

RIGHT TO VOTE — IMPORTANCE

Motion

HON ALYSSA HAYDEN (East Metropolitan) [11.25 am] — without notice: I move —

That this Council —

- (1) recognises the need to remind the Western Australian community of the value in their right to vote; and
- (2) recommends that an inquiry into re-engaging the community in the benefits of living in a democracy be considered.

It is an honour to move this motion. I note that my motion may seem relevant considering that we are leading up to an election on 9 March, as Hon Max Trenorden mentioned in the previous motion. This topic has been close to my heart for the past three years and it just happens that now is my turn to get up and move a motion. The timing, I have to say, is quite nice and relevant. Hopefully, it will make a difference to people and they will understand that they have rights in our democratic system and should be involved in the upcoming election next year. Over the past three and a half years as a member of Parliament, obviously the community's attitude towards government process and the political system has become a little more important to me than before I entered Parliament. In our role as members of Parliament we attend citizenship ceremonies and meet with various community and interest groups. All the people we engage with in these forums are very interested and keen to engage in our political system to fight for their issues. Our new citizens are grateful to live in a democratic country and to be involved and to participate in it. However, the past three and a half years has highlighted to me how many Australians are not engaged in our political system. I am not really sure whether they are disillusioned or just apathetic, but I must confess that this realisation has worried and still worries me.

In my first year as a member, I was fortunate to be part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference held in London. One of the topics discussed at the conference was the need to re-engage the population on polling day. Over 50 members of Parliament represented the commonwealth countries at the conference. The need to re-engage communities was most prominent in our leading countries. I found it most interesting that the general community in the countries that are experiencing political turmoil or conflict actually are interested in politics. The citizens in those countries understand how important it is to have a democratic system and to make sure that they have a strong government and leaders protecting not only their way of life, but also the future of their country. My husband was born in Rhodesia and lived through apartheid and the introduction of majority rule. The stories that I have heard from not only him, but also many migrants who have moved to Australia reflect how the suppression of democracy can ruin everyday lives and an entire country. I think Zimbabwe is a good example of that. That is not something that the citizens of Western Australia have experienced, and hopefully we never will. My fear is that we live such privileged lives that we have forgotten or have not been reminded of the privilege of living in a democracy and do not value our right to vote. We have forgotten how hard our ancestors fought for the lifestyle that we are so lucky to live and lead in Australia. We have forgotten also the simple act of freedom of speech and the freedom of our media. Quite often we read in our newspapers about political leaders being ridiculed and made fun of.

When the polls open on election day, every citizen over the age of 18 is able to cast a vote in Australia. That is a right that I believe Australians take for granted, and it is a right that defines our nation as a democracy. This democracy did not happen overnight, and 113 years ago one had to be a white British male to vote in Australia. It is hard for us to fathom or even entertain the fact that right now some countries are still fighting for those acts of freedom and for that simple right to vote. In fact, as we stand here today debating this issue, the men and women of Brunei have still not been given the right to vote or the opportunity to run for election. In Lebanon, only women with elementary education are given the right to vote, while all Lebanese men have the right to vote. It is also interesting to note that it is compulsory for Lebanese men to vote, but not for eligible Lebanese women. Saudi Arabia held its very first local elections only seven years ago in 2005. I am extremely proud knowing that Australia was the second country to grant women the right to vote, after New Zealand led the way in 1893. I know all members on our side are thrilled that women have the right to vote.

Hon Ken Travers: Was that done tongue in cheek?

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Not at all; I was serious. I know that I have the full support of everyone in this house. In 1899, Western Australia gave women the right to vote in state elections, and in 1901 at the federal level. It took another seven years, however, for the rest of the states around Australia to give all Australian women the right to vote; and, sadly, it took us another of 61 years to give Aboriginal men and women that same privilege. Over time, the two world leading countries have been Britain and the United States, but they took a little longer than Australia to grant women the right to vote, with the United States taking 19 years longer and not granting

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their women the right to vote until 1920; and Britain was even slower on the uptake, granting their women that right in 1928.

Why is it that some 100 years later Australian citizens have lost interest in our democratic right? Is it because we lead such a privileged life that the general population sees no value in engaging in our political system? Is it because we have forgotten our history or have not been reminded of how hard people worked and the struggle it has taken to build a democracy? Is it because as politicians we have failed our community by not emphasising the need for our educational systems to teach our children the advantages of living in a democracy? From my own experience, I know I was not taught this during my school life; I was not educated on the value of a democracy. Although my parents did instil in me the value of being responsible and that elections are something to be taken seriously, I was never educated on the value of the society we live in. My life started at a time when the fight had been fought and won, and I grew up enjoying the fruits of our ancestors' struggles to make sure we could lead the wonderful lifestyle that we have in Australia. It was not until I met my husband that I had a true understanding that countries were still being held hostage by politics. Call it naive, but it was not something that I was educated about and I feel that many people in our society share this same innocence. That is why part of my motion today is about considering an inquiry into re-engaging the community in the benefits of living in a democracy.

When discussing this issue at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in London, it was predicted that only 60 per cent of the British population would turn out to vote at their May 2010 election. Given that over 100 parties run at these elections, it was estimated that the winning party would be voted in by only 40 per cent of the country's entire population. At the time, the British government was also seriously looking at ways to re-engage its community, and it acknowledged it would take a lot of money to do so. Of course, they spoke strongly against my suggestion that bringing back compulsory voting could be the solution. That is a topic I know should never be brought up around the dinner table—along with religion—but fortunately we are not around the dinner table today! I am aware that there are conflicting opinions on this subject in this chamber, let alone at a state and national level. To me, compulsory voting cannot be ignored. In Australia, we enjoy approximately 95 per cent voter turnout on polling day. Before compulsory voting was introduced in 1924, the turnout of voters ranged from 50.3 per cent to 78.3 per cent. Although there is an argument to include a box at the bottom of our ballot papers for "None of the above" or "Mickey Mouse", I strongly believe that compulsory voting is a way to keep our community engaged and to avoid losing people for life from our political system.

I confess that when I first voted I did not have any political allegiance, and I was quite ignorant and naive about our political system. But as time went on, I made the decision to understand what the process was about and to get involved. Now I am standing in this place talking about the very system that I personally was not engaged in. If we did not have compulsory voting, I ask myself whether I would get engaged again, and I have to say most probably not; and I ask whether I would be standing here delivering this speech today—most probably not, and some members would think that might be a good idea! But I did get involved and I am now in that very system that as a young adult I was not connected to. From my personal experience and from the experiences of the friends I grew up with, I know that compulsory voting has engaged and made voters out of us, instead of losing us for life to the entire system.

How can we ensure that Western Australians are interested in our democratic system? How do we ensure that they respect the importance of their right to vote? How do we safeguard and make sure they understand that their vote has a value? Do we need to increase education in our schools on the democratic system? That is something I would love to sit down with the Minister for Education to discuss. Do we need a state and national campaign to raise awareness of the rights and benefits of living in a democracy? As I said, this is something for which I do not have the answers alone, but it is something that we need to ask ourselves so that we can start on the path of re-engaging our community in understanding their rights of living in a democracy.

Earlier this year the parliamentary research internship that is run by the parliamentary education office asked for topics of interest for students to take up. I put forward, "Compulsory voting—does it keep the community at large more connected? Have First World countries forgotten the value of the vote?" I was delighted when I was told that my topic was selected by one of the students. I met up with Amy Pracilio, who is studying law at Edith Cowan University, to discuss the topic and where she plans to go with it. I am looking forward to reading her report to see where her research has taken her and what her perspective and her generation's perspective is on this issue. Once it is completed, I promise to bring it back to this house during members' statements and share it with members.

I have to say that I had absolutely nothing to do with this opinion piece in *The West Australian* yesterday. If I had, I would have made sure I had a say! Mr Warwick Gately, the WA Electoral Commissioner, wrote a piece called, "We're failing ourselves by not exercising the right to vote". The piece was very topical and I thank him

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for his timing as it backs up my motion today. I hope he is listening. A number of paragraphs in that piece are vital and back up everything that I have said in this house today, so I call on members to take the time to have a quick read. Noting I have only two minutes left, I will highlight a few of his paragraphs, which read —

While enrolment and voting are compulsory, more than 10 per cent of eligible West Australians are not on the roll, including more than half of 18 and 19-year-olds.

WA is not unique in this, with 1.48 million people missing from the Commonwealth electoral roll.

Over half of our 18 and 19-year-olds are not engaged in our political system, which is where we are lacking. This is where we need to go back into our education system and make sure our children are educated on the benefits of living in a democracy. Maybe if we do that, we will have more interest in enrolling to vote, turning up and being part of our election process.

In closing, I think Mr Warwick Gately stole my thunder. I would like to read his last couple of paragraphs —

While we should take pride in our system of democracy, we are failing ourselves by not exercising this basic democratic right to enrol and vote; this is good reason for all participants in the electoral process to be concerned.

Turning this around requires us all to act. We need to take the time to complete an enrolment form and then update address details as we move. This is not complex or time consuming.

Members, on that note, I look forward to hearing what everyone has to say on this issue. Living in a democracy is a privilege. It is something that our ancestors fought hard for us to have. Millions of people around the world are still fighting for this same right that we enjoy every day. I would like those people who on election day think, “I can’t be bothered getting out of bed today to vote”, and who line up for an hour and whinge and complain that it is a waste of their time, to realise that it is important and it is a value they have, and they should take it seriously. They should not waste their time on 9 March; they should turn out and make their vote valid.

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [11.40 am]: I want to congratulate the member for bringing this motion to the house. I think it is a useful topic for us to have a discussion on. It is important that we discuss how we engage people within the voting system. I do not have time today to discuss the issue of giving women the vote in Western Australia, but it is very interesting why the boys back in those times gave women the vote in Western Australia. I can certainly say on behalf of the Labor Party that we share the member’s view that compulsory voting is a good outcome. It is not actually about compulsory voting; it is a compulsory attendance as part of a person’s responsibilities as a member of this society. What a person does once they get into the polling booth is completely their decision. If that person does not like any of us, they do not have to vote, but they must have attended and got the ballot papers, and they can make the decision after that.

In her final comments, the member talked about the need to engage young people. I think one of the things which we should look at in Western Australia, and which a committee could certainly look at, is the whole issue of automatic enrolments. When we talk to people who are involved in this issue, we find that there has been a decline in the number of people who are eligible to be registered and who are actually registered to vote. Other states have gone to automatic enrolment and the like. I believe that is something we should explore for Western Australia. But we can do things to encourage greater participation in the electoral process today, and we could do them for the next election without even needing to wait for a committee to look at the issue.

I want to preface my remarks by making it very clear that I am not suggesting that any individual is racist, and I accept that what we have is part of a historical system. However, I think there is an area within our electoral system in Western Australia in which there is structural racism. By that I mean the way in which we conduct voting in some of our remote areas. Two seats in Western Australia, Pilbara and Kimberley, cover vast areas of the state, and they are treated differently from the rest of the state in the way in which we conduct the elections. The people who are therefore disenfranchised are predominantly Indigenous voters who live in the remote communities.

I want to share with members this morning some statistics on this issue. As a percentage of the total number of voters who turned out at the last election, in the seat of Kimberley the voter turnout was 61.98 per cent, and in the Pilbara it was slightly better at 69.23 per cent. The interesting thing is that in regional areas in the south west of Western Australia that turnout is not as low as the previous figures. I can quote some figures for the seat of Central Wheatbelt, which is a fairly large agricultural seat. The voter turnout was quite high; it was around 88.63 per cent. In the seat of Wagin, another wheatbelt seat, the voter turnout was 89.75 per cent. That is actually higher than in metropolitan seats. Seriously, I just grabbed these figures at random in readiness for today’s vote. I will refer to two lower house seats in my North Metropolitan Region. In the seat of Churchlands, the turnout was 87.52 per cent, and in the seat of Joondalup it was 85.92 per cent. We can see that in some regional areas we

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are getting a better voter turnout than in the Perth metropolitan area. Within the metropolitan area, there will be different socio-demographics between Joondalup and Churchlands, but there is not a significant difference. However, once we go into the Kimberley and the Pilbara, we see a significant reduction in the voter turnout.

I now turn to what I think would be one of the significant reasons for that—namely, that in the wheatbelt a range of community centres are given a polling booth for the whole day of the election. They are not particularly large communities. Again, I want to preface my remarks by saying that this is not an argument to say that we should take away those polling booths. In fact, I completely and wholeheartedly support those polling booths remaining there. The total number of formal votes cast at the Ardath Tennis Club, for instance, in the central wheatbelt area was 55. We can go through these figures. At Ballidu, 112 votes were cast; at Beacon, 91 votes; at Jennacubbine, 73 votes; and at Meckering Primary School, 54 votes. Those places have a polling booth for the whole day. I could go through and list figures for other seats in the wheatbelt.

In the Kimberley and in the Pilbara, larger communities simply get to vote, as part of a mobile booth, for a couple of hours. We can look at a place such as Bidyadanga in the Kimberley. I find it extraordinary that Bidyadanga does not get, as I understand it, a full polling booth. We can look at a couple of other places, as I have the figures for the different polling booths. Balgo had 11.00 am to 2.00 pm polling. Balgo has a population of 460. We cannot get the figures for how many of those people voted at the Balgo mobile booth, but at a 60 per cent turnout—a large part of that population may be children—we would expect to get at least the turnout at some of those wheatbelt seats that I have talked about. Bidyadanga is a community of some 800 people. As I understand it—Hon Jon Ford will probably be better informed on these matters—on the out stations that surround Bidyadanga and in the areas around the Dampier Peninsula and outside Broome, a range of communities get only mobile polling booths for a couple of hours on a day before the election. I think that is one of the reasons why we get such a low voter turnout. I urge the government —

Hon Jim Chown: Do they have postal votes?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: They could do postal votes; they could do early access votes. They have all those things that we have and that the people in the wheatbelt also have, Hon Jim Chown. The point that I am making is that if it is good enough to do it in the wheatbelt—I think it is appropriate to do it in the wheatbelt; I do not have a complaint about that—why do we not provide communities of the same size and population in the seats of Kimberley and Pilbara with the opportunity to have the same access to the electoral system that everybody else in the state has? That is the point I am making. Large populations are being deprived of access to the system. I think that is something that we as a Parliament, as a government and as a community could fix for the next election. We do not have to wait for a committee to do that; that could be dealt with leading up to the next election to ensure that those communities across regional Western Australia are given that same opportunity to participate in the vote, so that when they see the advertisements on television saying that the election will be on 9 March, they understand that that is the day on which they have to turn up and vote, and they have from eight o'clock in the morning until six o'clock at night and they do not have to work out when the mobile polling booth will go into their community for a couple of hours. I think that would go a long way towards fixing one of the areas by which people are being disenfranchised from the voting system.

As I said, the voter turnout in the Kimberley, at 61 per cent, is significantly below the rest of the voter turnout. When we look at the rest of the figures, it basically ranges between 85 and 90 per cent voter turnout. I suspect that if we look at the seats of North West and Kalgoorlie, we may find a similar trend. I have not had the time to do the work on those points. I urge everybody in this house, especially the minister, to try to do something about this. I have raised this issue with the Electoral Commission. The upcoming election next year is a great opportunity for us to correct that structural situation. It is about structural racism. I acknowledge that it is a longstanding historical situation for both sides of politics, but this is an opportunity for us to correct that and ensure that we encourage participation.

When it comes to the other measures such as automatic enrolment to target young voters, I would certainly support a committee looking at that. I think the other matter is so clear that we could make that change before the next election and ensure that people who live in remote communities in the Dampier Peninsula and in Bidyadanga get access to the voting system that we all enjoy and benefit from right across the rest of Western Australia. That would be a significant step in engaging a large chunk of our community that is not being engaged in the political process. I urge that.

In my final moments, I thank the member for bringing this matter before the house. It is a great topic to debate. We should be appreciative of the fact that we live in a great democracy. We are very lucky to have that democracy and have debates in this place, not fights on the streets like they do in other parts of the world.

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural) [11.50 am]: I would like to commend Hon Alyssa Hayden for moving this motion. It is almost a case of great minds think alike. In making that comment, I am not alluding to myself. I am alluding to the fact that the WA Electoral Commissioner, Mr Warwick Gately, had perfect timing when he wrote his opinion piece that appeared in *The West Australian* on Wednesday. I doubt if the honourable member spoke to him prior to moving her motion but it is a very topical point. I am sure there is not one member in this Parliament who is not sensitive to the issues surrounding the right to vote. We have all been through some fairly robust preselections lately. We all understand that the value of a vote has greater value than currency.

The right to vote in elections is a fundamental prerequisite in the democratic system, certainly in the Westminster system. It is also a fundamental civil right. Armed conflict has taken place over this issue probably since the fourteenth century as the Westminster system has evolved. One thing that came to my attention when researching this subject related to the Civil War in America, which finished in 1865. That civil war was fought under very vicious circumstances. It was fought over a number of issues. One of them was the freedom from slavery around African Americans, or blacks as they were called in those days. After the war, Lincoln put the fourteenth amendment through Congress, which gave blacks, or African Americans as they are known today, full civil rights. We may have the right to vote but excluding the right to vote is important to some entities as well. For example, even though the fourteenth amendment had passed Congress, a number of southern states went to great efforts to exclude African Americans from voting. They put up some systems that members may be interested in. They had poll taxes under which people in some states had to buy their vote. These people could not afford it. There were literacy tests. If people could not write and read English properly, they were unable to vote. The one that tickled my fancy was the grandfather clause. Unless one's father or grandfather had voted prior to one attaining voting age, one was not allowed to vote. The civil rights movement grew out of that and a well-known person, Dr Martin Luther King, gave his wonderful speech "I have a dream", which I am sure all members are familiar with. It was not until 1965 that Congress passed the Voting Rights Act that allowed African Americans throughout the United States full voting rights and stopped all these shenanigans.

Hon Alyssa Hayden—I am sure other members will mention this—spoke about another significant part of our community that was excluded from voting; that is, our female colleagues, wives, friends and daughters. Emmeline Pankhurst fought for these women as a suffragette in England, where women were not given the right to vote until 1928. If we go to the United Kingdom and talk to people involved in the Westminster system, as we are, they will proudly say that democracy has been alive and well in the United Kingdom for many years. Quite frankly, until women had the right to vote, it was not operating as fully as it does in this great nation of ours.

The issue under debate is not only about the right to vote but also about the issue of some complacency in the general community. That is what Mr Warwick Gately's opinion piece was about. I am sure that everybody else in this house has had similar experiences as I have in that as we go forward to the next state election and the forthcoming federal election, we do a fair bit of doorknocking. We doorknock citizens in our electorates; we meet them face to face on a regular basis. On these occasions we are on their territory knocking on their doors, soliciting for a vote or telling them all the good things about the Liberal Party, the Labor Party, the National Party or the Hottentot party or whoever we are representing. When I doorknock I am always amazed by the absolute ignorance of some people. I am talking about the ignorance about the democratic system, what a vote is worth to people and why people need to vote. Some people get confused about local government, the federal government and the state government. I do not know how we are going to overcome this ignorance. As Hon Alyssa Hayden has already stated, we live in a very rich, wealthy, soft society. There is no conflict out there. People are not disappearing off the streets. There is no real issue that they feel threatened by yet they disregard the value of a vote and the fact that the right they have to vote is so important to the outcomes that they desire.

I remember one occasion during the last state election when I knocked on a gentleman's door in Kalbarri. He was a citizen of the United Kingdom. He had obviously been in this country for some years. As I found out, he was an Australian citizen. He was very irate that I was knocking on his door asking for his vote et cetera. It got to the point where I decided to depart his premises and stand on public property, where he followed me. I had to make a decision on whether to fight or flee.

Hon Ken Travers: Is this someone who actually knew you?

Hon JIM CHOWN: We got to know each other in time. I stood my ground. I made my point to him and I asked him one question. I said, "Do you believe in one political party?" He said, "No, you're all bastards." I said, "That's not quite right. If you will not weld onto any political party, you are a swinging voter, you are a kingmaker. If you cast your vote to a party that you believe will serve your needs appropriately, you may be surprised that within this electorate there will be enough swinging voters who feel the same way and then you will get the member in that you wish to represent your requirements in the Parliament." People forget that

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swinging voters make or break governments. If there are enough swinging voters out there who are listening to this speech, they need to start to do a bit of research on where they are going to cast their vote and take the casting of their vote extremely seriously.

When Hon Ken Travers was speaking there were schoolchildren in the public gallery. Thousands of them come into this place. I would hope that the guides tell them that when they reach 18, their vote is critical to their outcomes as adults and for their future families rather than showing them around and telling them a bit of the history of this place. A vote is one of the most important things that a citizen of this state and this nation can carry out at the appropriate times. The Youth Parliament is held in this place on a regular basis. It is subsidised by the YMCA. I am sure that a number of other members, as I do, give those people who attend the Youth Parliament some money to carry out their duties.

Complacency around casting a vote is a growing concern in the community. I believe that unless it is addressed in some manner—I do not know what the answer is—the democratic system is subtly threatened. I can see the time coming when not enough people cast a vote or people turn up and then walk out, as happened in the last state election. As Mr Gately expressed, more illegitimate votes were cast than the majority received for the member who finally came to represent that particular electorate. I think that is an outrageous and unfortunate and not very satisfying outcome, firstly, for the member and, secondly, for democracy in this state. If that becomes general practice throughout the nation, I think democracy faces a severe challenge.

HON ALISON XAMON (East Metropolitan) [12 noon]: I rise today on behalf of the Greens (WA) to make some comments about this motion. I think it is a good topic to bring to the attention of this Parliament. We do not talk about electoral affairs very often, so I think it is quite useful to do that. The Greens also support compulsory voting. That seems to be a position that all parties in the chamber share. We also share Hon Ken Travers' views about considering an arrangement for automatic enrolment for young people. I agree with the comments made by the previous speakers that the right to vote is not one that should be taken for granted. In fact, I consider it a civic responsibility within a democracy to exercise our right to vote. As Hon Ken Travers said, it is not compulsory voting as such; nobody follows us into the voting booth to see how we vote; it is simply a matter of being compelled to turn up at a polling booth. That can be seen by the number of people who choose to exercise their right to vote by making a donkey vote, which we members might not think is a particularly useful exercise; nevertheless, this is a democracy and that is a choice that people are entitled to exercise.

I share the concerns of Hon Jim Chown about the level of general understanding of our electoral system. Through my time as a political activist, which has been for quite a long time now, I too have encountered a quite high degree of ignorance about the difference between the role of local government, state government and federal government. I still find it absolutely stunning when I meet people who do not know who our Premier is. That is inconceivable to me, but the reality is that the level of knowledge of people within the Western Australian population is that low. Added to that level of ignorance is ignorance of the separation of powers. That is a bit of a concern as well. There is obviously a significant level of ignorance judging by the number of people who have contacted my office in the previous three years demanding that I intervene by writing to a magistrate or a judge over an adverse court finding that they think is terribly unfair, and exercise my power as a member of Parliament to advise said judiciary that they are wrong and they need to automatically overturn the decision. They do not usually like it when I get back to them and say it is not legally possible, let alone not appropriate. There is a degree of ignorance within the community about a number of elements with which the Westminster system operates in our democracy generally.

I too read the article by Warwick Gately in yesterday's *The West Australian* and share the concerns about the number of 18 and 19-year-old voters who are enrolled with the WA Electoral Commission. I note that the Electoral Commissioner hinted that he felt it was very low because we have not had a general election since 2010. But I think he was also implying that one of the reasons such a small number of young people are enrolled is a general disenchantment with the system. I think that is something we should all take on board. I think it is true that people are moving beyond the two party-system approach of government. I think also that people are becoming less and less impressed with the conduct of many of our elected representatives. Perhaps that is something we need to take on board because the last thing we want is for our constituents to feel this disheartened with the work we are doing. I think the work we do in this place is really important.

I also note that young people are traditionally a transient community and often move from rental to rental, and that can make them a difficult demographic to target. I agree that we need to ensure that we increase electoral enrolments and, hence, enfranchise our young people, certainly in the lead-up to the next state election. A suggestion was made that an advertising campaign might be implemented that would enable this to occur, and I think that would be very good. On the topic of advertising campaigns, one of the things that continues to strike

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me is the lack of knowledge within the community generally about the preferential voting system. This is of particular interest to the Greens and, I imagine, is of some interest to the Nationals. When I talk to people, I notice that there is generally a very poor understanding among people about the way compulsory preferential voting works. People do not realise that they can exercise compulsory preferential voting in voting for a party such as the Greens without worrying about their vote being lost. One of the things the Greens have endeavoured to do over the past few state and federal elections is to engage in our own attempts to educate the public about the way preferences work. However, I do not think it is the Greens' job to do that; it should be carried out by the Electoral Commission and it is something we have raised time and again and will continue to do so.

Hon Norman Moore: What about the education system? The Electoral Commission runs elections; it's not there to educate people.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am happy to take that interjection, Hon Norman Moore.

Hon Norman Moore: You can please yourself.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I agree that it should be picked up to a large degree in our curriculum, but the Electoral Commission engages in a number of education campaigns.

Hon Norman Moore: It does.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I think this too is a legitimate campaign. I wanted to put that matter on the record because people's lack of understanding is an ongoing problem. In principle, the Greens support the second part of the motion and are interested in being involved in developing the terms of reference for such an inquiry if it were to come to pass. In that case, we would be keen to see a number of elements included in such an inquiry. For example, I think it would be really good to have another look at the notion of one vote, one value in the Parliament in either one or both chambers. We could also look at the implementation of what we argue is a truly democratic system; namely, proportional representation in the house of government. If we had proportional representation in the lower house, for example, there would be about six Greens members there, so that is well and truly worth looking at.

We could also bring back into the debate the idea of formally recognising human rights because that is supposedly part and parcel of iconic democracies such as the United States. We could also open up topics around electoral disclosure and donations reform generally and the associated topic of a full public funding model, like the Canadian model. I think there is heaps of scope for an inquiry that really wants to look at a whole range of elements in relation to democracy. I think that would be really welcome but if it is simply about looking at engagement, it is only one part of the issue. I think we could look at a range of reforms to ensure our system is more democratic and that is something we should strive for at every opportunity. But I certainly agree with the sentiment of the mover of the motion that democracy is something that should be cherished. Democracy is something for which people have fought very hard and it is something we want people to have more of a sense of ownership of. If we were looking at a range of reforms, I think that sort of sense of ownership is more likely to come about from the general populace.

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral) [12.09 pm]: I would like to commend Hon Alyssa Hayden for bringing this motion to the house. It has been interesting to listen to the debate. I would like to start with a brief look at history. The debate certainly stimulated me. I looked at the situation in the United Kingdom and Australia. The right to vote is something we take for granted, but that was not always the case. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 states in part —

... elections ... shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Voting has not until recent times been universal and equal, with universal meaning that everyone should have the right to vote subject to objective and reasonable criteria, including age, being of sound mind and not being a prisoner sentenced to more than three years. The criterion of imprisonment for more than three years came in recently, of course. Equal suffrage means one vote. Having that vote is not dependent on gender, race, possessions, property or wealth. Of course, that is different for shareholders of a company; the number of shares one has determines one's voting power. We see that from time to time in our business section when members challenge by buying more shares, which gives them more voting power. Local government elections are, of course, interesting. If a person owns property in two wards in the same electorate, that person can have a vote in each of those wards. Of course, one would have to have a lot of money to have any swing and the shire would need to have many wards. I believe some of them have.

Hon Ken Travers: Back to the vote early and vote often days.

Hon KEN BASTON: Exactly right. I can remember people being hunted for local government elections when the rates that people paid determined how many votes they had for a property. If you had four next to your name, they hunted you down very quickly! Where have we got to? The original right to vote was a property-based right that goes back to the barons of England and the Magna Carta. The barons had objected to King John raising taxes without going through them, the owners of the property, under the feudal system of government that existed in 1215. In the United Kingdom, the right to vote remained with males and was based on the ownership of freehold land until the reforms of the nineteenth century. The 1832 act changed the property right to a right based on paying rates or rent of more than £10. The 1867 act extended the vote to all men in urban areas but still excluded, interestingly enough, men in rural areas. It was not until 1884 that all men in rural areas of England were able to vote. There is relevance to Australia in this because after the original landing in 1788, a number of free settlers came over and brought with them the view that they should have a say in who governed them. The right to vote was still dependent on property ownership. This was tested, of course, by the Eureka Stockade, which was a rebellion against paying for a miner's right and not being able to vote. The end result was a number of deaths, but also the easing of requirements from residency of six months and an annual licence of £8 pounds to a licence of only £1, and the miners of Ballarat were given eight seats in their Legislative Council. Things moved quickly from there, with men over 21 being granted the vote in South Australia in 1856, in Victoria in 1858 and finally in Western Australia. From my research at the J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History I found that the first Legislative Council in Western Australia met on 7 February 1832, with its members appointed by the Governor. It remained an appointed Council until 1870, when Governor Weld allowed two-thirds of the Council to be elected under restricted franchise. Our first Parliament in 1890 saw the Assembly elected by males over the age of 21, but it took until 1963 for property qualifications to be abolished for voting for the Council. Female members of the chamber will know better than I do of the battles that took place before women were given the vote in South Australia in 1894. It is interesting that votes were finally given to people over 21. When I first left school in 1967 it was during the Vietnam days. We did not have the right to vote but we did have the right to be conscripted to fight in Vietnam. Of course, we also did not have the right to drink until we were 21. Not that I crossed the floor and voted the other way at that time, but I was certainly a very angry young man because I did not have the right to vote but could still be sent to war. Other members have today touched on wars. Recent conflicts include those in Iraq and Afghanistan. We saw the people of those countries voting for the first time and what it meant to them.

Our compulsory voting system is really just compulsory attendance; it is just to register at a voting place rather than registering a vote. I note the figures quoted today that, on average, four per cent of votes are informal. I happened to be scrutineering at the last federal election. There were six candidates on one paper and, of course, the word "donkey" fitted nicely down the page and had been written in the boxes. I thought what a waste it was for that person to vote in that way. A lot of informal votes are accidental. With some papers voters have to fill in the whole paper, and with others they only have to record one vote. That is something that could be viewed. Why do voters not turn up? I guess the main reason is that people think it is only one vote and that their vote does not count—it is only one in a thousand. The only way to get around that is through education, which has been touched on today. I have noted since I have been in this place the increase in the number of schoolkids coming through here. When I was in school we hardly knew this place existed. I really believe that education is the process that is needed to sell this place, the voting right, both federal and state, and the value of voting. The bit of history that goes with it is really important to understand democracy. When I was doing a bit of work and was looking around on the computer I came up with some quotes. We talk about democracy. I found a quote by Karl Marx. He said that democracy is the road to socialism. Of course, if we take that, the next thing is communism. We have countries all coming out of communism and going back into what they call democracy, and it looks like a vicious circle. I thought that was of interest. I think that all of us need to value our vote from the point of that freedom—we can select who governs us. An educational process is needed to make sure that people value that.

HON NICK GOIRAN (South Metropolitan) [12.18 pm]: I rise to support the motion of my good friend and colleague Hon Alyssa Hayden. I thank her for bringing the motion to the attention of this place. I recognise that it covers two aspects, which are here for our consideration. In preparing for this debate I wanted to take note of some historical information. In particular, my attention was drawn to an essay entitled "Equality" from the great literary scholar, fantasy writer and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis. He explained his support for democracy based on his belief in the fall of the human race. In his essay he stated —

I am a democrat because I believe in the Fall of Man.

I will pause at this stage to provide proper context to him saying he is a democrat in the context of this particular motion. It continues —

I think most people are democrats for the opposite reason. A great deal of democratic enthusiasm descends from the ideas of people like Rousseau, who believed in democracy because they thought

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mankind so wise and good that everyone deserved a share in the government. The danger of defending democracy on those grounds is that they're not true.

...

I find that they're not true without looking further than myself. I don't deserve a share in governing a hen-roost, much less a nation.

...

The real reason for democracy is just the reverse. Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows. Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. I do not contradict him. But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.

I share those sentiments, and in seeking, as Hon Alyssa Hayden said, to remind the Western Australian community of the value of their right to vote, I consider it appropriate to highlight this perspective. C.S. Lewis thought he did not deserve a share in governing a hen-roost, much less a nation. We should encourage our fellow citizens to value their right to vote because not voting leaves it to others to decide the affairs of the nation or state. No-one is qualified to decide the affairs of the state, because no-one is perfectly wise or good.

A similar sentiment was expressed by the great English statesman Sir Winston Churchill during a 1947 debate in the House of Commons on a bill that sought a reduction in the powers of the upper house, the House of Lords. In the course of that debate, Sir Winston Churchill wryly observed the following —

Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those others that have been tried from time to time; but there is the broad feeling in our country that the people should rule, continuously rule, and that public opinion, expressed by all constitutional means, should shape, guide, and control the actions of Ministers who are their servants and not their masters.

Churchill was the Leader of the Opposition having, hard on the heels of his outstanding success in leading Britain to victory over Nazi Germany, been voted out of office as Prime Minister in the general election of July 1945. According to my notes, it is reportedly the case that he was in the bath—he apparently spent an inordinate amount of time in his bath—when the news was brought to him of his electoral defeat. He is said to have quipped, “They have a perfect right to kick me out. That is democracy”. In supporting the motion moved by Hon Alyssa Hayden that we hold an inquiry into re-engaging the community and the benefits of living in a democracy, we should be conscious, I think, that we would be reminding the community of its right to kick us out. With that in mind, I am delighted to provide in-principle support for the motion moved by my colleague.

HON ALYSSA HAYDEN (East Metropolitan) [12.25 pm] — in reply: I thank Hon Ed Dermer for allowing me to respond. That was very kind and gentlemanly of him. There are not many gentlemen left in this world, so I thank him very much.

I thank all the members who stood and supported the motion. As I said earlier, the subject is topical, but it is one that the community as a whole must take seriously. It was good to hear that Hon Ken Travers and Hon Alison Xamon support compulsory voting. I accept his view that our remote communities do not have the same right or privilege as the rest of us. If we give the right to vote to all people, all people should have an opportunity to cast their vote. Hopefully, we will get an inquiry up and, if we do, it should be taken seriously.

Hon Ken Travers: I hope we can get it addressed before the election.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: I wish the member all the very best of luck with that one!

Hon Jim Chown and Hon Ken Baston gave us a history lesson. Perhaps such history lessons should be taught in our schools.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm): Order, members! Hon Alyssa Hayden has only one minute remaining. Let us hear her in silence.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: As I said, the history lessons given by two of my colleagues on this side of the house should be taught in schools so that students understand where democracy came from. As Hon Jim Chown said, blood was shed for that right, and I think we forget that too quickly. Hon Nick Goiran's comments were quite entertaining, but also very true. People must understand that their right to vote is about not only putting forward their opinion, but also “kicking out” the government if they are not happy with it. How many people do we hear say, “What is the point of turning up to vote, you're all the same?”, “I don't like you”, “I don't agree with you” and “I don't think politicians are worthy”? If people do not think we are worthy, they should vote and have their

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say. That is the point of democracy. I would love for such people to spend a day with us, if not a week, to see how much work we do, how diverse our day is and how committed members in this house and other houses around the country are to ensure that we live in a wonderful country.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.