

Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon James Chown; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Darren West; Hon Simon O'Brien; Acting President; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Martin Aldridge

EDUCATION PORTFOLIO — REGIONS

Motion

Resumed from 14 March on the following motion moved by Hon Jacqui Boydell —

That this house calls on the McGowan Labor government to honour its November 2016 policy position that commits to providing “a quality education to Western Australian children and young people regardless of where they live” by —

- (1) reversing the decisions to —
 - (a) shut down six camp schools;
 - (b) close Moora Residential College;
 - (c) take 20 per cent from the agricultural education farms provision trust;
 - (d) cut the number of frontline regional education professionals;
 - (e) increase fees for VacSwim; and
 - (f) reduce the boarding away from home allowance; and
- (2) recognising the stress, uncertainty, and mistrust created by making rushed decisions in the regional education portfolio.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [1.13 pm]: I was making some comments on some of the projects that the Minister for Education and Training and I had worked on to ensure that we have better quality education for some of the most disadvantaged students in this state, including obviously students in remote communities in the Kimberley and the Pilbara. I would like to put on record that 10 schools have been selected for involvement in the Kimberley Schools Project: Bayulu Remote Community School; Dawul Remote Community School; Derby District High School; Djugerari Remote Community School; Kalumburu Remote Community School; Looma Remote Community School; La Grange Remote Community School; Nyikina Mangala Community School; Wangkatjungka Remote Community School; and Wyndham District High School. These schools are now the subject of intensive efforts in both pedagogy and the wraparound services that will be provided to students over the next three years.

From the work that has been done to date on the introduction of this explicit instruction on pedagogy, we anticipate that we will start seeing some very real increases in the foundational skills of those students. We understand that if students are coming to school and learning successfully, it will fundamentally change their attitude to school. The program is not just pedagogy, though, because it also very much involves developing parental understanding and involvement in the work of the school to try to bring a greater commitment to education within those families.

Pilbara schools is a separate program and, as I think I remarked the other day, it is very much focused on school retention in the larger towns of the Pilbara. We are also delivering a program for speech and occupational therapy, using final-year Curtin University students. That will be delivered particularly to Nullagine, Jigalong and Punmu, with some outreach work at Cotton Creek. We are also working on developing programs for Martu high school students in remote communities. The educational product on offer for these students is very limited, and there are great question marks over the appropriateness of that education, particularly for young men who have reached initiation age. We are looking at the feasibility of developing a residential college either in Newman or Port Hedland, focusing very much on students from the Martu lands.

We are also pleased to say that we have invested some seed funding for the Pilbara universities centre. It is very important for the educational aspirations of many people in the Pilbara to have the capability that has already been developed in Geraldton through the Geraldton Universities Centre. We want to replicate that delivery of higher education in a supported environment in the Pilbara. They are really, really important projects, and I hope everyone understands that they are aimed towards young people who are very much disadvantaged by where they live in respect of educational outcomes.

I want to talk a little about Central Midlands Senior High School. We understand the concerns of the community. For a number of decades, the high school at Moora, like many other schools in the wheatbelt, has seen a decline in its student population. There is understandable concern that the population will continue to decline and, to some extent, the residential college has provided a bit of a lifeline.

The really interesting thing is that we are seeing some real change in the demographics of these wheatbelt towns, and we are working with the Wheatbelt Development Commission on analysis of the numbers. According to the reports provided to me, there has been a 30 per cent increase in the number of students enrolled in Moora Primary School. We also note that the birthrate in that region has been higher than average over the past four years. This

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demographic change is feeding through into schools like Moora. Also, I may have previously outlined some of the businesses coming into Moora over the next two years. We anticipate, not unrealistically, that from those businesses, such as Iluka Resources and Westpork, another 30 students will come into Moora schools. There are positive opportunities here. The future of Central Midlands Senior High School, in my view, is not predicated on the continued operation of the residential college.

I have spoken with the shire president, Ken Seymour, and a number of other community members about what we need to do. The demographic growth is happening and new businesses are coming in that will bring students, but we also have to address the retention rate of Aboriginal students. Clontarf has estimated that 26 Aboriginal boys attend the high school, but possibly another 15 boys in the town are of school age but do not attend school. If we really focus on what we can do to encourage Aboriginal students to engage more fully in the life of the school, and feel that the school has more to offer them, that too will assist us to address these critical numbers. We want Central Midlands Senior High School to succeed, and we believe that all of these factors put together will ensure the sustainability of that school. I have been working with the Minister for Education and Training and my parliamentary secretary, Hon Darren West, to determine what projects can be put in place to assist in getting the Aboriginal students in the town engaging with and attending the school. I am not in any way being critical of the school. We are very impressed, at the senior high school level, with the number of literacy programs et cetera that are seeing the school perform at a good standard, but we think that part of the population is not engaged. We want to do some work to bring those people who are living in the town—they are not living in Marble Bar or a long way away; they are in the town, so they should be at school and they should be achieving—into the school, so that we can ensure a sustainable number of students at the school.

As we have said before, in this current financial situation, it is not sustainable for us to have the various residential colleges in that region—Geraldton, Northam and Moora—operating at only 53 per cent occupancy. When we add the student populations of those schools together, the current occupancy rate for the residential colleges is 53 per cent. It makes absolute sense for educational outcomes and the rational expenditure of government resources to move students into those facilities. At the same time, we understand the need to continue to work with Central Midlands Senior High School to ensure that it retains its sustainability. We have talked positively about this, and I am sure that Hon Darren West will provide some more commentary about the very positive project that he went up and launched the other night. It is a collaboration between the private sector and Central Regional TAFE, which is seeing a really strong traineeship and apprenticeship culture being fostered in the town.

Some concern has been expressed about agricultural education, and I understand that. We have taken very active steps to get the old Department of Agriculture and Food, now the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, engaged back into the education space. It is probably true to say that, some five or six years ago, the department, with all its funding cuts, moved away from having a role in education. It is probably true that Education was not necessarily doing a lot of outreach to the other government agencies, but we understand that that has to change. We have put in place a working group between the Department of Education and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and I gather from some of the emails that I have received that this seems to be working well. A couple of our representatives—Pamela I'Anson and Neil Guise—from various regional offices will be working with the Department of Education. There was some concern within the community about the demise of the position of the special director of agricultural education within the Department of Education, but I am pleased to say that we have had discussions with the Department of Education, and we are very pleased that it has now appointed Alysia Kepert to a full-time position. She was previously part time. She has certainly been a leader in agricultural education, and she is now engaged by the department on a full-time basis, working with Pamela I'Anson and Neil Guise in this cross-portfolio group to see how we can ensure that we keep high-quality agricultural education alive.

We have had very productive meetings with the School Curriculum and Standards Authority, and it is absolutely committed to keeping agricultural education thriving in this state. We have to get more people enrolling in this, but we want to make sure that, at both a vocational education training and an Australian tertiary admission rank level, we have good quality education. We are putting effort in through Careers in Grains, for example, to get kids to understand that there are extraordinary jobs in farming, particularly in grain farming, and there is a huge variety of technical, scientific and marketing jobs focused around the grain and other agricultural industries. We recognise that there is a lot more work to be done there, because those numbers in agricultural education, certainly at an ATAR level, have not been increasing in line with the opportunities. We want to win the hearts and minds of kids in both the city and the regions for these important job areas.

I was very pleased to meet with the Combined Agricultural Advisory Committee, which has members from all the agricultural colleges. We acknowledged that this is a budget repair measure and we hope that it is a short-term

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measure, but we are taking a dividend that is fundamentally around eight per cent of the farm operations money because it is 20 per cent of the 40 per cent that goes into the agricultural education farm provisions trust. We understand that this money is used to invest in upgrading farm machinery. That is not going to come to an end, but it does mean that these things will be slowed down. We can do more to work with the private sector in that regard to ensure that we get a better connection and better prices. We have agreed that the representatives of the CAAC should participate with that interdepartmental working group, and I understand that those meetings have commenced. We think that there are agricultural facilities that could be better used and that could take a more active role in the delivery of education. The research stations in Kununurra and the Gascoyne, for example, should be working closely with the schools to offer various vocational education and training programs that offer structured workplace learning programs, because we have a bit of a disconnect between the local communities and the horticultural industries in those areas. We are employing a lot of backpackers whilst a lot of local people go unemployed. We want to see if we can, through engaging kids in the structured workplace learning programs, do something to turn that around. We have also made it very clear to all our regional officers that we see their engagement with their local agricultural college as a really important part of their activity. We are going out there to encourage our personnel to once again, as they were in the past, be very involved with the local ag colleges. We are trying to get that focus again. As I say, within the old Department of Agriculture and Food there has been a culture of retreat, particularly over the last five or eight years. I acknowledge that we now have limited resources and we are asking a lot of the staff, but we want them to go out now more actively into that community and understand that having a role and interaction with the ag colleges and providing the opportunities to utilise our research centres, is an important way in which we can encourage and participate in agricultural education.

I am pleased that none of us, not even the Minister for Education and Training or any minister in this place, has said that these cuts we have had to make are without pain. In most cases, we would rather not have had to make this decision, but this is the job that we have been left with. Members need to understand that there are a lot of positive stories out there. There is a lot of positive investment in our regional schools and we are very optimistic that we will see an improvement in the regional education opportunities over the next four years.

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural) [1.33 pm]: I would like to thank Hon Jacqui Boydell for this motion. I would also like to thank the house for giving it precedence to address it. This is a very important motion and the debate addresses cutting frontline education services in regional Western Australia, something that I do not believe my community has ever seen done by a government previously.

I had the privilege of sitting on the government bench for eight years. In my first term I was a backbencher and in my second term I was on the frontbench as a parliamentary secretary. During that time, the now Minister for Education and Training, Hon Sue Ellery, was the opposition's shadow Minister for Education. She advocated for education with distinction, quite frankly, and integrity on behalf of all children and adults across this state. She impressed me with her ability to address issues that came up. In fact, over a period of time she won my respect and I thought that at some stage as a future Minister for Education, she would be worthy of consideration and support. Unfortunately, as we have found, that was all a facade. What we have seen today by the Minister for Education and Training is a stepping back from what her ideals were over those eight years. We have seen the Minister for Education and Training forgo frontline education in regional Western Australia with the excuse that it is about budget repair. This is not about budget repair. The education of children in regional Western Australia and all of Western Australia is paramount. It is about service delivery; it is not about budget cuts or budget repair at all. As we found out last week, when Hon Tjorn Sibma was on his feet, a senior member of this house and this government admitted that it is about cost shifting and moving money around to fulfil election promises—dubious ones at that. What concerns me greatly is that the press tells me that Hon Darren West is trying to step back from those comments and that he believes that at the time he got confused because the house was noisy—it was not! If members look at the vision and listen to the audio, they will hear that it was not noisy at all. We come to the issue of honesty and integrity with regard to senior members of this government.

Last Tuesday, there was a rally at the front of this house that hundreds of people from Moora attended in 38-degree heat. They stood in that heat, along with the students from the residential college and the school in Moora, with their parents and their grandparents, and rallied to try to change the mind of this government. They respectfully listened to the Minister for Education and Training put her reasons for these cuts being made and why Moora Residential College would close in 12 months. It is interesting when we talk about honesty. The minister made a public statement that this government had inherited \$40 billion of debt. Well, that is incorrect and an absolute lie! How a minister of the Crown can make that statement and not understand the government's own budget parameters is beyond me. I will go to the root of the matter here with regard to where this government is going. Let me state it very clearly, Madam President: the budget papers state that at the time estimated, at the end of the financial year the debt was \$32.5 million. The *Government Mid-year Financial Projections Statement*

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audited by the Auditor General states that the state debt was \$32 billion. Would somebody please explain how an \$8 billion mistake can be made by a minister of the Crown?

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon JIM CHOWN: Thank you. In the other place, the Premier actually repeated the same statement seven times. We have a Premier who does not understand the basic parameters of his own budget. Quite frankly, this has to stop. It is time for this government to be honest. It is time for this government to state what its intentions are, especially with regard to education. I note that the Minister for Education and Training is not in the house and has left on urgent parliamentary business.

The PRESIDENT: I am glad you added that, Hon Jim Chown.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Thank you, Madam President. Some of the things that have been taking place are, quite frankly, hard to comprehend. We know that there has been no consultation with the parents of students at Moora Residential College. An education department person is calling them individually and offering them all sorts of incentives, including money, clothing and anything else, that will ease their way into giving up their pursuit to have their children remain accommodated at Moora Residential College. There has not been a single group meeting by the minister or education department. This is basic stuff. If the minister is going to change the life of somebody—if she is going to change the education outlook for a group of people—common decency would say that she would meet with these people as a group and consult with them, rather than letting them know after school had broken up pre-Christmas.

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

Hon JIM CHOWN: That has not taken place.

Hon Donna Faragher: It is not consultation to make a decision and give them 12 months to get over it.

Hon Kyle McGinn: Get over it? It is 12 months to consult through that.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members, Hon Jim Chown has the call; he does not need any help from his own team or from elsewhere.

Hon JIM CHOWN: This is about dividing and conquering parents; this is not about consultation as a group. This is not about getting parents together to sit in a room and talk it through with a departmental person representing the Minister for Education and Training. This is a war of attrition against these parents and their children for the sake of a few million dollars for the sake of budget repair. We know it is not budget repair. This is an attack by this government on regional Western Australian frontline educational services. Country government members on the other side of this place should be standing up against this, but they are not. We have not heard a word out of them, publicly or otherwise. Shame on them, because they have the power to make a change. They sit over there—I look at them now with their heads down, because they know I am right—and there is not a word.

The minister claimed at the rally that she gave Moora an extra \$288 000. Funnily enough, every mid-sized school in the area got that amount. The \$288 000 was not to help the Moora school but was just part of a policy on an equity adjustment. It was nothing special at all. The minister talked about the assistance of a School of Isolated and Distance Education coordinator in Moora. They already have one. The allocation is for only a very small extra SIDE coordinator—I think it is about half a day or a day, so there is nothing special about that either. In fact, I am informed that Moora is not actually eligible under the parameters for new SIDE funding. This issue is not going to go away. Members of this place need to pursue this issue until the government changes its mind.

A number of questions have been asked in this house about other matters and other cuts to education. I asked one yesterday about camp schools that is worthy of repetition. I asked the Minister for Education and Training whether, under the commercial enterprise arrangement, given the number of people who put up tenders, the government would be charging an access fee. The second part of the question asked whether the minister had looked at some form of sponsorship. The response I got was not a response at all. From the answer I received from the minister, I can assume that these camp schools are now going to go from service delivery to a form of income for this government. I inform the house that these camp schools are absolutely essential to the wellbeing and future development of the thousands and thousands of children who go to them. The Point Peron camp school, for example, gives precedence to public school students. About 5 000 students go through that camp school every year. Its shortfall was \$330 000 last year. That is what the government has to make up, which the camp school does not generate itself—\$330 000 for 5 400 students. The government is going to commercialise camp schools; it is going to privatise them. This particular camp school has such a great reputation that private schools in this city have, on occasion, asked for or tried to buy a term so that they could have full access to this camp school, at the expense of public school students. When the

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government commercialises the camp schools, which is its intention, we know what is going to happen—fees will double and the private, wealthy schools will get access because commercial entities want to make a profit. Obviously, from the response to my question yesterday, this government is going to charge operators a fee for access. The government is going to make money out of it, at the expense of public school students, many of whose parents cannot afford it. This is a Labor government at its best. I imagine that that will be exacerbated right throughout the camp school system in this state if this policy is adopted by this minister.

I will talk about the issue with the Western Australian College of Agriculture Cunderdin. My goodness! Cunderdin is one of the most outstanding agricultural colleges. I encourage everybody to go there. They will welcome members with open arms. They are happy to see members of Parliament. They are proud of their institution. The students are outstanding. In fact, graduates from Cunderdin immediately get jobs in the workforce, such is the standard that the college maintains. Hon Donna Faragher and I had the privilege of attending Cunderdin school a month ago. We met the new headmaster, his staff and his administration staff. We were welcomed by the senior boy and girl of the college and we had a full tour, which included some delicious sponge cake at afternoon tea. It had lashings of cream. I had two helpings; I almost had three.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Admirable restraint!

Hon JIM CHOWN: Yes, it was admirable restraint. What Hon Donna Faragher and I found out in discussion with the new principal, his administration staff and his deputy principal was that students cannot just get into Cunderdin—there is an application process. The college takes students who it believes will benefit from this institution. Guess what? There is a waiting list. Members can call it what they like. It may not be the technical expression, but it has expressions of interest. The principal said that it could not accommodate seven students because the college was full. If that is not a waiting list, I do not know what is. The minister says that there is not one, but there is. Guess what is happening in Moora? This education operative has gone around to a couple of parents and said that their child will be given priority access to Cunderdin agricultural college because that person knows the principal. That person has said, “We can get them in.” That is on the record, Hon Darren West; it was on the radio. Hon Darren West is shaking his head; that is typical of him on this matter. There is a waiting list. This person is operating on behalf of the Minister for Education and Training and no-one else. They are operating under her direction. Otherwise, she is not the Minister for Education and Training. The question is: what happens to those seven children who are waiting 12 months to get into the college that their parents want them to go to and who have gone through the application process? Because the minister wants to close Moora Residential College, she has decided that those students are not worthy and somebody else, who has not even conformed with the application process as far as I know, will be given priority. That is not how one runs a government or a ministry, or how one deals with education in this state. It is shameful.

I think members here should be aware of all that has taken place in regard to frontline services in regional Western Australia. We have just heard from Hon Alannah MacTiernan what is happening and taking place out there and studies et cetera. They were all put in place by the previous government! There was nothing new in her statement at all—nothing! She tried to make out it was this government’s doing—rubbish! More lies! It is not worthy of a minister of the Crown to stand and make a statement like that in this place, and pretend that it was this government’s doing while it is cutting frontline services throughout regional Western Australia. Our children in regional Western Australia have the same basic right as everybody else. They have the right to attend a college or institution of their choosing, as they do now, without the rug being pulled out from under them and being coerced and pressured by ministerial staff to move somewhere else. This is not Russia—this is Western Australia! You may laugh again, Hon Darren West, but that is exactly what is happening and you know it. As a regional member, your silence on this matter speaks volumes. You may giggle away there as much as you like, but you are on the record, my friend, as being not worthy of representing the Agricultural Region.

Hon Darren West: That’s a matter for the people of the Agricultural Region, I think.

Hon JIM CHOWN: There are a number of issues. Quite frankly, when a town loses an institution like the Moora Residential College, it never comes back. Over time, the repercussions on the community will be immense. We heard Hon Alannah MacTiernan talk about possible outcomes for industry in that particular area that are not yet there. This agricultural college is there today. It operates today, and has students attending it. If the government were able to step back from closing something like that, it would continue for another 20 or 30 years and grow with the community.

We know that communities in regional Western Australia are declining in numbers. But there are significant hubs out there that need to be maintained by responsible governments. Moora is one of them. Moora is the main town in the midwest, and to lose an institution such as Moora agricultural college will decimate it over time. I have no doubt whatsoever, regardless of what is being said by the government benches, that student numbers will decline. Student numbers will decline so much that the senior high school will be downgraded. Any regional member here

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knows that one of the greatest issues in agricultural areas is education. Commercial industry and local government operatives find it hard to get people there because the education facilities are not what they should be. Young families come in, and once their children reach years 9 or 10 at school they move on; they come back to the coast. Currently in Moora they can go to year 12, and to lose that ability will wind that town back over time, regardless of what happens. We will end up with an aged population out there because all the youth will have gone, and that will be the fault of this government. That will be the fault of this minister, and it will certainly be the fault of this Premier. I heard him on 6PR radio yesterday. He was asked by somebody from Moora what he was going to do, whether he would step back and whether he would change his mind. He said, "Well, there's only 32 or 34 students at the Moora Residential College, and none of them are locals." What the—? If they were locals, they would not need a residence! That was the Premier's answer. That is his care factor—zero! Maybe these people need to get out more and maybe, rather than swinging around the place and just flap, flap, flapping their gums, they need to actually speak with people. They actually need to go and consult with the locals; talk to the locals! But it is not happening.

I think this government needs to reconsider this major issue. I am not sure whether the Minister for Education and Training is up to it at this stage, but it certainly needs to be reconsidered. I do not believe that the financial situation of this government will change much. We know it will lift state debt by at least 27 per cent over the next four years, and that its Metronet et cetera program has blown out substantially. What really concerns me is that if it gets away with these cuts to regional education, in the next budget year it will exercise further cuts. That is the real concern here. We need to make a stand from this side of the house. We need to send a message that this will not be entertained; that education is absolutely paramount and should be the last portfolio that has to exercise cuts.

Let me finish by stating—as stated in this house by Hon Peter Collier, the former Minister for Education—that the same cuts were put in front of him by the department and he rejected them. He is a very wise man, because they would never have been approved by my party room, ever, yet they were obviously accepted by the Labor caucus. So, members, especially regional members, please do not give up the fight on a basic right. Do not give away what we fought hard for over years, to ensure that our children out there had the best education possible—the best education the state could afford—probably the best education in regional Australia, and this government is now in the process of taking away.

HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan) [1.56 pm]: I rise on this motion as the education spokesperson for the Greens. From the outset I want to say that ordinarily the Greens, as a matter of process, would not support a change in the order of business on the motions. This is a precedent, and we are not particularly keen to go down that path. However, in this one instance we agreed that it was important because of the timeliness of this matter and how urgently people are feeling this. We thought it important that we brought this on for urgent debate. I think it has been particularly aggravated by the timing of the announcement of the cuts, the meaning of which we are discussing today, having occurred only the week after we rose from our final sitting of the year in 2017. It meant that we were looking at a very long period before we had an opportunity to talk about cuts that have had the effect of distressing an enormous number of people within the community. I want to say how disappointed I am to be standing here, pretty much about 10 months since the last time we had a major problem with the education portfolio, yet again talking about decisions I think could have been avoided if there had been appropriate consultation. I do not think that it is a good reflection of sound decision-making.

I think there is a particular concern around what is happening with the lack of appropriate levels of consultation before decisions are being finalised—before decisions are being made and announced. We are seeing what are proving to be dramatic changes to what is happening with people's lives and children's access to education around the state. Frankly, we will have to start to see a completely different approach to how these big-picture decisions are being made because untold levels of distress are being caused to families. I am also very concerned about what long-term, amazing, hard-fought-for educational services will be lost because of the government's decision to proceed with these funding cuts. I am glad that some of those cuts were reversed. Some of the cuts to services such as Schools of the Air were highly problematic and particularly ill thought out. I urge this government to look also at some of the cuts that are continuing because I think they will be highly detrimental.

We know the education portfolio has taken quite a hammering since this government took office. As I have said over and over again, I am the first to acknowledge that the state is in a financial crisis, and that is also one of the reasons the Greens are consistently prepared to support revenue-raising measures. As I said last week when we talked about education, education seems to be receiving a disproportionate brunt of financial cuts. We know that 3 000 public service positions have been cut across government in a range of areas and that is particularly concerning for education, which is core government business or, at least, should always be considered to be core government business.

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I want to talk about some funding cuts that are also impacting on the regions that are not included in this motion. But I note that we have been talking about cuts broadly, regardless of where people live, so I will chuck in some additional cuts that I think are highly problematic. I want to talk about cuts to the number of Aboriginal education officers. I think some of these cuts are some of the most ill-thought-out and short-sighted decisions made under this budget. I am particularly concerned about the decision to cut Aboriginal education staff numbers from regional offices. We know that the gap in educational achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is already appalling and is not getting any smaller. We know that there is a strong link between improved learning outcomes for Aboriginal students, who are supported and mentored by Aboriginal teachers and other Aboriginal staff. At the same time, we know that all government departments are seeking to improve the number of Aboriginal people they employ. Frankly, it does not make any sense to me for the minister to decide that the Pilbara, the mid west, the wheatbelt, the goldfields and the south west regional offices should no longer have any Aboriginal education staff and for only one Aboriginal staff member to be located in the Kimberley district office. In December, the minister abolished the positions of 36 Aboriginal education regional consultants, managers and coordinators within Aboriginal education teams located at the regional offices. It is still spectacularly unclear why this decision was made. We know the connection to land, family and culture is fundamental to closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Employing and retaining Aboriginal staff is one of the key ways services can genuinely ensure they include Aboriginal culture within education. Obviously, I welcome the undertaking by the minister to put 50 full-time Aboriginal and Islander education officers, the AIEOs—the vowels as we used to call them when I worked in education—into classrooms. This does not make up for abolishing more senior Aboriginal staff positions in regional offices. We know these positions are pretty critical to helping support Aboriginal children to attend and to succeed in school. The positions were important liaison points for schools and communities. Importantly, they helped keep kids off the streets and in schools and they helped to advise schools and acted as cultural brokers to improve relationships between schools and Aboriginal families.

I found out about these cuts being on the agenda because I was contacted by regional police officers I know who were very, very concerned about these cuts and said it would make their lives immeasurably harder. They wanted to see whether anything could be done because they were very, very concerned about the impact it would have on their workload, let alone what it would mean for the students. These are really important roles. Frankly, they will be effective only if the staff are located close to the schools and students. These are quite clearly positions the loss of which will be felt quite acutely on the ground. I know five of the 36 abolished positions will go to the Aboriginal education teaching and learning directorate in the central office, which was created in 2017 by the previous government. But these positions need to remain located in the regions because the type of work they were doing and the services they were providing simply cannot be provided out of a central office.

I spoke last week about some of the other areas that are missing from this motion that will also impact on regional students. I spoke about what I thought was the absolutely foolish decision to re-purpose Tuart College and to close access to Canning College for local students. That is significant also to regional students because these were centres that provided educational opportunities also for regional students who for whatever reason could not succeed in year 12 as well as they had hoped, and it meant they could come to Perth and get another opportunity to undertake that education. These changes will disadvantage students who need alternative pathways to university. For decades, these colleges have played a critical role in helping young people attain year 12, and they provide students with quite diverse curriculum pathways to university. As I said last week, they also provide opportunities for students who may not even want to go to university but just want to complete year 12. I do not intend to go into all the reasons this was a foolish decision, because I have already canvassed it in this place. But I want to say that I really hope the government completely reconsiders why it has decided to close Canning College. The argument that universities are providing alternative pathways does not cut the mustard. As I have said over and again, TAFE is not equipped to pick up the slack. We know that TAFE has its own financial problems and will not be able to provide the same level of schooling. It is problematic, and the decision to close Canning College to only international students, I suspect—this has certainly been reinforced—will completely undermine a critical part of the marketing model; namely, it is available for opportunities to learn along with domestic students.

I will also make some comments about Landsdale Farm School. Again, this is an important matter that is missing from the motion. The farm school began in 1979 as an annex of Burbridge school and became autonomous in 1987. The purpose of Landsdale Farm School, according to its annual report, was to provide and I quote —

A rich and extensive learning environment for all students with an emphasis on students with disabilities ...

It serves a range of purposes but has maintained its original primary purpose as “a special education facility for students with disabilities”. Members may know that apart from being the spokesperson for the education portfolio, I also have the disability portfolio. I have been contacted by families of young people with disability who are

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extremely disappointed with this decision because the school has had a special place in the hearts of many people. It is not surprising when we find out how many people visit and use the farm school every year. The number has been steadily increasing from just over 9 000 people in 2000 to over 58 000 last year. We know that last year the school was visited by 3 420 ed support students and 2 319 other students, including 99 TAFE students. In addition, thousands of teaching and support staff visited the school last year. It was also used by a number of teachers who used it for professional development. I have been told that many students with complex needs often have very positive experiences at Landsdale Farm School. They respond to the animals and the environment and these experiences enhance their lives on a therapeutic level. The school can also provide learning opportunities for students that far surpass what they would gain in an ordinary classroom. It also provides a fantastic environment for high school students who are studying vocational education and training courses such as horticulture. There is no question that the staff and the volunteers who run this facility provide an invaluable service to not only schools and teachers and students, but also the broader community.

We often talk about the importance of breaking down silos, particularly between different departments and between government and the community. In many ways, by creating large departments, the machinery-of-government changes are a response to this recognition, but models such as Landsdale Farm School, Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre and Canning River Eco Education Centre are excellent examples of communities working together in partnership with local and state governments to provide fantastic educational support services. Therefore, the last thing we should be doing is defunding any of these services. It will basically take it back to a silo mentality. When the minister chose to withdraw support from Landsdale Farm School, Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre and Canning River Eco Education Centre, she said that it was because these services are not schools and not core Department of Education business. However, that fails to acknowledge that these amazing places are delivering not only excellent education services to students in schools, but also education and community facilities to the broader community. These are examples of resources that are breaking down silos and are valued by the whole community. Defunding these services sends entirely the wrong message that we do not value these sorts of models. That needs to be revisited urgently.

I want to say a bit more about Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. Hon Donna Faragher previously said that she thought it would be something the Greens would be particularly concerned about, and Hon Donna Faragher was correct. As I mentioned, the minister's decision to remove funding from areas that are not considered core business of the department might help marginally with the department's bottom line, but I do not think it benefits the community more broadly. Cuts announced in December included the reduction in or ceasing of some grants that were previously provided to external organisations. It has been difficult to get a list of all these grants, but we know that the savings the government will make from defunding the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre and the Canning River Eco Education Centre are relatively small. We are talking about \$165 000 for Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. It is not millions of dollars. The centre has been run by the Western Australian Gould League, with an extraordinary number of volunteers, since 1982. The funding covers one teacher and one administrative support person, with all the other operating funding raised by the fee-for-service from visiting schools. Next year, the Gould League is supposed to celebrate its eightieth anniversary, yet it has a dire future, having lost this money.

Hon Donna Faragher: It is likely to close.

Hon ALISON XAMON: It very possibly will close. Since 2002, the WA Gould League has had over 111 000 students participate in school-based programs, with an average of 6 500 students participating every year. Its programs are curriculum based and comprise both environmental education units and Aboriginal education services. The programs have been described as innovative and inspiring, and that is the core business of education and what education should be about. The Gould League has had many achievements and the partnership between the WA Gould League and the Department of Education has been long. I think it is such a false economy to look at defunding what has been, until now, a really important and useful partnership. Particularly with the focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics and the government's recent significant investment in this area, it seems really short-sighted and utterly counterproductive to remove support from this amazing science education resource.

Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre is the key venue for the delivery of the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative and it is also a vital resource for teaching children who live in the metropolitan area about biodiversity and the wonders of the state's unique environment. The abandonment of Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre by the department is an example of the government's failure to prioritise Aboriginal education. The Indigenous education program at Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre was initiated in 2002 and provides a key specialist service to the Department of Education. The minister should reconsider the decision to withdraw funding from the wildlife centre so that the WA Gould League can continue to use the centre to continue to deliver high-quality education programs. It has been running on a shoestring budget forever and what a waste of volunteer energy!

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 21 March 2018]

p1056d-1072a

Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon James Chown; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Darren West; Hon Simon O'Brien; Acting President; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Martin Aldridge

I will turn to some of the specifics of the motion. The closure of the Moora Residential College has been specifically noted. In the tranche of cuts announced in December was the closure of both Moora and Northam Residential Colleges. I am pleased the government has reversed the decision to close Northam Residential College and that was much to the relief of the communities involved. However, we know that the government still intends to close Moora Residential College. The college provides accommodation to students who go to Central Midlands Senior High School and live too far away to commute by bus every day and have no other appropriate senior high school close to where they live.

The decision to close Moora is not a good decision. The way that it has occurred has quite clearly caused an extremely large amount of distress within the Moora community. I was present at that rally, along with my colleague Hon Diane Evers, and the level of distress and anger of the people present was absolutely palpable. According to the lobbying that I have received on the issue—there has been a lot—Central Midlands is the only public senior high school between the Perth metro area and Geraldton. Therefore, the college is considered to be vitally important for not only Moora, but also regional students and families and the surrounding districts. I suggest that the options the government is advocating are unrealistic for many families. It will make many families' lives much more difficult. For example, we know that Yanchep District High School, which is in my electorate, is too far away for many students. It does not have boarding facilities. No bus route is in place and one has neither been costed nor offered by the government. It also means forcing students to travel over one and a half hours each way twice a day on what has been cited as the most dangerous stretch of road in Australia. It is not surprising that people are distressed about this decision.

In addition to the direct impacts on the college boarders and their families, the local community is understandably concerned about the ripple effects that will follow the closure of the college. The community is worried that the closure will lead to a fall in the number of students attending Central Midlands Senior High School and that this will lead to fewer teachers and fewer course offerings and will impact on the viability of the school to maintain its current status as a senior high school. It is worried about the economic impact on the town as the residential college contributes significantly to local businesses, including through things such as purchasing food locally for boarders. It is difficult to understand why the government would enact a policy that has such a significant risk of negatively impacting on the vibrancy, heart and economic situation of an important rural community.

I recognise that it is expensive to keep it open—but guess what? In a state as large as Western Australia, it is always going to be more expensive to provide educational services to people who live in our regions. That is not why we decide not to fund them. As members in this place, it is our responsibility to ensure, as the motion states, that every student in this state regardless of where they live has equal opportunities for education.

Now I want to make some comments about the camp schools. The minister's decision to close six camp school sites is another example of bad decision-making because there was a lack of consultation prior to making that decision. There was a lack of consideration particularly of the impact of this decision on our rural communities. We know that we are looking at losing the camp schools at Point Peron, Pemberton, Bridgetown, in the goldfields, Geraldton and Dampier and that the camp in Broome will stay open for the time being. These camp schools are well used; my own kids have used them. They provide important opportunities for students to learn outdoor and team-building skills. Schools find that they are really important for the personal and social growth of students. They provide unique experiences. Not only do country students in the communities near where the camp sites are located benefit from these facilities, but also they are used by many city-based students who have the opportunity to visit and stay at these facilities. I understand that there is an assertion that the occupancy of camp schools has been declining, but I want to be clear that this assertion has already been disputed by many stakeholders. I think that many of us would be interested in interrogating the data that has informed that assertion. It is important for children to have an opportunity to experience Western Australia's natural environment, and camp school experiences are a really important part of a well-rounded education. We need to ensure that these opportunities are available not only for those students whose parents are wealthy enough to send them off to private camps, but for every student.

Again, I will come back to the 3 000 public service positions that have been cut. We know that 3 000 jobs cannot be cut without making a significant impact on service delivery. I will remind members that the Langoulant inquiry—people love raising the Langoulant inquiry in this place, particularly government members—found a worrying level of under-resourcing in government departments, particularly in areas of public policy and project work. Instead of gutting it, the report recommended that we need to build capability and capacity. I will continue to argue that cutting positions from the public service is a false economy and Langoulant apparently agrees with me, particularly when this is done in a non-strategic way. I think it will ultimately cost us more in the longer term.

Other cuts that the Greens do not support that are outlined in this motion include the increase in fees for VacSwim across the board. The fees for a 10-day program will increase from \$13.50 to \$30, or \$20 for families with

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a concession card. We should be encouraging families, particularly vulnerable families, to ensure that children know how to swim. In Australia, this is not an optional extra. It is one of the core things that we need in order to make sure that our children stay alive. The last thing that we should be doing is making it more difficult. I sometimes wonder whether I am one of the few people in this place who has raised a child on a sole-parent benefit, which is what my life was 20 years ago. I can tell members that these sorts of increases do impact people on the lowest possible level of income. At the very least, we should have been looking at keeping absolutely stable the level of fees that we are asking from people who have a Health Care Card.

I also want to make some comments about the decision to take 20 per cent from the agricultural education farm provisions trust and to reduce the boarding away from home allowance. The decision, which members keep talking about in this place, to remove the royalties for regions contribution from the boarding away from home allowance over the next few years has caused a number of rural families a great deal of distress. The funding is for families who do not have a choice. I am firmly of the view that the government has a responsibility to ensure that it provides every child with access to education, no matter where they live. It is similar to the decision to cut the royalties for regions funding to the community resource centres from 2019. I recognise that there were serious issues with the way that royalties for regions funding was distributed in some instances, but we also recognise that it did fund some really important things, and frankly this is one of them. When the original motion was drafted, it included a range of cuts that were subsequently reversed by the government, and I am glad the government did that. This is another area that I think the government needs to respond to strongly. These cuts have disappointed the community but, more than that, they have made many people very, very angry. People have been galvanised into action. I was at the Country Women's Association's march to Parliament House last month. This group does not otherwise get politically active, but it was such an important issue that its members were mobilised. We have seen countless letters to the editor and heard calls to talkback radio. I want to acknowledge the work of the Save Moora College group, the Save Our Schools of the Air group and the State School Teachers' Union of WA, as well as the countless individuals and small groups that have contacted my office, and I know many members have been contacted as well. The fact that people are putting so much into this indicates just how acutely they feel about this issue.

The savings from many of the cuts are really quite minimal compared with the message that is being sent to the community. The way the community is hearing it is that this government does not care about rural kids and families, it does not care about environmental education, it does not care about community resources, and it does not care about Aboriginal education; the list goes on. Because the decision-making processes have been so poor, I think that people have a right to be angry. We know that the government has been forced into a cost-cutting exercise but the decisions that have been made demonstrate a serious lack of consultation and lack of transparency. I do not believe they have been significantly thought through. The groundwork has simply not been done. We are going to have to find a better way to proceed on this. If members want to talk about what we can look at and some of the cuts that could be made even just in the education budget, I suggest that for starters we do not proceed with the highly unpopular and completely unnecessary—especially now we are not going to redo City Beach—\$21 million relocation of the International School of Western Australia to the Doubleview Primary School site. Right there, \$21 million can be saved just within the education budget and without even looking at whether we think that education is perhaps bearing a disproportionate level of the cuts.

I keep carrying on about this but the importance of integrity in government and people trusting the government cannot be understated. Unfortunately, the decision-making behind these cuts has lacked transparency and accountability. I am really concerned that lessons do not seem to be heard. I have mentioned before the importance of establishing something like an independent schools commission. It is something that the Greens have been calling for. I acknowledge that it would not have addressed many of the poor decisions that have been made that we are discussing today but I think it would at least help to ensure more transparent and better decision-making about where cuts will be made.

I recognise that we need to find ways to make sure that we find the money to ensure that these sorts of cuts do not occur. We will need to reconsider people and how we look at raising revenue. It is always going to be expensive to provide education services but that is the core business of government. That is the sort of thing that we need to fund. We need to fund education, TAFE, mental health, suicide prevention, disability services, child protection, workers' safety and integrity-of-government measures. That is the core business of government. That is what taxpayers' money needs to go on. It is also why we need to look at raising revenue. I ask the minister to go back to the drawing board and come up with an evidence-based, consultative, transparent and accountable way to make savings from the education budget. I ask the government as a whole to look at leaving education alone.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Members, I am going to give the call to Hon Rick Mazza. A number of members have indicated their desire to address this question. It is a limited-time debate and we are in the final three-quarters of an hour. I indicate that having consulted with the President and observed things over the last week, I will give

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the call to Hon Rick Mazza. I also have Hon Colin Tincknell, Hon Darren West, Hon Martin Aldridge and Hon Diane Evers, who have each indicated that they wish to speak, and there may be other members as well. Nonetheless, you have the time that the standing orders provides you as individuals; that is just for your information so you know where you all are in the pecking order.

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [2.29 pm]: First of all, I would like to thank Hon Jacqui Boydell for bringing this very important motion to the house, and the house for its indulgence in bringing this very relevant and live issue to the front of the notice paper. This house does deal with live issues, to make sure that we are relevant!

I recall learning just before Christmas of the cuts the government had proposed to education in country Western Australia and being absolutely gobsmacked and appalled. The government had planned to shut down the Schools of the Air along with the residential colleges; there was also the agricultural trust fund raid and cuts to programs like VacSwim. To me, Schools of the Air is like the Royal Flying Doctor Service—an innovative regional essential service and something that should not be tampered with. It has delivered essential services in this state for decades and is iconic. It certainly is something that should not be cut.

In January I went to Moora Residential College to meet with parents and staff, along with a delegation from the Shire of Moora. That day was the day that the government backflipped on Schools of the Air and the Northam Residential College. When I arrived, the look of despair on the faces of members of that delegation was appreciable. They were very concerned about their town and about the college. They gave me a Cook's tour of the college and we went through different aspects of it. It had got to the point where the college manager, Kevin Hurley, along with some volunteers, had been painting the college to keep it in good condition. The college is tired; there is no doubt about that. It is tired, but people in the country are quite used to having buildings that are not modern, and they live with it.

Hon Jim Chown: But it's functional.

HON RICK MAZZA: It is very, very functional, Hon Jim Chown. The kitchen facilities were in good operational order.

Hon Jim Chown: No-one's complaining.

HON RICK MAZZA: No-one is complaining. That college could continue to operate. It was suggested to me at the time that, after fees, the net cost to the government to keep the college open would be about \$313 000. Maybe the finances are not there at this time; I will touch on that a bit later. But that facility could be kept going for \$313 000, until such time as the economic situation improves and money can be spent on it.

The protest by Moora residents at Parliament House last Tuesday went from, as I saw it, people who were in despair to people who are absolutely angry—red-hot angry, and not just about losing their residential college. They were there to save their town, because they know what the impact on the town will be of closing this college; it will degrade the town over time. There are only around 1 600 residents of the town and some 2 500 residents of the shire. For them, the domino effect of that facility closing down will be the loss of students and loss of people from the town. An economic assessment that was done suggests that some \$2 million would come out of the town. People will begin to leave that town, from the butcher who supplies meat to the residential college to other services. If they cannot educate their children there or they cannot run their businesses there, over time the population of that town will decrease.

Full marks to the Minister for Education and Training, who addressed that rally last Tuesday. I believe the Premier was invited but was unable to attend. It was an angry crowd, but the minister addressed it. One thing that became apparent, though, was that as soon as budget repair and the current economic circumstances were mentioned, there was a howl of outrage. I think people are over the government using that as an excuse, particularly when it was reported yesterday on the Channel Nine news that the Minister for Education and Training had a new concept plan for an inner-city school, with tens of millions of dollars to be spent on it, while Moora Residential College misses out for the sake of about half a million dollars a year just to keep it open.

Cutting the guts out of education in regional Western Australia is, to my mind, unforgivable. There are currently 27 students at Moora Residential College, and that does not sound like many, but if we took those 27 students out of the high school, fewer teachers would be required. The catchment area for that school is enormous; we are talking from Geraldton down to at least Northam, and it is fed by about four primary schools. But of course, if people begin to leave, there will be fewer students at the school over time.

I listened earlier to the Minister for Regional Development talking up the bush, and she mentioned that the birthrate was up in regional Western Australia. We all know that country people are pretty fertile, but the question is: if more children are being born, where are they going to go to school if these facilities are going to be cut? We will not have the ability to educate them out there.

Hon Jim Chown: Lancelin, apparently.

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Hon RICK MAZZA: Apparently it will be Lancelin.

To cut the education budget of regional Western Australia for a relatively small amount of money compared with the entire education budget is just wrong for the people in that area. We also have year 7 students now going to high school, and some of those kids have been going to Moora Residential College. Of course, parents come in for sports days or assemblies or whatever the case may be and, as I say, it is a fairly big catchment area; they might have to travel 100 kilometres or more to get there, but it is doable. If we start shifting those kids to Lancelin, Geraldton or Perth, it will become something that is not doable because of the cost and inconvenience, particularly for young kids who might be only 11 years old.

We have seen that there are plans for an inner-city school and plans for upgrades to a couple of schools in Perth, to the tune of about \$50 million each. I refer to an article that appeared in the *Business News Western Australia* of 15 January 2018 by Peter Kennedy, a very well respected journalist. The article states, in part —

One minister whose contribution has caused grief for most of the first year has been Sue Ellery in the education portfolio. As government leader in the upper house, she ranks third in the cabinet. But she has been accident-prone.

Her first gaffe was the handling of the proposed change of status for public education's flagship Perth Modern School, and the introduction of a new high school in a city tower building. Efforts to sell the proposal failed dismally, and the government (sensibly) beat a hasty retreat.

The article goes on to state —

However, despite the parlous state of the finances, she did deliver on the election promise to employ an extra 350 support workers in government schools, even though WA has one of the best support worker–pupil ratios in the country.

Which is good, if we can afford it. Extra support staff—great. But given the state of the finances, do we really need them? From memory, in the budget papers, that was about \$34 million—more than enough to put into education in rural Western Australia.

Peter Kennedy is a bit more cynical than I am, and the article continues —

Hopefully that will help achieve better results in schools—including where classroom harmony is under challenge—as well as deliver extra members for the influential United Voice, which supports Ms Ellery and several other senior ministers.

The government says that this is about budget repair and that it cannot afford it, yet it is able to spend \$34 million or thereabouts on additional teaching staff. Maybe we need only half of them; I do not know, but certainly some of that money could be siphoned off into regional Western Australia. The raid on the agricultural education farms provision trust fund is another area that I think was real penny pinching. The five agricultural colleges—Harvey, Narrogin, Morawa, Cunderdin and Denmark, and the Esperance farm school—all put 40 per cent of their proceeds into a trust fund. That money then gets used to fund farm schools, et cetera. The 60 per cent they retain goes into financing equipment for the school, such as tractors. It is a really good concept. How many schools or education facilities can boast that they are pretty much self-funding for a lot of the equipment that they require? At the Wagin Woolorama, it was reported that the Narrogin Agricultural School had reached the highest price for a stud bull, of \$2 500. They obviously have very good facilities, and are able to produce fairly good outcomes teaching those kids. The \$200 000 to \$300 000 that the government will take from that trust fund is really penny-pinching, and pretty mean-spirited.

There is no doubt that this proposal will affect country Western Australia. My greatest fear is that now the government has done a backflip on Perth Modern School, the Schools of the Air and the Northam Residential College, it will dig in its heels, as a matter of principle. It is not fit and limber enough to do another backflip. This residential college will be shut, not because it is the right thing to do but because the government does not have the appetite to dig itself out of a hole on this issue. I know that others want to speak, so I will leave it at that. I hope the government sees the error of its ways and considers reversing its decision and supporting the residential college at Moora, and reversing its decision to take the \$200 000 to \$300 000 from the agricultural education farms provision trust fund. The agricultural schools are self-funding. Would it not be wonderful if all our schools were able to self-fund in that way? How are they rewarded? They have the money taken off them. It really is appalling. I will leave it at that, and I support the motion moved by Hon Jacqui Boydell.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [2.42 pm]: I thank the honourable member for moving this motion, and for the contributions made by other members. Many things that I was going to say today have been touched upon, so I will make this as quick and as precise as possible. We have talked about budget repair, and I mentioned

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that in a few discussions last week, and also VacSwim, so I will not repeat any of that. I want to read out the names of the communities that will be affected by this measure: Bridgetown, Dampier, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Pemberton, Point Peron, Rockingham, Curtin, Canning, Tuart, Landsdale, Cunderdin, Denmark, Harvey, Morawa, Narrogin, Esperance and Yule Brook. There are others I will have missed, because this affects many other communities as well. Of course, we cannot forget about Moora. This has a massive effect on many communities that right now have major problems in many areas of health and education facilities. This measure will have a devastating effect on those communities in many ways. I read recently, in a strategic plan for WA public schools, that one of the government's priorities was to —

investigate ways to strengthen secondary schooling in regional areas including delivering high quality residential college services

Obviously, that has changed. I will refer to a scoping study that was prepared by Labor back in May, costing taxpayers \$150 000. It found that Moora college was structurally sound and up to code, with some maintenance repairs required. The Building Management and Works report in 2012 put the cost of the maintenance repairs at \$160 000, well shy of the \$8.7 million at which Labor has costed the upgrade. To add to this, the recurrent funding required for Moora college is \$315 000. In total, \$500 000 is required to retain Moora Residential College. It sounds like the consultation has not been done.

I will move on to an area touched on by Hon Rick Mazza—the 20 per cent take from the agricultural education farms provision trust. The colleges at Cunderdin, Denmark, Harvey, Morawa, Narrogin and Esperance Senior High School contribute 40 per cent of their farm revenue to the trust annually. This 20 per cent take, or half of that revenue, will affect them a great deal. It equates to \$240 000 a year. This cash grab will fundamentally de-incentivise these colleges to earn a profit, and that seems crazy. The colleges will become run-down and need maintenance and repairs to be funded by the government in the long term. Once again, it seems to be a bit crazy.

I also want to touch on the reduction in the boarding away from home allowance. About 1 800 families will be trying to find another \$700 a year to fund their children's education. That is a big impost on those 1 800 families. The Labor government attempted to explain the reduction as necessary due to a reduction in royalties for regions. The proposal seriously impacts on vulnerable regional families and creates serious challenges in an already challenging environment, where isolation, geography, and now government policy make access to education very difficult.

We have heard many people talk about the six school camps. These are camps that I attended as a child at school. They are important to regional and isolated children, and they are also used by the Schools of the Air. They provide crucial infrastructure to support the socialisation and interaction amongst this group of students. As can be seen, this has far-reaching ramifications. The camps are also used by metropolitan kids. I was one of the kids who used those camps in my early days. Saying that closing the camp schools will save money is a nonsensical attitude. These camps are generally self-funding, and very popular. Often they are booked out 12 months in advance.

I have heard many members, especially those from the northern suburbs, talk about Landsdale Farm School. With that in mind I would like to move an amendment to this motion.

Amendment to Motion

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL — without notice: I move —

To insert after paragraph (1)(f) —

(g) close Landsdale Farm School; and

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Minister for Education and Training) [2.49 pm]: I want to make a quick comment because, although this debate has been useful in some ways, it has been quite frustrating in others. Not everybody who has wanted to make a contribution has been able to do so. We have done it in a different way from the way we have done it in the past, and I do not understand why that is. I just want to make some comments about Landsdale Farm School in particular. It is a great community resource. I do not have my notes in front of me, but more than 50 000 visitors attend Landsdale Farm School. The majority of those attend on the weekends and are not school students. Out of the 50 000 to 60 000 visitors, some 11 000 are school students and the rest are community members. It is a great facility for those community members but, clearly, it is being used by the broader community far more than it is being used by the Department of Education. If we are able to find an alternate provider who will continue to meet the needs of those students with a disability who use that facility, that would be a great outcome. But we need to ask in difficult times: is it the business of the Department of Education to provide a service that is primarily used on weekends and primarily for adult members of the community?

Amendment put and passed.

Motion, as Amended

Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon James Chown; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Darren West; Hon Simon O'Brien; Acting President; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Martin Aldridge

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.50 pm]: I will make some brief remarks on the motion, as amended, which is very much the same as the original motion. I think that members on the opposite side of the house have forgotten exactly how poor a financial position they left the state of Western Australia in after their eight years of government and how difficult it is to run a major portfolio like the education portfolio in that economic environment. It is a very difficult task. Everyone who sits over there thinks that that is all in the past.

Hon Peter Collier interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: When the member opposite was Minister for Education, he had the best set of books in Australia. He has given this education minister the worst set of books in Australia. People seem to forget about this, maybe conveniently or just because they do not remember what it is like financially in Western Australia. I thank the member for bringing the motion on because there have been some worthwhile contributions, but there have also been some terrible contributions because people have forgotten what a challenging fiscal environment this government is operating in. I listened to many of the speakers. I was particularly interested in the comments by the Minister for Regional Development. What a breath of fresh air that minister has been in that portfolio when she talked about many of the positive things that we are able to do in the area of regional education. We are putting more money into classrooms than the previous government. It is true that we have to make some difficult decisions around educational services, and everybody keeps calling them education cuts. But if members think about it, they are not cuts to the classroom. They are cuts out of the classroom and the savings are made out of the classroom. We are actually putting more education assistants into classrooms, including into regional classrooms. Surprisingly, Hon Rick Mazza seems to think that there is something wrong with that. We are putting support back in the classroom that was removed by the coalition government.

Point of Order

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I know that there are a number of us who are probably not helping in this regard, but it is very hard to hear the member and it is important that Hansard records his contribution in case anyone in his electorate wants to read about it, for example. I ask if you, Mr Acting President, can ask that the member be heard.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Martin Aldridge): Thank you, Hon Simon O'Brien. I remind members that there is only a short time left on the clock and Hon Darren West has only just risen to his feet. Can you please give him the opportunity to make his speech.

Debate Resumed

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Mr Acting President. I will be brief. I am mindful that there are other speakers. I want to touch on a couple of the main points in the motion. I note the outrage from the other side of the house, but I did not see that outrage when the very unpopular decision was made to put year 7s into high schools in regional Western Australia. I did not see the outrage when Geraldton Senior College and Central Midlands Senior High School had hundreds of thousands of dollars removed from their budgets. I did not see the outrage from some of the communities when that happened. I note that there has been a campaign against these changes. It has become very personal and very bitter at times, and that is a shame because we have, from time to time, moved away from the issues. But we are spending more than \$5 billion on education and much of that is in the regions. We are putting more education assistants into classrooms, including regional classrooms; more Aboriginal and Islander education officers into classrooms, which will predominantly be in the regions; and more science labs into primary schools, which is a great initiative, and many of those are in the regions as well. It is a challenging environment and the education minister is doing an outstanding job under difficult circumstances.

I am pleased to see that this debate has lured Hon Jim Chown out of the western suburbs and into the agricultural region—fantastic! We welcome him out there and wish that he would come more often. It is great to see him out at the Western Australian College of Agriculture in Cunderdin and I agree with the member that it is a fine educational institution and will remain so; it is only getting better. With some of the changes that will be made around technology in regional education, that college will continue to grow.

Recently, on Monday night, I went to Moora. I can see that we are not the most popular people in Moora. However, I went to Central Regional TAFE in Moora, which was decimated under the previous government with 500 per cent increases in TAFE fees and the loss of many jobs in the TAFE sector, especially in Moora. We went there to announce a new partnership between Central Regional TAFE and the AFGRI group. I must congratulate everyone at Central Regional TAFE, including the managing director, Bill Swetman, and the AFGRI group, which, for those of us who do not know, is a John Deere machinery dealership. It is one of the world players, with 40 branches around the world and 14 in Western Australia. It is a very big company that could do its own training, but it has chosen to partner with the TAFE that we are rebuilding and, in doing so, gaining the respect of the community, to do all its precision agriculture training in Moora. Thirty-six trainees will be coming to Moora, jobs will be coming to Moora and industries of the future will be coming to Moora. I spoke to a gathering of 80 to

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100 people in Moora about the announcement and I got a round of applause at the end of my speech. I must say that I was very pleasantly surprised. That leads me to think that perhaps the majority of the community of Moora is moving on and looking to jobs and industries of the future as its future.

Hon Donna Faragher interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: I do not have long, but I am happy to talk to members afterwards.

Point of Order

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am struggling to hear Hon Darren West. Members opposite made many contributions earlier and they were listened to in silence, particularly Hon Jim Chown. I ask that you encourage members to listen to the member in silence, please.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Martin Aldridge): Hon Darren West could assist the Chair if he did not attack members opposite and invite interjections, but I will try to keep the chamber more settled in the remaining time that we have for the motion.

Debate Resumed

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Mr Acting President. I will assist you with that.

I want to deal with a few points that have been raised and are blatantly wrong. A couple of members—I think it was Hon Colin Tincknell and Hon Rick Mazza—came up with this idea that it will cost \$500 000 to repair Moora Residential College.

Hon Rick Mazza interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: It is not. It will cost \$8.7 million to carry out the refurbishment required. These figures did not arise since we were elected; the commitment of \$8.7 million was made by the previous government. A press release went out in August last year from then ministers Collier and Redman referring to \$8.7 million. Can the members tell me why the previous government committed \$8.7 million when it could have been done it for \$500 000? That makes no sense. The cost of refurbishing the hostel is \$8.7 million, and each year that hostel costs taxpayers around \$400 000.

Hon Rick Mazza interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: Yes, plus the other cost of \$62 000, so we are getting up to around \$400 000 a year. I know that education facilities cost, but when \$8.7 million is added to \$400 000 a year, it is a significant expense to taxpayers for 26 boarders. Compared with the number 10 years ago, we have two-thirds the number of boarders in public facilities in this state. The numbers are falling and we have the capacity. It is not a nice decision to make, but it is the right decision to move on and congregate those boarders in public facilities in the larger centres.

I will also touch on the boarding away from home allowance. The total amount receivable under the BAHA by rural parents increases this year from last year. Changes have been made to the mix. There is a greater contribution from the federal government and a smaller contribution from the state government as we reduce the royalties for regions component, but the total amount goes up. I think people are deliberately being a bit cagey with their language. Anyone who applies for BAHA this year will receive more than they received last year, and so on into the future. The Cunderdin queue jump that Hon Jim Chown spoke about, and which has come from somewhere, is blatantly incorrect. The minister dealt with that yesterday. No-one is getting preferential treatment. I know that circumstances change, but today there is no waiting list for Cunderdin Agricultural College. I do not know where this information came from, but it is incorrect. The minister sought to set the record straight in Parliament.

Then there is the raid of the ag trust! I remind members that the farms, the machinery, the equipment, the livestock, the buildings and the boarding facilities are all owned by the taxpayer, as is the agricultural education farms provision trust and general government revenue. There is no raid; it is all owned by the same people. An amount of \$26 million is invested into those facilities each year by the taxpayer to pay for tuition. Of the income, 60 per cent goes to the farms and 20 per cent to horizontal fiscal equalisation. That is not a bad idea. If Morawa has a tough season, it can have some offset from that 20 per cent. The rest is taxpayers' money. Whether it is administered by a trust or the government does not really matter to the day-to-day lives of students at those schools. That is what this is all about. That is a sensible position.

I want to make one final point. I am getting very, very tired, and I know other people are getting very, very tired, of the opposition—especially the National Party—and members of the community of Moora and other regional communities talking down the regions. I am over it. I choose to live in the regions; it is the best place to be. I have chosen to invest in the regions; it is the best place to invest. It is utterly ridiculous when people make stupid videos and put them on Facebook about tumbleweeds rolling down the main street of Moora if we close the residential college. I encourage all members to talk up education in the regions. They should talk up the Moora community

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and the potential there. I was heartened to hear the minister say that there has been some engagement with Clontarf Aboriginal College. What a fantastic opportunity that may prove to be in Moora, because there are some social issues in town that it would be great to address. That is what we are thinking about. Why is it that there is such a low patronage of that school by the local community? How can we upgrade that school and make it more attractive so that we can get those numbers up? If we are relying on that residential college, with its ever-dwindling numbers, that town's future is not bright. Let us get a bit creative about how we deal with education in the regions. Let us talk about tele-education. We have managed telehealth. Let us think about the future and how we can have a better outcome for our students, rather than just carping from the sidelines, whingeing and talking down the regions of Western Australia.

I thank the member for bringing the motion forward. It was good to have the debate. I know that other members want to have a say. Let us get our heads together and work on how to increase education both in the city and the regions. I do not believe in a city-country divide. We are one Western Australia. Everyone is entitled to a fair go right across Western Australia. That is a basic value that we believe in. Talking down the regions to create a divide is not helpful to anyone. It is great to talk about education. We are all very passionate about it. One of the reasons many of us get involved in this career is that we want to do good things for our young people. We can, but we all have our ways to go about it. The fiscal challenges we face are very real. It is not nice to make unpopular decisions. It is not nice to front crowds with those unpopular decisions, but sometimes governments have to make some hard decisions. We must fix the finances in Western Australia. We are the worst; let us get back to being the best.

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural) [3.03 pm]: I thank Hon Darren West for leaving some time so that I can make some brief remarks this afternoon. I rise to obviously support the motion. I thank the house for its decision to agree to a motion without notice by Hon Jacqui Boydell to reorder the notice paper. I am disappointed that the Labor Party opposed that motion, because I would have thought it would have welcomed a debate on the matter we are discussing today, so that it could defend itself and articulate the reasons it felt these reductions in funding to regional education were so important. Unfortunately, that did not occur, but the house did decide to have this debate nonetheless. As we finished last year, some complimentary remarks were made in members' statements. Hon Sue Ellery said —

I particularly thank the Labor team—new members of Parliament who have embraced their new roles and the ongoing MPs who have stepped up into expanded roles. They really have put in a sensational effort.

She went on to say —

Our worst day in government, my friends, is still going to be a thousand times better than our best day in opposition.

That was six days before Minister Ellery announced significant cuts to regional education—via media statement and not by press conference or any other sort of public event. Obviously, we were a week out from Christmas and many of us were attending school awards nights. This was obviously the talk of the town and of our education circles within our communities. On the day these cuts were announced I was due to attend the Lancelin Primary School awards night. I turned up and was joined by Hon Darren West, the government's parliamentary secretary for regional development. He got up and addressed the assembled parents, teachers and students at the end-of-year Lancelin Primary School assembly and made a statement to the assembled crowd that Minister Ellery was no longer his favourite minister. That was quite telling of what government members, and particularly government regional members, thought of this decision. Despite that, we all saw their media statements that said that these were the cuts we deserved and which they stood by. They said it was because of the gold royalty increase. All of this sort of stuff was being pedalled in joint media statements by Hon Laurie Graham and Hon Darren West. A month and one day later, a media statement by the minister reversed a significant number of those cuts. It was interesting to then look at how those same regional Labor members responded. A Facebook post by Hon Laurie Graham, MLC, on the same day the minister issued her media statement, which was 11 January, states —

Regional Labor members have lobbied hard for this change, since the announcement was made in December.

We do care about regional people, because we are regional people.

We will continue to lobby for regional people and the issues that matter to them.

Interestingly, the same words were posted on the Facebook page of Hon Darren West. The lemmings in the Labor Party were all lined up in terms of what they were telling people. When the cuts were announced, Labor members said that they were the cuts we deserved and the cuts that the Legislative Council caused for our

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regional communities because of the opposition to the gold royalty, which obviously is an issue that has been well canvassed in this place, and then a month and one day later, they took credit for changing the government's mind. It is just baffling.

When I received notice from Hon Sue Ellery, the Minister for Education and Training, on 14 February that she would be in my electorate on 15 February, I thought that here was an opportunity for the minister to perhaps meet with one of the organisations that would be impacted by this decision; namely, the Geraldton camp school. Quite kindly, the minister's office sent me notification that the next day the minister would be attending the opening of upgrades to the Holland Street School, the opening of upgrades to Geraldton Senior College and the opening of new facilities at Wandina Primary School, amongst other things. This was rather interesting, because all the things the minister was doing in Geraldton on this day involved opening projects that were commenced and funded by those on this side of the house. It is interesting that Labor members come in here and carp on about how we wasted all this debt—forty thousand million dollars—which we know is false. They come in here and criticise everything we did in government, but there is no shortage of them to turn up and cut ribbons. In fact, they are so busy running around and cutting ribbons for projects funded by members on this side that they could not find time to visit Moora Residential College—they still have not found time to visit the Moora community—and on this day the minister could not find time in her schedule to go and look the people in the face whom she was sacking at the end of the year from the Geraldton camp school. That is quite staggering. That goes to the integrity of the minister and members of this government. If they are going to make these tough decisions and stand by them, they should be prepared to have the debate in this house and to look these people in the eye and tell them why they are making that decision.

I did that; I visited Geraldton camp school on 21 February, about a week after the minister was in Geraldton. The staff said I was the first member of Parliament to have visited them since the decision had been announced in the week before Christmas. To be honest, the staff members I met with were in distress. They were in distress because a date was looming in relation to the voluntary targeted separation scheme, which is becoming a debacle by the day, and they had to make a decision and exit the public service by the end of March if they were to take the financial incentives offered under the VTSS. We now know that the date has been extended to the end of June. They had little information available about the future, and were getting very mixed messages from the government—they still are—about what it intended to do with camp schools. The government announced by media statement that six of them would close—we are still a bit uncertain about the seventh—and there was no mention of them in the retraction of many of those cuts one month and one day later. Today they are still none the wiser, with the minister saying the government will find somebody to operate the camp schools. I still find it quite remarkable that some non-government organisation—some charity, some incorporated organisation—will come in, take over these camp schools and run them. Given that the state government has been running them with an operating deficit, how those people will be able to do that and why they would want to take on a liability like that is beyond me.

I visited Geraldton camp school. It is a very impressive organisation, led by very dedicated staff. It is an old place, but as soon as I walked into the school I could see how much those people cared about their job and what they do. I was gobsmacked that a week earlier the minister had the opportunity to go there, while she was in town opening all the projects funded by the Liberal and National Parties, but she did not. Anyway, that will be for the minister to defend in time. I will run out of time, but many other aspects of this motion could be discussed, not the least being Moora Residential College, which I will probably need to raise at another time.

Before time lapses on this debate I want to raise the issue of the boarding away from home allowance. During a debate yesterday, the minister made some comments about the boarding away from home allowance. She said the way we had increased the boarding away from home allowance and funded it from royalties for regions was unsustainable, despite, I think, for the first time in her own budget, that all these education staff will now be funded by royalties for regions. Aboriginal and Islander education officers, education assistants and dedicated teachers employed in regional schools to support students in years 11 and 12 in major regional centres will for the first time all be funded by royalties for regions. By the minister's own measure is that not unsustainable, given her critique of the way we significantly increased the boarding away from home allowance and the way this government has significantly reduced it? In a debate on Wednesday, 14 March, Hon Sue Ellery said it is a reduction of only about \$150. Well, that might be this year, but the overall reduction in the boarding away from home allowance is a \$785 reduction in royalties for regions funding, which equates to somewhere in excess of \$600 in funding to parents. These parents have no other choice but to send their kids away for school.

I commend this motion to the house. Much more could have been debated if we had more time, and I encourage all members, especially those from the regional Labor caucus—Country Labor—to support this motion.

Extract from *Hansard*
[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 21 March 2018]
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Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon James Chown; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Darren West; Hon Simon O'Brien; Acting President; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Martin Aldridge

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy President (Hon Simon O'Brien) casting his vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (20)

Hon Martin Aldridge
Hon Jacqui Boydell
Hon Robin Chapple
Hon Jim Chown
Hon Tim Clifford

Hon Peter Collier
Hon Colin de Grussa
Hon Diane Evers
Hon Donna Faragher
Hon Nick Goiran

Hon Rick Mazza
Hon Michael Mischin
Hon Simon O'Brien
Hon Robin Scott
Hon Tjorn Sibma

Hon Charles Smith
Hon Dr Steve Thomas
Hon Colin Tincknell
Hon Alison Xamon
Hon Ken Baston (*Teller*)

Noes (12)

Hon Alanna Clohesy
Hon Stephen Dawson
Hon Sue Ellery

Hon Adele Farina
Hon Laurie Graham
Hon Kyle McGinn

Hon Samantha Rowe
Hon Matthew Swinbourn
Hon Dr Sally Talbot

Hon Darren West
Hon Pierre Yang
Hon Martin Pritchard (*Teller*)

Pair

Hon Colin Holt

Hon Alannah MacTiernan

Question thus passed.