friend. He seemed a very scary creature when I was a first-term member, sitting there, under the second Court government and he was over there as the Leader of the House—very scary indeed. But over 16 years we do get to know colleagues very, very well and I feel richer for the experience.

To you, Norman, and to Lee, I wish you every happiness in whatever will be the next phase of your life. I note that we are looking for a candidate for the seat of O'Connor, for example. Who knows? We have a special sitting of the house tomorrow to appoint a new senator. Who knows what spontaneity might arise. We shall see in the fullness of time. However, I am deeply appreciative that I was able to share part of my career with this distinguished member and to be able to make these comments this evening.

HON BRIAN ELLIS (Agricultural) [9.06 pm]: I join with the other members of this house in thanking His Excellency the Governor for his address at the opening of the thirty-ninth Parliament. Although this was His Excellency's first opening of Parliament with the current government, it was also the last opening of Parliament for Hon Norman Moore. After dedicating 36 years of his life to the business of this house and service to the Western Australian community, I believe it is fitting that I begin this address by acknowledging his place in the history of the Western Australian Parliament. Although I acknowledge Hon Norman Moore's achievements as Leader of the House and as a minister in both the Court and Barnett governments, I will not go into all the other positions he has held. Hon Simon O'Brien has very adequately gone through Hon Norman Moore's career; and a long list of achievements it is. However, I wish most of all to record my appreciation of his friendship. Hon Norman Moore has been a great mentor to me in my time in the Legislative Council and I have valued his advice. He has always given wise counsel. Away from Parliament he has also given me a few valuable lessons in wine appreciation. It may be that I could have done without some of that advice, Norman!

Hon Simon O'Brien: Very expensive lessons too!

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: Very expensive lessons, yes.

Norman, I do wish you and Lee all the best in the future in whichever direction your life takes. I am sure that I am not the only Agricultural Region member who appreciates the outcome of a good harvest of grapes. I also want to toast the future of Hon Max Trenorden, Hon Philip Gardiner, and yourself, Mr Deputy President, Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm, who also sit here for the last time. I also believe Hon Ed Dermer has a quiet appreciation for a good red, although I suspect that has more to do with a reflection on his political leanings than the actual wine, and we will all miss his gentlemanly contributions to this place. With his beard and motorbike, I suspect Hon Jon Ford is leaning more towards or has a secret fancy for bourbon and coke.

Hon Kate Doust: Actually he is a Moët man!

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: Is he?

Hon Kate Doust: Yes.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: We find out everything eventually, don't we? I have appreciated, as Hon Simon O'Brien has said, many of the speeches that Hon Jon Ford has given to this place. Being a fellow Deputy Chair, and a former minister, I hope that he rides off happily into the sunset.

Whilst Hon Giz Watson probably prefers an organic red beverage, I would like to pay tribute to her vigorous contributions to debates and her attention to detail, even though I may not have agreed with her very often. I also acknowledge the contributions of the departing members Hon Alison Xamon, Hon Helen Bullock and Hon Linda Savage and wish them all the best for their futures. I hope that these few words so far will encourage the new members who will take their place in this house next week. Whilst this is rightly a place of debate and sometimes it is adversarial, it is also a place of mutual recognition as we do our best to provide good government and to keep government to account. I look forward to joining with the house in making these new members welcome.

Something else that is welcome is the assistance being provided to farmers who are doing it tough. I intend to speak along those lines tonight as it is topical, particularly for my region, the Agricultural Region. Hon Philip Gardiner has expressed some views on where he thinks agriculture should go. I do not necessarily agree with all of them, but I have sympathy for some of his thoughts and I respect the dedication and commitment that he has shown towards his constituents in the Agricultural Region. As a third-generation farmer with a son on our family farm at Bindi Bindi and a daughter farming in the marginal area of Bruce Rock, I know firsthand what it is like to live at the whim of the weather. That is probably one of the reasons that the Premier asked me to help organise a tour of the wheatbelt not long after we came into government for this term. Let me share with members some of my insights into what farmers are facing in the marginal districts. I happen to know a young bloke who had to sell part of his farm in the eastern wheatbelt to try to keep the rest of the property viable. This was a heartbreaking decision for a young fellow who inherited property that had seen better seasons. Sons in this situation feel a responsibility to keep the property in the family in honour of their fathers and for the future of their own children.

Nevertheless, farming is a business these days and I encouraged him to make that business decision. If this season does not go well, he might have to make another heartbreaking decision and sell the remainder of the property. In the meantime, like other farmers in that area doing it tough, he and his family have to draw up a business plan to take to the bank and ask for finance for this year's crop. Then they will spend their days waiting for the rain, and if they are lucky enough to get the crop out of the ground they will then wait for the follow-up rains. If the crop grows and gets past the risk of frost and is ready for harvest, they will still be worrying about the weather in case of storms that may flatten the crop and knock it down so it cannot be harvested, just as they are thinking of going to pay back the bank for the money that they have already borrowed. There is nothing they can do about that except have the courage to keep on farming, and if it rains, it rains. In the meantime, they have to put food on the table and petrol in the farm vehicles, buy schoolbooks and clothes for the kids, and pay the electricity bills and household expenses as people in the city also have to do. For farmers such as this young fellow whom I am speaking about, I believe there needs to be three packages of assistance—an intermediate package to help keep food on the table so that they can stay on through this season or leave the farm if things have become that desperate; an interim package to plant the crop for this season; and a long-term package to look at the future viability of their property. We now have these three packages. I am hopeful that the three will fit together to make a brighter future.

The government has promised to address the long-festering boil of red tape. I will just give a quick example of that red tape. I will give my example, I suppose, and it is a common example for most farmers. We have a truck that does fewer than 5 000 kilometres a year. It is an old truck but it is well maintained and in good condition, yet we have to have it audited every year. The audit is done by my son because he fills in the paperwork, but he pays an auditor \$500 or \$600. The auditor never sees the truck. It is just a case of my son doing a heap of paperwork, which he sends off. I still do not know where the auditor sends that paperwork. My son has to have a medical examination every three years. I do not know of any other industries in Perth—delivery vans or perhaps even private car use—that have to have their vehicles checked. It is fair enough in the trucking industry, because when trucks do hundreds of thousands of kilometres a year, there is a good case for the inspection to make sure that they are roadworthy, but even those trucks are not checked. They just have to fill in the same paperwork and send it away to have it audited. Unless there is a real follow-up and a thorough investigation and audit of the truck, what is the audit for? It is just another expense that is added onto these farms that are small businesses, with vehicles not doing many miles at all. That is just a simple example. Another example that Hon Jim Chown knows more about than I do is a simple thing; a grain silo builder in Kellerberrin cannot deliver grain silos outside Kellerberrin because of the red tape involved in him trying to do that. I will not go into all the details, but there is a lot of that red tape around making life hard for people without any real positive outcome for the work that they do. Most farmers are looking forward to the reduction of that red tape.

The state government has provided the emergency relief that forms this first package that I was talking about. The \$5 million provided for the financial support grants will give an estimated 200 farm businesses the option of accepting up to \$25 000 each to help with their expenses. They do not have to pay it back. They do not have to take it—it is their choice—but they do not have to pay it back if they qualify. To be eligible the recipients must have traded as a broadacre farm business for the past five years. The property must have been owned by the recipient for the past five years or have been held with a written agreement to sharefarm or lease the property. At least one member of the farm business must have derived at least 50 per cent of their income from that farm business and at least one member of the farm business must have devoted 75 per cent of their labour to it. The recipient must have farm business equity between 55 per cent and 65 per cent and have received finance for the 2013 cropping program. The net off-farm assets of all members of the farm business, including shareholders, partners et cetera must be less than \$412 500. The scheme is capped at \$5 million and individual grants will be allocated according to the number of applications received. The grants are available until 31 July and details can be accessed through the Department of Agriculture and Food's website. I understand that within the first few weeks of the grant being made available 43 applications were made and that now 70 applications have been received, with money, I think, expected to flow next week.

For those who have done their best but have made the tough decision to walk away, the state government will provide exit grants of up to \$20 000 to an estimated 50 farmers. This is to go towards living and transitional expenses for farmers who have owned their farms for a least five years and who have net assets of no more than \$450 000 after the sale. The exit grants will also assist those farmers who may be leaving their farms for other reasons, including having reached retirement age. Once again, they do not have to pay that back. It is simply their choice whether they take the grant or not.

For those who need to talk through the tough times and also need the interaction and support of local communities, the state government has provided \$1.8 million over 12 months for rural counselling and for local governments to bring people together. Fifteen Wheatbelt shires including Kulin, Bruce Rock, Westonia and Esperance will be eligible for grants of up to \$20 000 from the \$300 000 pool to stage community events. We do not want to underestimate how powerful that can be. It may seem trivial, but Hon Nigel Hallett and I went to what was called a blokes barbecue a couple of years ago and it was a good night. We went along to speak to these farmers along with a doctor and a local farmer who in his day was a high profile VFL footballer. He spoke about some medical conditions he had. The doctor went through a lot of other issues that these farmers would have been facing. I have to say I was quite shocked on the night to find out how many of those farmers were on some sort of medication. At the end of the night farmers came and spoke to us afterwards and thanked us for being there. I had expected, being a politician, a night of horror, of being attacked by farmers and pulled apart for not listening to them, but they were most constructive and very grateful we had gone out there. By the end of the night it was a relief to them in some way to find that they were not alone and that a lot of their friends and fellow farmers were going through some of the same difficulties they were. That is why I say: do not underestimate the assistance that is being given to those communities so that they can hold community events and get the community together. Hon Philip Gardiner touched on the fact that some of the burden of this stress falls back on the wives, and I have to say that that is the case. The men are out there doing the work; they have the worry of trying to meet their commitments to loans, but in many cases the wife is at home, looking after the children and taking on board the husband's worry and the whole family's worry, and often also doing the books. I am sure that in most cases the wife is the stronger partner, supporting the husband out in the paddocks. Once again, I think this is a very important part of the state's package.

I would now like to turn to the three packages that have been announced. The relief package offered by the state government has provided a foundation for the intermediate package offered by the federal government. Without the state package, some farmers would simply not survive long enough to take advantage of the intermediate federal funding. The federal government's farm finance package will provide \$30 million each year over two years for low-cost loans to Western Australian farmers. Members who have been following this issue in the media will know that low-cost loans were one of the remedies called for at the farm crisis meeting in Merredin. Indeed, 91 per cent of the 200 growers surveyed at that meeting believed that access to long-term, low-interest loans would allow them to return stability to their businesses. Personally, I do not agree with adding more debt, but I hope I am proved wrong. The same survey showed that 25 per cent of businesses were paying between eight and nine per cent interest on farm debt, with many paying between nine and 12 per cent.

I believe that the details of the criteria are still to be set, as the minister alluded to during question time, but it is my understanding that the scheme will be administered by the state government and will offer farmers low-interest loans for productivity enhancement projects or debt restructuring for a 20-year loan period. Concessional interest rates will apply for the first five years, with the rate returning to commercial levels for the remainder. These farmers must demonstrate that they are viable in the long term, but struggling financially under current conditions such as seasonal pressures and pressure from the high Australian dollar, although there seems to be

some light on the horizon with the Australian dollar coming down just recently. This funding is designed to provide a breathing space. In return, the loan recipients will have to demonstrate financial need, participate in farm business planning programs and demonstrate their capacity to meet a debt repayment schedule. These loans will take effect as soon as possible after the states and territories sign up to the farm finance scheme, at which time eligibility criteria will be finalised.

Whilst I welcome the funding proposal, it is a shame that the state government was not consulted or informed about the federal package prior to its announcement, but I understand that the state is negotiating with the commonwealth government to ensure that the best possible agreement is reached for WA farm businesses. The federal package also provides 16 more rural financial counsellors, bringing the Australia-wide total to 126 from 21 July. A commitment to establish a nationally consistent approach to farm debt mediation will help farmers and their bankers access a simpler and more consistent system that delivers real results for both parties. Currently, only Victoria and New South Wales have appropriate legislation, so a working group will be established to develop model legislation and will include industry and banks, and the states and territories. The federal package will also increase the non-primary production income threshold for farm management deposits from \$65 000 to \$100 000. The FMDs are an important risk management tool for primary producers to manage fluctuations in their income. However, with many farmers now working off farm to gain much needed income, greater flexibility is needed in how farmers can manage and use their deposits. From 1 July 2014, the non-primary production income threshold will be increased by \$35 000 so that more farmers can access the scheme and diversify their income to help better manage income variation. From that date, red tape will be removed to allow farmers to roll existing FMD accounts into one account. This applies to accounts held for the required minimum period of 12 months.

We have an immediate survival package in place and a low interest rate loan program on offer. What is needed now is a long-term future for farm survival. This involves an intergovernmental agreement on the national drought program reform. A five-point program was agreed to by the federal, state and territory governments, and Hon Ken Baston, in his role as Minister for Agriculture and Food, is a signatory to this agreement. It will be implemented prior to or on 1 July 2014 and will replace the former exceptional circumstances agreements. It will expire on 1 July 2019, but may be terminated earlier, or extended, as agreed in writing by all parties. Full details of the programs in the package will be announced as commonwealth, state and territory budgets are finalised. However, in brief, the agreement includes a farm household support payment based on individual need. As this involves the accountability of taxpayer funding, this will carry reciprocal obligations and involve case management. It also includes continued access to farm management deposits and taxation measures; a coordinated collaborative approach to the provision of social support services; tools and technologies to inform farmer decision making; and a national approach to farm business training. The state government will be responsible for encouraging the delivery and uptake of the national approach to farm business training and developing a state implementation plan in consultation with the commonwealth and monitoring and assessing its delivery. Performance indicators and benchmarks will be included.

Another product that has been spoken about for some time, which Hon Philip Gardiner mentioned tonight, is risk mitigation insurance. A survey of 200 farmers taken at the rural crisis meeting in Merredin showed that 84 per cent of those surveyed would take up affordable mitigation insurance. However, a previous crop insurance program through the CBH Group had a poor uptake. The cost was just too high for enough farmers to take it on. However, the *Farm Weekly* reported last week that Latevo International Pty Ltd had indicated that crop insurance would be available to Western Australian growers from \$15 a hectare this season. The cost would vary for individual farmers and how much they wanted to cover. The company reportedly wants to attract 100 farm businesses. Assessments will be independently audited by RSM Bird Cameron. More recently, *The West Australian* reported that Latevo was already accepting applications and was set to offer revenue-based insurance policies by July. According to that report, the financial clout behind Latevo included the biggest reinsurers in the world of agriculture and would be revealed in the next few weeks. The article went on to state that the company's model relied on a case-by-case assessment of a farm's records over a five-year period, and that the financial records were independently audited and benchmarked as part of the application process, which involved a \$3 000 up-front fee. The article in *The West* further stated that Victorian farmer Andrew Trotter, who is behind the launch of the scheme, has said that it gets straight to the base of the problem in farm business and that it deals with the missing revenue in the exact production years when the problem occurs. He also reportedly said that Latevo had brought forward its launch by 12 months and was still working through the industry compliance process.

I also look forward with great interest to the outcome of the state government's discussions with companies such as Swiss Re and its United States-based partner, the Climate Corporation. I understand that they have a different approach and their product could be worth more consideration. A commercially viable risk insurance product would give farmers more certainty of income.

In conclusion, today's farmers have not only battled poor seasons over the years, but have also had to survive against the high Australian dollar, live export problems with both cattle and sheep, and other market issues such as the price of wool. For example, the western market indicator for wool has fallen every trading week since March and dropped 14 per cent in under two months. Although the price is still historically strong, it is causing problems in the current conditions, when farmers have lost so much of their purchasing power. It is a sign of the times that it is hard to spot a sheep when driving through the wheatbelt these days. Farmers have always had the attitude that it is a case of adapt or die, and most of them sold their sheep long ago. At least they had the choice; some cattle growers and sheep graziers are talking about shooting their animals because the overseas export market is such a disaster. So much for the legendary romance of farming! In reality, it is a business of survival. Farmers are small businessmen and they must make decisions as businessmen. Farming is a great way of life, but it has to be a profitable way of life to survive these days of high cost pressures. I came to that understanding when I took over my farm when my father suddenly died. I realised that I needed advice so that I could make the correct decisions to succeed in farming. I employed a farm adviser, and even though I have been a farmer for over 40 years, I still seek his business advice and so does my son. There is no shame in seeking advice, particularly when times are tough, and I would recommend that farmers who are struggling at the moment to make a decision about what to do seek advice; it will help. A farm adviser cannot make it rain.

Whilst the state package has not pleased everyone, and I would have liked to have seen more money available, where do we draw the line? I am relieved that a safety net is now in place with some options for those who want to try to survive for another season, consolidate and improve their farm business in the future or move on to another lifestyle. I recognise that this is more help than many struggling family businesses receive in the city. Whilst I appreciate firsthand the quiet desperation of those doing it tough on the land, these three packages are a start. We do not want to appear ungrateful.

HON HELEN MORTON (East Metropolitan — Minister for Mental Health) [9.40 pm]: I would like to begin by thanking His Excellency the Governor, Malcolm McCusker, for his address in opening this term of Parliament and also for his tremendous work, along with Mrs McCusker, right across WA in all the areas that I am heavily involved in. I continue to come into contact with the Governor and his wife at many functions, whether they are to do with mental health and drug and alcohol services or disability, and I am sure the same will occur with child protection and family support services as well. In particular, I thank him in his role in encouraging adults and children, in particular, to give back to the community. That is probably even more important this week, which is National Volunteer Week.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the long parliamentary career and leadership of Hon Norman Moore. As a member for the Mining and Pastoral Region, that was the very first time I got to meet Hon Norman Moore. At one stage I felt that I might have liked to have been a member for the Mining and Pastoral Region. I was living on a pastoral property at that time and I spoke to him in one of his offices about the possibility of it but not long after that I moved back to the metropolitan area. His roles as Leader of the House and Leader of the Opposition are the only leadership roles that I have known him to have in the house since I have been a member of Parliament. It was not hard for me to understand why he was often referred to as the father of the house. He was also the Minister for Mines and Petroleum and Fisheries and had many other portfolios before those. I do not know all of them but I know that education and tourism were a couple of the favourites that I have heard Hon Norman Moore talk about.

I acknowledge Hon Norman Moore as being a tremendously influential person, a tremendously influential Liberal, a fantastic politician, an amazing parliamentarian and an incredibly strong and valued member of the Liberal Party in Western Australia. Thirty-six years has seen many changes in technology. I think one of the biggest changes that Hon Norman Moore has seen is the increased number of women in the house, which we have often talked about. The one message that he will constantly leave with me is to just be very clear that what goes around comes around. Because he has been here long enough to see a number of cycles of changes of Parliament and most of us have not, that is a clear message. He has always provided very solid advice about aspects of the house, including custom and practice and standing orders that must be preserved. For those of us who might like to think that we have a better idea about how to run things, that advice is always well received and appreciated.

Hon Norman Moore: Ha-ha.

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is so! I wish Hon Norman Moore and his wife, Lee, all the best for a very long, very enjoyable and, I am absolutely certain, productive retirement.

I also acknowledge the contributions made by all the retiring members and wish them all very well.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.