

STATE BUDGET — IMPACT ON SENIORS AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Motion

MS M.M. QUIRK (Girrawheen) [4.56 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for the impact its mismanagement of the state budget is having on seniors and vulnerable people in our community.

The financial mismanagement of the Barnett government means that when the federal government abolished funding for states to deliver concessions to state Seniors Card holders and pensioners by \$24.5 million a year, it was not in a position to absorb those cuts. The state government's budget mismanagement has necessitated cuts to private vehicle concessions on car registrations, with seniors and pensioners hit hardest by increases as high as 75 per cent. It means that changes to the security rebate eligibility—a broken election promise—locks out 97 per cent of seniors. It means that Treasurer Nahan has to review all concessions, with further cuts to come at or before the next budget. The review of concessions will mean possible cuts to discounts on local government rates, the emergency services levy, water rates and free bus and train travel. All those things are at risk.

The government's financial mismanagement means that the annual cost-of-living rebate has been halved; it has reduced to \$82 for single seniors and \$123 for couples, thereby saving \$21 million. Those cuts affect 306 000 Western Australian seniors. The cost-of-living allowance is stretched further with electricity prices continuing to rise by 4.5 per cent and water prices by six per cent. In fact, since Colin Barnett was elected in 2008, household bills have increased by 50 per cent. Those things are coupled with federal cuts to level the old-age and disability pension increases, a possible \$7 tax for each visit to a general practitioner, an increase in prescriptions by \$5, and the abolition of the seniors supplement worth up to \$876 a year. These cuts all add up. The cumulative impact is more than a minor inconvenience, and it involves more than swapping to cheaper brands in the supermarket aisle; it is about going without altogether. That is why seniors are grumpy, as the Premier says, and rightly so. In an article by Brendon Foster published in *The Guardian* on 9 July 2014, the Premier was reported as commenting at the 500 Club —

“When you're in a second term, issues that might seem to be relatively insignificant add up.

“We've got grumpy pensioners over pension concessions and entitlements, a group of grumpy people over the price of housing or the cost of living.

The article also states —

Among the “relatively insignificant” issues Barnett seemed to be referring to is his government's recent slashing of the seniors' cost of living rebate in half, which saw the single seniors' payment reduced to \$82 from \$163 in the next financial year. Couples get \$123 instead of \$245.

Leaving aside the fact that those attending the exclusive lunch would have paid an amount equivalent to the annual cost-of-living rebate grudgingly given to “grumpy” seniors, these remarks show a complete lack of empathy for and a lack of any real understanding of the impact the government's cuts have had on seniors. This is not an isolated incident and it is not a question of the Premier just having a bad day. Repeatedly, when confronted on talkback radio, the Premier's standard line is that he “acknowledges” that people are doing it tough. However, his actions and his lack of respect for seniors suggest otherwise. An interview with Yasmine Phillips of PerthNow on 24 July 2014 reads, in part —

PERTHNOW: We've seen WA seniors taking a little bit of a hit lately with recent announcements, how do you think that today's seniors fare in terms of support and assistance?

PREMIER: I acknowledge —

Those famous words again —

that people who have retired, may be on fixed incomes, people in pensions, it is a struggle. The cost of living is higher in Perth than most other parts of the country and there are all sorts of increases in not only utilities, but also the price of food. Lyn is always telling me when you go shopping, it seems to be more and more expensive every week.

To equate the dilemmas of his wife at the supermarket with the daily challenges our seniors face is glib, trite and outright disturbing.

In the time remaining, I want to focus on how the Barnett government's mismanagement and cuts to seniors have impacted disproportionately on that cohort and in ways the Premier apparently does not appreciate or understand. I am indebted to the Council on the Ageing Western Australia, which made a submission to a current

inquiry of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. The submission is public, and in it the council makes a number of cogent points that I would like to refer to.

Firstly, it makes the point that concessions are an important aspect of retirement income policy and should not be seen in isolation from other aspects of retirement incomes. Planning for financial security in later life is a long-term activity and people have made plans in light of existing concession frameworks; any sudden change to those concessions will seriously disrupt those plans. Likewise, seniors' finances are largely inflexible, and sudden changes to income streams that have been anticipated and acted upon in good faith can be catastrophic. Measuring poverty is fraught with difficulty, but poverty appears to be prevalent amongst some seniors and on the increase. According to Poverty Living, 40 per cent of Australian seniors live in poverty. That figure is particularly alarming when compared with the figure for the Netherlands, where only 1.7 per cent of seniors live below the poverty line.

The impact of concessions should also not be understated in the context of the reduction of social isolation. A decrease in social isolation leads to better mental health outcomes and wellbeing, and we need to be mindful of that. The concessions that have the most impact on social isolation are concessions for drivers' licences, motor vehicle registration and public transport. There is a direct nexus between those sorts of concessions and a senior's ability to volunteer. Members will recall the seniors' rally outside Parliament earlier this year; a number of the people present at the rally, in addition to callers to talkback radio, talked about the fact that if concessions were to be reduced, they would have to reconsider the extent of their volunteering.

Volunteering is one of the ways that seniors give back to the community and gain a sense of personal worth and community involvement. They feel valued, they should be valued, and they certainly contribute greatly. The value of volunteering to the economy has been well researched. The annual contribution of volunteers to the Western Australian economy is estimated at more than \$9 billion. In that context, concessions facilitate volunteering, which is definitely a net benefit to the community rather than a cost. It is vital that the concessions framework is well targeted and structured to facilitate the continuation of seniors' volunteering.

Another issue that the Premier does not appreciate when he says that he "acknowledges" that people might be struggling is the issue of depression. As people grow older, they experience significant life changes that put them at increased risk of depression. There are several causes and risk factors that contribute to the onset of depression amongst older Australians, and they include health problems; illnesses that might cause disabilities; chronic or severe pain; cognitive decline; damage to body image due to surgery or disease; loneliness and isolation; living alone; a dwindling social circle due to the death of friends; relocation or downsizing; decreased mobility due to illness; loss of driving privileges; reduced sense of self-worth and purpose; loss of identity due to retirement; and physical limitations on activities. Fear might also lead to depression—for example, fear of death or dying; anxiety over financial problems or health issues; and recent bereavement, including the deaths of family members, friends, pets and spouses or partners. They are all contributing factors.

Although public attention has been focused on youth suicide and the rate of suicide amongst people under the age of 35, few people are aware that those aged 75 and above, particularly males, are also at very high risk of suicide. In fact, older people's access to mental health services in Western Australia has fallen behind the rest of the population, and rates of suicide in Australia are highest amongst men aged 85 and over. Concessions can play an important part in alleviating depression and suicide amongst seniors. It is important that concessions are well targeted to meet the needs of older people at risk of mental health problems and suicide.

Another major cost of living issue that impacts upon seniors' capacity to survive is housing. The private rental market is often the only option for older Australians, as there is a critical shortage of public and social housing. Currently, around 12 per cent over the age of 65 in Australia are renters, with one-third of them in public housing and two-thirds in private rental accommodation. It has also been recorded that there has been an increase in homelessness amongst older people, particularly older women, and an increase in older people suffering from housing stress. According to the Council on the Ageing Western Australia, between 2011–12 and 2012–13 there was an increase of 14 per cent in the number of people over 55 years of age seeking support from specialist services. COTA made the observation that this underestimates the total number because it believes that older people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are less likely to use specialist services, particularly when they are homeless for the first time.

An increasingly popular housing alternative is lifestyle villages and caravan parks. These are often seen as affordable types of retirement living as they have lower capital costs than retirement villages and do not attract the same level of management and ongoing fees. It allows some people with the capacity to downsize to a tree change or a sea change. It gives some people the capacity to move from a private rental into something that they own, if they have enough modest superannuation to buy in. However, as we have heard in this place for a number of years, there is a lack of consumer protections for people living in those forms of accommodation. They are not covered by retirement village legislation and they are also not adequately covered by residential

Extract from Hansard

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tenancy legislation. We are awaiting the so-called second tranche of laws to be introduced by the Barnett government to give greater security to this cohort of seniors.

On the positive side, people are living longer and are healthier than at any time in human history. This is obviously something that we should celebrate, but it conversely leads to the argument—one that the federal Treasurer has been known to use from time to time—that with a growing number of people living longer, there is the rhetoric that the ageing population will bankrupt the community. Seniors feel in some way responsible for the financial wellbeing of the community.

There is also the fear of crime. That makes it problematic as to whether seniors want to go out and about and participate in the wider community. Although we know that victimisation is low, seniors do things such as avoid public transport for fear of crime. The budget mismanagement of the Barnett government has meant that police numbers are not sufficiently high to act as a deterrent to those unfeeling thugs who prey on seniors, especially those who seriously assault seniors in their own homes. Offenders may be caught after the event, but that victim will never again feel secure in their own home. They will always carry the trauma with them. Frequently following a violent assault, their health deteriorates rapidly.

I now refer to the discrimination of older workers. As we all know, this is widespread and requires a major change of culture in employers. Even if a senior does not want to be a drain on the community and even if a senior wants to continue to earn money through employment, there simply are not the options. The Equal Opportunity Commission of Western Australia has had substantial budget cuts. That has reduced the capacity for that organisation to provide an educative function to would-be employers about the usefulness and value of senior employees. Because of this government's budget mismanagement, the Equal Opportunity Commission also has fewer resources to pursue claims of age discrimination on behalf of job seekers. Not only that, older people seeking to reskill are met with sharp rises in TAFE fees imposed by the state government. Again, that will act as an impediment to retraining. Unlike other states, there is no specific earmarked service for mature-age job seekers who have trouble finding employment because of outdated job skills. This of course also discourages them from seeking further employment.

I now want to mention a matter that came to my attention today. I am pleased to say that my very efficient electorate staff have managed to resolve the issue. It goes to the level of the Premier's denial about the kinds of issues that seniors face every day. The member for Warnbro and I received an email. I do not have the permission of the correspondents to use their names, so I will need to edit it slightly. It states in part —

I am writing to you on behalf of my partner & his family who reside in Esperance. His father ... has late stage alzheimers and has been cared for at home by his mother ...

I am not sure if you are aware that the Dementia section of the Esperance nursing home is full. A much touted 25 bed extension to the nursing home is not happening as there is no funding.

At a public meeting on Friday representatives of several families were told they would have to make plans to move their parents/husbands/wives out of Esperance as there was no possibility in the near to medium term that they could be accommodated in the Nursing home in Esperance. This just compounds the distress & suffering these families are already feeling. What is happening in Esperance? Why is there no funding for something so critical to the community?

My partner's mother had been battling on caring for her husband who has late stage alzheimers in the vain hope that he would be able to stay in Esperance once a bed became available. Late last week my partner's father was admitted to Esperance hospital, as it was clear to the medical staff in A&E that mum desperately needed respite.

After a few days in hospital, mum was advised that the hospital would not release him back to her care because his behavioural issues were at such a level she could not manage him and he needed to be admitted to a secure care home with 24/7 coverage. The hospital advised her that they would keep him sedated in hospital until she could find a place in a home for him. Then she must transport him from hospital to the home—there is no possibility of assistance from ST Johns/RFDS.

We have found a space for him ... in Maylands near to our house ...

However, Dad's GP will not sign Virgin Australia's medical clearance form to allow him to travel by air to Perth as he judges his behaviour, even sedated, as too unpredictable.

So we are left with the only alternative to try to drive an elderly sedated dementia patient by car to Perth. Mum finds it almost impossible to drive him around Esperance as he is always undoing his seat belt & trying to open the car door whilst in motion. An 8 hour journey to Perth just fills her with dread

and is very distressing. What risk does this pose not only to the patient but the driver & passenger trying to control ...

That is a dilemma that the member for Warnbro and I were made aware of today. I am very pleased to say, thanks to my excellent electorate officers, that it looks as though the Royal Flying Doctor Service will now take that patient. Frankly, that is an example of the kind of issue that affects hundreds of families on a weekly, if not daily, basis. The Premier can say that he acknowledges there are problems, but he does not fully understand the extent of suffering and neglect that a failure to deliver resources can have on those most in need.

I wanted to make one final observation. I went to the Retirees WA annual general meeting a couple of weeks ago. Members who have been to that will know that it is not a hotbed of radicalism! Hon Max Evans and Hon Clive Griffiths regularly attend and they were there on that occasion. We were advised at that meeting that Retirees WA had secured 7 500 signatures on a petition for a commissioner for seniors—an older persons commissioner. I queried why we needed one and I was told that the minister was busy with other things and could not act as an advocate on seniors' behalf and they did not feel they were being listened to. To me that is a sorry state of affairs. It is also a sorry state of affairs when private nursing homes have the federal government's longstanding payroll concession of a nine per cent cut, frankly, putting them at risk. When representatives sought an appointment with the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering, they were told that he deals only with healthy seniors. Again, that is a major issue concerning the provision of care to elderly Western Australians that is just ignored by this government. It is a question of this government having the wrong priorities. The budget cuts are seriously impacting on basic service delivery. We have a situation in which the need is now. It is not the case that, in the words of Bill Cosby, old is always 15 years from now. In this case, people need the services and need to be listened to now. They do not need to wait until after the football stadium has been built, Elizabeth Quay has been constructed or the Museum has been finished before the government turns its attention to the crucial needs of seniors. I say to the Premier, who acknowledges the so-called struggle that seniors have, that actions speak louder than words and I hope that he reviews this budget's priorities and directs his attention to seniors, who deserve to be listened to and who deserve our respect.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [5.22 pm]: I am very keen to make a contribution this afternoon to a motion that I believe has been carefully worded. It is carefully worded for a specific reason—that is, to alert the house. Quite often, motions in private members' business highlight or issue a condemnation of the government. This motion before us, however, is focused on alerting the government to the impact that its mishandling of the budget has on the people of Western Australia, specifically, of course, seniors.

I was going to go on at great length to talk about in general the various increases in costs that have been imposed on families, individuals and seniors in Western Australia by this government. In her contribution, the member for Girrawheen very clearly outlined just some of the cost-of-living increases that have been borne by a cross-section of our community. We know that the annual cost of living since the Barnett government was elected in 2008 has increased by over \$2 500. There have been significant increases in charges for basics such as water and electricity consistently, which have compounded the problem for people living on fixed incomes and pensions, with them having to bear those increases in the cost of living. We know that electricity charges under this government have increased by over 70 per cent—I understand 77 per cent—since 2008. We know that water charges have gone up by 90 per cent under this government. We know that car registration charges have gone up by 60 per cent under this government. We know that there have been, of course, cuts by the federal Abbott government that will impact on seniors, including cuts to the seniors supplement and changes to the indexation of pensions with regards to the means-testing of incomes, the asset threshold et cetera. We also know that rental costs have increased, so anybody on a fixed and low income or on a pension and in their senior years is bearing the brunt. Of course, the federal Treasurer, Joe Hockey, says that everyone should take part in the heavy lifting.

I will share with members a number of responses—numbering in the hundreds—that I have had in the last month to a newsletter I sent out, which was specifically responded to by seniors in Mandurah. I will use the words of the people of Mandurah, the seniors in Mandurah, to highlight to this government, this minister and, ultimately and particularly, this Premier, as this motion seeks to do, the impact that the Liberal–National government is having on those seniors in our community, who of course we know number in the hundreds of thousands. I will let the people of Mandurah do the speaking tonight. These are real people who live in what I consider to be the best city in Western Australia and the place many of them have chosen to live for many, many years. I will highlight to the house some responses from people in Mandurah about this Barnett government, its handling of the budget and, indeed, its priorities. I look to one of the recent cuts, which was to the licence rebate. R.J. Aurisch from Coodanup said —

David my licence went from \$54.30 to \$129.60 and when I in quite at licence centre I was told that it was after the rebate 50%. Over all I paid \$85.20 more than last year ... Why the difference?

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We know the reason: the Barnett government cut the licence rebate.

D. Buchanan-Paterson of Coodanup said —

Joe hockey's Budget is only about punishing the poor. The Barnett Government has punished the poor and wasted money on the Premier's office, shark culls and the list goes on. Looking after "fat cats". I used to be a Liberal voter not anymore. Disgusted!

The response from Bruce and Lorraine McGarry from central Mandurah stated —

I am an aged pensioner in my 70's and my wife a disability pension. We cannot understand why the Liberal gov't attacks us and doesn't touch the well off people

The future under Liberal is bleak.

Ms Ashley in Meadow Springs, Mandurah responded —

The audacity of Mr Barnett & the Liberal Party towards seniors is beyond comprehension.

Wayne Abbott responded —

This Govt ... they give with one hand and take with the other. We have worked hard for a long time to retire & Mr. Barnett is someone you cannot trust.

This response is from Eric Hind. I know Eric; he is a great bloke and he has been in Mandurah for a long time. His response reads —

What can you expect from Barnett. He should have retired years ago

Ms Booth and Mr Ward of Meadow Springs responded —

Why doesn't Mr Barnett get into the real world where there is pain & suffering for lots of people. He will never be a poor pensioner & know what its like to struggle. He's nothing but a liar.

I know that is unparliamentary, but I am reading from a letter and quoting a constituent —

He can sit in his "Emperor's Palace" & think what a clever man he is NOT.

Len and Margaret Makin responded —

Liberal governments are living up to their reputation of being mean and tricky.

Ms Nobbs of Alondra Way responded —

Totally disgusted. I don't see pay rises or perks of the job being taken from the polities. I was always taught to lead by example.

Withdrawal of Remark

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member for Mandurah, I need to ask you to withdraw that, because it appears that that kind of indirect assault is not appropriate—the word you used.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Do you mean "Totally disgusted"?

The ACTING SPEAKER: No, the word you used earlier.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The one that I read out—the "liar" one? On behalf of Ms Booth and Mr Ward, do I have to withdraw "liar"?

The ACTING SPEAKER: You do, member.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I withdraw on their behalf.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I have been given advice that that is the correct procedure.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Madam Acting Speaker, just a clarification. It is a letter. Are we going to be censoring third party documents in the Parliament?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Standing orders say that you cannot indirectly imply that either. It was not implied, it was spoken specifically, and standing orders are very clear that that is not okay. I am sorry, member.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Further to my point of order, the member for Mandurah is not implying anything; he is reading a letter. He is not making any judgement on the veracity of that word. If he is to withdraw it, what will *Hansard* record? Will it just black out that word? How is that reported in *Hansard*?

The ACTING SPEAKER: I asked the member to withdraw the word that he used. We can move on.

Extract from *Hansard*

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Dr A.D. BUTI: I know what you have done, Madam Acting Speaker. I am just seeking clarification because I think it is important. Any time someone reads something out, it does not necessarily mean they are making a judgement or an implication on the veracity of those words.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, I am sorry; it is just not possible. You are not allowed to do it, full stop.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Therefore, is the ruling that members can never ever in this Parliament utter the words “lie” or “liar”?

The ACTING SPEAKER: If the member would like to sit down, I will read standing order 92, “Imputations and personal reflections” —

Imputations of improper motives and personal reflections on the Sovereign, the Governor, a judicial officer or members of the Assembly or the Council are disorderly other than by substantive motion.

It is clear that any imputation such as the one made by the member for Mandurah need to be withdrawn because they are not permitted in the Parliament.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think I did withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, member.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: S. and R. Hession from Lakelands responded —

“Shocking” We have never seen a Government treating the seniors like this. It seems that senior’s are carrying the burden.

Bill and Kath Dean, whom I know very well, in Mandurah, responded —

It is bad enough putting up the normal services eg Electricity, water, ect. But the killer blow especially for single pensioners is the car licence which it is essential to have the car for Doctors, specialists, hospitals as well as Dentists and shopping makes life very hard for over 80’s trying to keep out of old peoples homes.

I do not know whether I will be challenged in reading some of these, but the response from Mr Hawthorn reads —

Colin Barnett Tony Abbot has stabbed the Liberal Voters in the back.

These are people are normally Liberal voters —

The deserving poor get poorer Rich get Richer.

I do not know about these responses, but Mr Hawthorn continues and says —

Colin Barnett most arrogant Premier ever.

I do not know whether that is going to be ruled out of the order.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, it is really the word that you know we are not allowed to use in this house that was of offence.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will continue —

Why should he care. He’s made for life, ie Great Pension for life. Why bother with Seniors etc

The response from Mr Mickan, Harper Court, Mandurah reads —

This government has no respect low income seniors. They spend money on rubbish (eg.) new football oval, Elizabeth Quay, ect.

I point out that is a theme that is coming out that is very interesting.

Ms Eves from central Mandurah responded —

Why target pensioners? We have contributed all our lives and they now want to take away from us.

Mr Cook from Greenfields responded —

I am on disability pension and need these rebates to survive. Its just not fair.

I know Barnett doesn’t care about people suffering, he will be out eventually on his massive retirement super which is tax payers money. I will be selling everything to live.

Ms Foy of Greenfields responded —

We are already feeling the effects of Colin Barnetts budget. His mismanagement is legendary—how much more of W.A.’s money is he going to waste

Mr Hunter from Mandurah responded —

Barnett has no idea how to govern this state with consultation.

Mr Gallagher responded —

The banks raided retirees' super funds—no recourse!

Barnett & his so-called “cabinet” of clowns are doing it yet again—stop the rot.

Dr A.D. Buti: Member, are you sure they are from your electorate or are they the back bench of the Liberal Party?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: They could be. Mr and Mrs Cock from Lakelands responded —

Pension doesn't stretch far enough. We used the last of our savings to instal solar panels thinking this would cut our power costs—Ha! Ha! Even our miserable buy back has been cut!

The response from J. and M. Seal of Mandurah states —

don't you feel a little bit sorry for Colin et al. After all, he wants to leave behind a memorial to himself (ditto Bell Tower & Richard) a big sports stadium & Elizabeth Quay—some one has to pay for it. Take it from the pensioners, after all, they will only be here for a few more years. And some people voted this lot ...

Don't treat us like mugs, Colin. There's an election soon.

The member for Joondalup made an interesting interjection in the last debate and then he slunk down in his seat when he was reminded about taunting people about being “losers”, as he called them. He is not in the chamber now. Many of these people normally vote Liberal; they are not rusted-on Labor voters. The theme that is coming back consistently in people's responses is that they now feel they were duped at the last election—duped by you lot on other side! They will to be waiting for members opposite. That is why some members opposite who might think they have a nice safe margin of five per cent and even 10 per cent for some first-timers should be very careful what they say in here, because I tell you what, they would hate to be known as a one-termer. There ain't nothing worse than a one-termer! Some members opposite do not listen to what these people are saying. They should not follow the party room line when the emperor gets up and tells them what is happening, how the state is going wonderfully, that it is fine for the state to have a debt that is out of control, that the government can keep spending and promising all sorts of things and that Western Australians will not hold us accountable. Just remember, when he goes, he will go off to his place in Cottesloe and be on his very generous superannuation. He will not have to worry about the debris that he has left behind. If some members opposite survive the next election and they are sitting on this side, they will be very embarrassed by the situation they have been left in. If some of them do not survive and become former members, they will join an interesting list of people who have sat in this place for only one term. Just be careful; do not be too cocky. Hello; the member for Balcatta has left the chamber, too! He was a bit nervous. I could see him squirming.

Max Martin, who is a great bloke from Coodanup, says, “Barnett is a dictator. Living off our money.” He is a man of few words but they are very powerful. Ms Cross from San Remo says —

Instead of treating our seniors in this way our government should be embracing them, meeting their needs and showing them the gratitude they deserve. After all Australia was built upon them. To-days generation owes much to their hard work and sacrifices. Shame on you Mr Barnett/Abbott. You will not be remembered for icons but for the fact that you dishonoured, degraded and demoralized those who enabled you to enjoy the wealth and comforts that you do to-day.

I could not have said it any better. Ms Cross is in *Hansard* for the rest of her life and beyond. Mr Hanigan from Lakelands says —

1. WA needs to stand up more strongly against Abbot's GST cuts to this state!

I think we all agree with that —

2. Barnett is most unfair making seniors pay for his budget shortfall.

He also says —

What about our miners making big \$'s??

T. and V. McGovern say, “After all the belt tightening, what comes next? Noose tightening.”

Mr Lister from Mandurah says —

Liberals always take from the poor, never the rich to make up for there blunders.

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He does have a very nice postscript —

Keep up the good work Mr Templeman!

Thank you, Mr Lister. Mr McArdle from San Remo says —

After a lifetime of work and planning for a retirement, it is very difficult to manage if the government takes money away from you. It is too late to try to get employment to supplement the pension. “How can you plan for this”.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have hundreds of responses to read, but I will not read them all. I just want to give members a theme. I asked these people for an email address but some of them said that they cannot afford a computer, which is real; it is a fact. Ms Bickley from Coodanup says —

Sorry we are still living, according to the Liberal Gov we are suppose to be dead at 50.

Colin Barnett should never been voted in. He is nothing but —

I do not know about this bit either.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Perhaps you should not use it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is not the “I” word, but she says —

He is nothing but a idiot. It’s the Pensioner who has to suffer, we are battling to make ends meet now. Why should we suffer. I have been paying tax since I was 14.

I know Ms Bickley. She is a great Australian woman.

Dr A.D. Buti: Does she have enough blankets to keep her warm?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: She is a great Australian woman. She is an older lady, so she is one of that generation of remarkable Australians who have seen remarkable stuff throughout their lives and made a great contribution to the fabric of our nation. The trouble with this government is that it takes a little slice here and makes a little cut there and then says that there will be a bit of pain for some. However, it does not realise—this is what I have tried to say on a number of occasions, particularly to some of the new termers—that these very people not only remember what happens, but also are part of what we sometimes call the chattering class, so they talk. When they talk, they are forceful and when they make up their mind about certain things, they tell everyone; they tell their family members, their neighbours, their friends and the people in their social groups. When they start steamrolling along, that is when the guys and ladies opposite are in trouble, because they are almost unstoppable.

Ms Creasey of Dudley Park says —

Now we are old, after working all of our years, paying in for our twilight years, you are going to stop it. You have no right to do this, as it is our money, not yours, you get too much money anyway.

I will finish with two final comments. Mrs Stocks of Dudley Park, which I think is in the member for Dawesville’s electorate, says —

Not impressed with Barnett Liberal Government.

There are so many homeless which is only going to increase with pensioners joining them. Such a shame to see the “lucky country” in such disaray.

Finally, Mr Ray Ashby from Mandurah says —

Barnett/Abbott gov’ts are very narrow minded. We seniors are one of the few generations who will have paid taxes for the duration of their full working life.

There are many more responses. A number of them indicated that they were Liberal voters but will change their vote next time. However, that is not really the point. The point is that this motion seeks to highlight to the government that people are hurting. It is all very well to have wonderful monuments that it can say are tributes to itself, but when those monuments do not deliver outcomes for people who are hurting and are experiencing difficulty in trying to make their budgets add up at the end of the month and the government stops listening—I think this government stopped listening a long time ago—as the late former member for South Perth, Hon Phil Pental, said many a time in the chamber in his deep resonating voice, “You will rue the day.” Some members opposite will rue the day that they followed like lambs this Premier, on whom some continue to lavish with unbelievably brown-nosing comments. I have never heard the like in all my life. It will be to their detriment, because he does not care about them. He has an exit plan. Most of us are not on the superannuation scheme that he is on. Do not be tricked when he goes into the party room and says how

wonderfully the government is doing. That is not what the people are saying. We on this side of the house are going to work like billyo to make sure that we are sitting on that side of the house next time. We will listen constantly and bring to this Parliament the concerns of the people in our electorates. We will not just lavish praise on the Premier, who really does not care a hoot about his own lot because he has an exit plan, although, with some of the contenders, his exit plan is looking a bit shaky. Some of the contenders are looking a bit shaky. We have the new Minister for Transport —

Dr A.D. Buti: The one-per-center.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, the one-per-center. He needs everything to be scripted. I reckon that every morning he practices all his lines before he comes to Parliament. He is not doing too good a job and that is why I think a few people are thinking that some members will have to hold off retiring at the next election, such as the member for Kalamunda. I have heard that even the member for Dawesville has been asked to stand again and save the Liberal Party.

I digress. Those are just some of the words of the people of Mandurah, and they reflect the words of many, many thousands of pensioners, seniors and people on low incomes in Western Australia. The government needs to listen, because if it does not, people will hurt more, and, indeed, it will be to the detriment of the Liberal–National government at the next election.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [5.49 pm]: I also rise to contribute to the motion before the house. It is interesting to listen to what the member for Mandurah has read out and the very heartfelt concerns expressed by his constituents, many of whom had been Liberal voters. Given that the Premier has been involved in breaking many promises since the last election, we really should not be surprised about his treatment of seniors. We remember in the previous Parliament he said that when it is cold, people should not worry about using the heater and should get another blanket. He said that people should not worry about how cold they are because having another blanket should do. What about his statement about people not needing air conditioning and that it is not a life-and-death matter? It probably is not a life-and-death matter, but it is okay if someone lives near the coast in the western suburbs, such as Cottesloe, with the beautiful breeze coming off the Indian Ocean —

Mr J.R. Quigley: For the elderly it is a life-and-death matter.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member for Butler is right; it is a life-and-death issue for the elderly. I was trying to be kind to the Premier, but I should know that I should not do that. If I give his comments a silver lining, I will mislead the Parliament. For someone in a one-bedroom apartment in Armadale, for instance, or any of the eastern suburbs, there is no sea breeze in the afternoon. It is 35 degrees out there today; that is nothing compared with what we get in late January and early February. For the leader of the state to say that we do not need air conditioning shows that he is completely out of touch and has no concerns about how the elderly are feeling and struggling.

Often it is said that we can judge a society by the way it treats its young and its elderly. If that is the measure for the way we treat our seniors, taking the examples set by the Barnett Liberal–National government would not be a very good assessment of the compassion and civility of the Western Australian community. At every turn the government has disadvantaged the elderly and those who are less able to protect themselves from the increases in utility prices and decreases in benefits. The elderly are unable to accommodate those challenges. On top of the Barnett government’s uncaring nature and strategy towards elderly people, the federal Abbott government also does not care, as was relayed in the comments by the member for Mandurah’s constituents. If money has to be found, it is found by taxing the elderly or cutting their benefits.

A lot has been said in the past couple of weeks about the debt of the state of Western Australia. The Premier’s solution for that is to try to hit with budgetary measures the people who are least able to afford to be hit. Rather than attacking his vanity projects, he seeks to attack those who can least afford to stand up for themselves. The football stadium is an interesting issue. I had a conversation with someone in the Australian Football League industry and was told that although it may appear to be a very good stadium, the cost of it is absurd. Much of that money could have been saved by following the Langoulant review’s recommendations about where we should put the football stadium. I think the first two options were Kitchener Park or the renovation of Subiaco Oval. The money saved could have been invested in giving our elderly a more comfortable existence.

As many of us who have the fortune of our parents still being alive can attest to, seniors are doing it very tough and there does not seem to be any light at the end of the tunnel. The Premier does not talk at all about seeking to assist seniors. Any measures that are made in regard to seniors are further attacks on seniors. Coupled with the federal strategy for seniors, the state government has shown a complete lack of concern and care for seniors, and not only in this term. As we all know, the Barnett government has been an absolute disaster since it won a mammoth victory in March 2013. As far as I can remember, from the time that the Premier was elected as Premier in 2008, he has shown no empathy for, or capacity to understand, the concerns of the elderly—none

whatsoever. Some ministers have occasionally implemented policies to assist seniors in our society, but nothing has come out of the mouth of the Premier to show that he understands the concerns of seniors.

I do not want to take my contribution any further because the comments that have been read out by the member for Mandurah reflect the comments that many seniors in the electorate of Armadale have relayed to my office and to me. I do not understand how the Premier, who is an intelligent individual, appears to completely misunderstand that the seniors of Western Australia are struggling under his leadership and the decisions that he makes day in, day out. His prioritisation of his vanity projects over the more important issue of making sure that the state of Western Australia accords the appropriate benefits to seniors who have worked for many, many years and have paid their taxes; many would have served in the armed forces —

[Interruption.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Many of them would not know how to use a mobile phone. The member for Mandurah mentioned that some seniors cannot afford to purchase modern technology, which is incredibly important. One thing that is well understood and a major concern with trying to devise policies for the ageing population of Western Australia is the isolation that many seniors feel. They do not necessarily have the ability to purchase computers and various information technology devices, and that increases their isolation.

Mr D.A. Templeman: They cut the First Click program.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is right. Was that by the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering?

Mr A.J. Simpson: No, that's commerce.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will give that to the minister, but it was still done by the Barnett government. The inability of many elderly people to have the economic purchasing power to engage with computers is coupled with public transport always being a low priority of any conservative government. It is simply absurd that the Minister for Transport is trying to attack the Labor Party, which is a party of public transport. The Labor Party did not close down the major railway line in Western Australia; the Liberal Party closed the Fremantle line. The Liberal Party did not build a major railway line in Perth; a Labor government built the Mandurah line. If I am correct, the extension to Butler is the first additional line ever laid down by a conservative government in Western Australia, and they could not even get that right.

The member for Butler can relay to the house the nightmare of the vibrations visited on his constituents who live along the Butler line. Member for Butler, I assume that some of those people are also in the senior category?

Mr J.R. Quigley: Very much so. That is the main reason they brought it in under budget. They did it on the cheap and made my constituents pay the long-term price.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is right, member for Butler. I was very surprised looking at the record of the Barnett government and how it has blown the budget that it was able build a line—a small extension, may I add—under budget. We know why it was under budget; as the member said, it was because the government did not do the proper investigation, engineering and construction to ensure that residents along that line would not suffer. Imagine a person living along the Butler line having to endure vibrations in their living room or even in their bedroom as various trains go past day and night. The Barnett government has a massive fail for the way it has treated and spoken about the elderly. For the Premier to say to elderly people, “Just get another blanket if you are cold” and “You don't need air-conditioning” attests to the fact that he does not care, he does not understand and he has no empathy. That attitude is reflected in his government's policies and the damage he continues to do to the living standards of the elderly. If members opposite cannot look after the elderly and seniors of Western Australia, they do not deserve to be in control of the treasury bench.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [6.01 pm]: I rise to support the member for Girrawheen's motion. This motion resonates strongly in my electorate of Gosnells. The motion condemns the Barnett government for the impact its mismanagement of the state budget is having on seniors and vulnerable people in the community. There is no doubt that people in my electorate are finding it harder and harder to hold together their household budgets. These people have budgets framed around fixed incomes and outgoings—services and utility bills—that are anything but fixed. Their outgoings are increasing and changing all the time. The only consistency is that they are going upwards. These bills and annual budgets change; whether they are bills for electricity, water, transport or accommodation, they are all going upwards. That is the only consistency that seniors in my electorate can identify. It is a daunting prospect for these people. They face the challenge of living on fixed incomes and things have to be sacrificed. Initially, holidays are sacrificed. They cut back on time spent visiting relatives who may live on the eastern seaboard or overseas. The frequency that seniors can enjoy overseas trips has dropped right back.

But it is much worse than that. To make their budgets balance and ends meet, these people have to cut back on the essentials of life. They are cutting back on purchasing nutritious food. I will go into that in a bit more detail.

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They are cutting back on entertainment—even trips to the local cafe to meet with other seniors. Those sorts of things are being cut back as well. It goes to show that the Barnett government's budget presented in May has had some very serious consequences; it has caused a serious decline in the quality of seniors' and vulnerable people's lives in the Gosnells electorate and I suspect in most other electorates. It is unfair. People in their senior years are likely to be preoccupied with their health and although they want to keep in touch with their families—hear about the latest from their grandchildren and children and find out what they are doing—so often their day-to-day routines are shaped around the requirements of scheduled appointments with medical professionals. Sometimes those appointments seem to occupy at least half the day by the time they get to the consultant's rooms, take the advice, get the medication and try to work out how to schedule the advice into their daily routine. The constant grind of dealing with health concerns is a serious issue for seniors. People need to be able to focus on their health. They do not need to have all these household budgetary problems thrust upon them, causing them extra stress and strain. That is the last thing that people dealing with health concerns want.

It is hard enough for someone to find out how their weekly budget will allow them to get to a sporting venue or see a musical performance once every couple of months—some sort of light entertainment. It is just not fair for people with the complication of health complaints and the problem of managing a tighter and tighter household budget. These people cast around and wonder how they can manage their household budgets better, but also keep their lives interesting and fun and ensure that they remain socially active. These people then have to work out how this government can do its vanity projects, such as the stadium and Elizabeth Quay, in which huge amounts of money have been expended, yet they are left out in the cold struggling to pay household bills on a fixed income. That seems grossly unfair and it is an issue that people are raising with me more and more. I have had many discussions about the new football stadium with people in my electorate from overseas, particularly the United Kingdom, who raise the issue of how stadiums are funded in other jurisdictions in other countries. They point out that in the UK it is the clubs that pay for the stadiums, not the taxpayers. They find it extraordinary that \$1 billion that could have been applied to helping their household budgets by keeping utility prices reasonable is going toward the construction of a stadium. They do not understand why that is the case.

Seniors often raise the Elizabeth Quay project with me. They tell me that they cannot imagine that there would be anything affordable for them at Elizabeth Quay or how they would be able to go there. They are much happier thinking about going to their local cafe where there are no transport problems and they can meet people who live in their community. That is where we have made a mistake. I think the vulnerability that seniors are facing is because this government has created vanity projects that have sucked money out of many other areas and it has failed to put money out in the suburbs where people live. Seniors in Gosnells and Thornlie would like to be able to feel that their budgets are manageable. Member for Perth.

Ms E. Evangel: Have a look at the plans. There will be lots of public open space and free activities within the area.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Member, in Gosnells, people want to be able to afford to live. It is wonderful to be able to go down to public open space. Yes, of course, they can go and do that. But their budgets are so tight that after they have been to the hospital and paid for their medication and anticipated the dreadful idea of the federal government's \$7 general practitioner charge, they do not have the money to pay for those very basic things that the member and I take for granted, such as those utility charges for example.

We should bear in mind that we have seen a 77 per cent increase in electricity prices. People are really struggling to meet those price hikes.

I wish to quote from a petition that I have circulated. I held a seniors' forum in Thornlie recently to which the Leader of the Opposition was kind enough to come with Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson. People flocked to sign this petition. The wording that caught their eye was —

... the cuts to seniors' benefits like the rego rebate cut, —

I do not hear that mentioned enough. People who get around in cars have had a huge hike in their transport costs. There used to be a rebate on registration plates but that rebate has gone. The petition continues —

together with the increase in prices such as 90% increases in water charges and electricity up 77% and then further attacks like the pension indexation fiddle, never mind the planned GP visit tax, these are devastating on Seniors in Thornlie and Gosnells.

I think almost everyone who came to the seniors' forum, even the odd Liberal Party plant who was sent along and dutifully noted things down and recorded the key points from the event, signed this petition. That in itself is remarkable. People were very keen to sign the petition as a means of recording their frustration with the present situation.

Mr P. Abetz interjected.

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Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Were some of the member for Southern River’s branch members at the event?

Mr P. Abetz: They didn’t sign it, though.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: But they did come along.

Mr P. Abetz: They did report back very well.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: That is good. I am glad that they were able to record events or take notes. I am not sure what the procedure is for seniors these days and whether they prefer to just take notes or use their iPhones, if they are that way inclined, to record the dialogue and get the sense of the occasion that way. It is good to know that they are keeping an eye on us.

At the event were people from Manna Inc, a very worthy organisation that runs a Foodbank-type operation that provides meals to people who are struggling. They are finding that an increasing percentage of their customer base are seniors who are phoning up in desperation because their household budget has been cut so much that they have had to slash the amount of money that they spend on food. They are feeling hungry, just for the basics—for things such as pasta and tuna. They are missing out. The member for Victoria Park runs a tuna can drive. That sort of thing is so appreciated and needed. John and Bev Lowe from Manna Inc provide that service to the community, to people who are homeless and now, increasingly, to seniors. It is a tremendous effort.

I have spoken to the Country Women’s Association, which is very active in the Thornlie and the Gosnells area. The Country Women’s Association—“chicks with attitude”, as they like to be known—also provide a lot of support and companionship for people in their senior years who perhaps do not have the money to go to the cinema on a weekly basis. The CWA gives people the opportunity to come together and enjoy some companionship. I put it to the house that people should be able to do something like a CWA activity in addition to those other things that so many of us take for granted, such as the occasional trip to the theatre, the opportunity to see a light musical or to join other seniors at the excellent events run by the City of Gosnells, such as Morning Melody that occurs on a monthly basis at the Don Russell Performing Arts Centre. That sort of thing is essential. The Gosnells community men’s shed provides that sort of service. That is another outlet. It is a very active club that is in its early stages but it is going from strength to strength. I acknowledge the support of the member for Southern River. It is coming along very well. I think the opening date for the men’s shed is still to be determined but the shell is there; the outside structure is magnificent.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Is it a good match with the homestead?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is a great match for the homestead. We should bear in mind that the founding members of the men’s shed initially met in the Lewis homestead, which was going to rack and ruin. It is fantastic that we were able to achieve a heritage preservation outcome by forming this men’s shed. The founding members came together and developed or grew on the various skills in the group and at the same time were able to carry out the necessary organising and formed a committee to build the men’s shed. That is nearing completion and it is moving towards an official opening date.

The point is that people are turning to men’s sheds, the CWA and groups such as Manna Inc because seniors do not have any money in their pockets for recreation. It means that these things are incredibly important. I support seniors being active in these things in the local community. People should not have to turn to organisations in a state of distress. They should be able to engage with community organisations off the front foot. They should be able to do things they want to do as part of their local community engagement, not turn to these organisations because of the financial stresses and strains that they are facing.

Other members have quoted several examples of seniors in their electorate. Mr Dave Eastley, one of my constituents from Corfield Street in Gosnells, put his case plainly to me recently. I think Dave is 65 years old. He is getting on. He would love to retire but he cannot afford to. He has one of those Toyota Coaster buses. He has some young children—I think they are grandchildren—and a couple of foster children that he and his wife look after. They do a fantastic job. They are patching up this old Coaster bus, trying to keep it running because it is the only way that they can get around. I can almost hear Dave when he comes towards my office. I hear the clunking of the muffler and exhaust pipe as it bounces along Spencer Road and then turns into the car park. I can almost see the sparks flying as bits drop off it. He manages to keep that old bus going. He recently said to me—

“I can’t live on the pension. I’ve tried to cut down on work but the price of everything keeps on going up and up and up. Especially power prices. We’ve got those things on the roof and we’re still paying them off every month. But even so the bills are just ridiculous. I’m having to get my bus license back now.

Mr Eastley is looking to become a professional bus driver. He has his Coaster bus but that is for family purposes. He continued —

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I'm 65 so I thought I could stop having to drive people round with a F Class, so in April or so I gave it up. And now I've got to pay Department of Transport a couple of hundred dollars —

That is his F-class licence —

to get it back and trawl round Police Stations to prove what demerits I've got. They know what demerits I've got!

I am sure they know; there is a computer system that shows perfectly well what demerits Mr Eastley would have, if he has any at all. I continue —

All they have to do is reissue a car with F Class added. What a tort. I'm having to pay them so I can go back to work to be able to pay the bills. What a state of affairs."

That is the situation faced by my constituent, Mr Eastley. It is typical. People have to make decisions and change their plans at such a stage in their life. They have been planning their retirement at age 65 but they find that they cannot afford to retire at that age any longer so their family plans for reunions and travel are thrown out the window. That is grossly unfair on these people. That is why I fully endorse the motion of the member for Girrawheen. It is unfair that people have to deal with this Barnett government budget hardship that forces them to make huge sacrifices to their and their families' quality of life.

MS A.R. MITCHELL (Kingsley — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.20 pm]: I rise to say that I certainly do not agree with the motion. Much of my speech tonight will be about the part of the motion that refers to vulnerable people and not the part that deals with seniors, because my competent and eloquent colleague the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering will deal with an incredible number of matters in his response to this motion. I wish to speak about those people in the community who may be in a situation that is not always easy for them. Many of them may also be finding life difficult. Last week was national Mental Health Week and on Monday this week I had the pleasure of attending and speaking at the launch of Anti-Poverty Week and the release of the report produced by the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, entitled "Falling through the cracks: Poverty and disadvantage", prepared by Professor Duncan and Rebecca Cassells. The report deals with the very important matter of people who find themselves in some level of poverty and examines a serious level of poverty and how to work within that. I am proud of the amazing job the Barnett Liberal-National government has done and what it has achieved in the last few years in an area that people very often do not associate with being part of a successful Liberal-led government. That is the sort of thing I am going to talk about before I come back to a couple of other matters.

I will refer to a couple of areas in which I have received information from the Treasurer. The report states that a key way of keeping people out of poverty, or out of low income levels, is through education, and that if people have sufficient quality education, they have more chance of earning an income, and with an income, people can help themselves so that they can be in a better position. Education is not always perfect, but it does make a difference. I have received some figures from the Treasurer. I know members have heard them before, but I am going to repeat them so that we get the message across. There has been a 40 per cent increase in the education budget since 2008-09 and \$4.6 billion will be spent on public education services in 2014-15. I also have responsibility in the area of mental health. There has been a 68 per cent increase in the mental health services budget since 2008-09. Those are the people who are vulnerable in our community. There has been an increase of 77 per cent in the child protection budget since 2008-09. In disability services, there has been an increase of 101 per cent. Those are real figures. They are real amounts of money that go directly to people, not into bureaucracies. Some money will go into non-government organisations to be spent on the people who need it. We are proud of that. We do not build agencies or that sort of service; we make sure that the money goes to where it is needed—that is, to the people in our community. I repeat again that this government has significantly increased funding in areas that assist people in vulnerable positions in our community. It is those people that the government is putting work and effort into.

I want to go back to a couple of comments I made on Monday night. Although education is not directly my responsibility, there was general agreement that if people could get—I am not going to say a basic education—a good education, there is a much better chance that they will get an income. This is one of the things that we sometimes do not talk about much because there is so much going on in education that we are all very proud of. I will refer to a couple of things that I believe will have an impact on people being able to have a good education that will then enable them to seek employment and minimise their chances of being vulnerable in the community. I will start with what everyone knows; that is, we need to invest and get in early in a child's development to make sure they have positive learning experiences. We have a plan to set up 16 parent and child centres so that children and services are located in the one place—the school. Speech pathology, health checks, checks for sensory deprivation and those types of activities will all be conducted at the one site. The seventh parent and child centre opened today. I have been to the opening of a couple of those centres, and they are great.

However, what is important is that parents become involved in the process that starts at preschool and sometimes years 1 and 2. Often parents ask for help with their older sons and daughters as well. It is important that parents are involved, because, as a gentleman said the other day, unfortunately, in some circumstances, young people do not want to attend school because they see no purpose in it because no-one in their family works; they do not understand what a working family is about. Some children come from families in which no-one works. That is an unfortunate situation. I am not making a judgement here, but some parents do not know how to help their children in the learning process. Now they are able to become part of that process at a very early age. They are learning how to be a parent, to help their children in their education and, at the same time, make sure that their child's health is such that they will be able to focus and concentrate and be interested in the education process.

Something that goes along with that is the new funding model that will see more finances going into primary school education, so that we can work in that area to ensure that the basis for an education is sound. That basis for an education means that they can go on with their education and come through the educative process. Of course, another thing I want to mention is that as of next year, every student who leaves school will have a qualification. At the moment, a number of people get to the end of 12 years of school and walk away with nothing that allows them to go to a certain place. Now students will come out with at least a certificate II qualification, which means that we will have made a difference and they will be able to get work. Having employment means having an income and, hopefully, that minimises the number of people who find themselves in a vulnerable position in our community. We are trying not to just hand out money; we are trying to help people set up their future. We are starting with young people. I have talked about young people, because it is important that young people start off with a very positive base from which to move forward. Many people in our community did not get that opportunity; things were not right for them and they often find themselves in difficult positions. I will talk about those people in a minute.

On Monday night almost everyone in attendance was floored when a gentleman suggested that we do what they do in Brazil—that is, give poor people a certain amount of money. Most people just did not know how to respond to that suggestion because they know that is not the way to make a difference in our community. Unfortunately, I do not think he had actually been to Brazil; I think he had read something. Those of us who have been to Brazil know that it is not exactly the way to deal with things. I was very disappointed to hear someone say that we should just give people money to solve the problem. We need to build people, build communities and have people functioning in our community. Words I use in mental health a lot are “recovery” and “functioning”. We want people in our society functioning and recovering—I use “recovering” in a very broad sense—so that they can participate. We are working on making a positive difference for young people, but we are also dealing with people in other stages of their lives who might find themselves in vulnerable positions.

I will talk about housing, because one of the other things that came through in the report was that housing in Western Australia, as we all know, is not cheap. But for someone in the position of renting for the rest of their life, that would take a considerable amount of the money available to them. I am not sure whether the Minister for Housing will speak today, but just in case he does not, I wish to make a few comments on that. I know we have all heard about the state affordability strategy, but do we really understand it? The Department of Housing had a plan that by 2020 it would have constructed 20 000 accommodation units for people to be able to afford to purchase and get into. In 2014—the minister mentioned the figure today—16 500 units of accommodation have already been built and are occupied. On Monday night I was talking to one of the other panellists who was representing the Smith Family and he mentioned the Keystart loans and how wonderful they are for the people able to take them up; getting people into their own accommodation makes such a difference. He was talking to me about a lady who had said she could not save because she did not have enough money, but with some guidance and help she started off saving, I think, \$12 a month, then it became \$12 a fortnight, then \$12 a week, and before too long she was able to apply for a Keystart loan and got into a house. I have residents in my electorate who, once upon a time, were in social housing; they now no longer are because they have bought their own place—they have bought the house they have been living in through the Department of Housing. There are a number of positive ways that people are engaging with others to minimise the risk of being in rental accommodation for a long time. But at the same time, what we are providing with social housing is very good.

Of course, the other extreme is that a lot of people find themselves homeless. It can be young people through to older people—some seniors are in homeless situations. That is a little frightening, and some of us cannot understand that. Unfortunately, the definition of homelessness is quite varied and diverse, and what is now considered homeless is quite different from what it once was. I want to mention a few of the places that have been introduced in the last couple of years that are making a difference, once again, to people who find themselves in this position. They do not just give them a bed for the night and perhaps a bowl of soup, but they make sure we help those people get back into society, functioning and recovering. Entrypoint Perth is a new homeless referral and emergency assistance centre that began operating this year in a section of the community;

it is operated by Centrecare. At the moment, on average, it speaks to approximately 350 people a month. It is anticipated that this service will extend across the metropolitan area from February 2015.

I will also give members some examples of the increased accommodation capacity that has been made available in the past 12 months. Beacon is an inner-city service that provides accommodation and support to single men. It is now offering places for up to 102 homeless men. The interim night shelter for Tom Fisher House is a joint partnership between the state government and the St Vincent de Paul Society that was officially opened in April 2014. It now accommodates eight chronically homeless men over the age of 18. I think one of the most exciting projects is in the member for Perth's electorate—Foyer Oxford. It provides accommodation for young people aged 18 to 25 who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It was officially opened in March this year. The service accommodates 98 young people, and 88 of the places have been funded by the department. A number of the beds at Foyer Oxford are available to young parents, because sometimes they find themselves in vulnerable positions. Twenty per cent of the beds and places to stay are for those who find themselves leaving care. When someone reaches the age of 18 they are no longer in care, and sometimes that transition can be quite hard. There are places at Foyer Oxford for young people leaving care or those who have experienced or been involved in the child protection system. That is fabulous, because, as I said, it is not just about providing a bed; they can go into education, get their health checked and have support services around them. Those things are very important.

Geographe House is a refuge in Busselton that opened this year with accommodation for up to six women and their children who have escaped domestic violence. Derby Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation commenced operations on 7 September 2014, and will accommodate up to 54 people in both individual and family units. It is designed specifically for Aboriginal people who are visiting Derby. I know they are trying to increase those opportunities around the state. There is planning for a new refuge for women and children in the Ellenbrook area as well. These are the sorts of places we are putting in, and I say again that it is not just about giving someone a bed and perhaps a bowl of soup, although that is most important; it is about the total recovery and total reintegration of people back into the community. Most of those people did not choose to be homeless; most of those people did not think they would be homeless. We have to make sure that we assist those people, health-wise, physically and mentally. There is no doubt that if people have security in their accommodation or a safe place to sleep on a regular basis with support services, they will find it easier to move back into society.

I have to say that one of the most unfortunate situations for people with a disability is that many do find themselves near the poverty line; many are vulnerable people. Because their chances of achieving the income levels of other people are not so great, I think that needs to be worked on in our society so that businesses and the public sector see a place for people with disability to be employed. People with a disability also often have to deal with home modifications, additional medication and transport costs, and the cost of necessary supports and aids.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Often that disability affects not only the person with disability, but also their families and carers. They are often more likely to rent rather than own their own home; therefore, those homes are not always close to places of work, transport and family and friends. I have to say once again that the Department of Housing and the Disability Services Commission have been absolutely fantastic. In 2011-12, the state government committed \$95.7 million as part of a combined capital bid to build or buy 169 homes for people with disability over three years. I am very pleased to tell members that the program exceeded the targets, with more than 200 disability housing projects being programmed through this project. What is even more pleasing is that they have sourced another \$8 million that will continue to come up with community disability housing in 2014 and 2015. No, it is not enough yet and there is plenty to do, but it is a good start that is making a difference in the lives of people with disability. I have had the pleasure of meeting a number of people from many of those organisations, and they are just so passionate and committed to what they do and how they do it. I was at the second-largest employment agency for people with disability in Western Australia on Monday morning. It runs 10 businesses that employ people with disability, and it is looking to expand, so it needs bigger premises and things like that. But it is a credit to many of the organisations that are going above and beyond their normal core work to ensure that people with disability have the chance to have their own income and sense of belonging.

Of course, I quickly mentioned mental health and drug and alcohol services, and there is no doubt that if we put drugs and alcohol and mental health together, we invariably find people living in vulnerable situations within our society. There is a lot to be done there; we can use the words "recover", "integration" and "functioning" very confidently and I think those sorts of things are very important. It is sad, and it is something that we have to do better. I think it is definitely agreed that people who need drug and alcohol services often also need accommodation services, and sometimes the integration of information is not as free-flowing as we would like it to be. Yes, we have to be careful about the confidentiality of people's information, but if we can also have

a smoother and more integrated system of information provision, it could make it easier for the person to be serviced through a one-stop shop. We could then be more successful in our outcomes.

I want to mention a couple of things in the mental health budget this year. We are expanding the public mental health service; this week we had a code yellow, but I can tell members that that is a rarity with more beds coming on. The focus on mental health is not to get to the acute stage, the stage at which people have to attend a hospital; we want to make sure that we intervene and help people early on. We need to make much more use of the community and get people involved with treatment so that we can minimise the number of people who find themselves in the acute mental health system. I see the member for Kimberley; we are very, very conscious of making sure that services for Aboriginal people with mental health issues are expanded and increased. We want to have sub-acute community-based mental health services. At the same time, we want to expand services in the legal system such as youth and adult court diversion services that provide real assistance to many people who find themselves in situations that they do not know how to deal with—they know that they do not want to be there, but they have been caught up in a world that many of us do not have to deal with. That is really quite eye-opening.

In respect of suicide prevention, once again, people in vulnerable positions often find themselves at a point that they just do not know how to get out of, so we are making sure that we have very sound suicide prevention strategies in place and we are expanding the provision of drug and alcohol services. The government is doing much in this field, particularly for vulnerable people in our communities. As I have said before, some of our seniors find themselves in that position as well.

My esteemed colleague has returned to the chamber; I am not sure whether he will follow me or if someone else will speak next, but I can assure the chamber that the government provides very sound and strong support for people in our community who find themselves in vulnerable positions.

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park) [6.42 pm]: I too rise to speak to the motion —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for the impact its mismanagement of the state budget is having on seniors and vulnerable people in our community.

I commend the member for Girraween for bringing this motion to the house. I have been particularly critical of the way in which this government has managed the finances of this state. I have said, year after year, that eventually there would be a financial reckoning for the Barnett government's mismanagement and that the era of committing to projects and programs would eventually have to be paid for, and now they all have to be paid for. My Liberal–National colleagues can wander blindly, thinking that the day of financial reckoning will come after they have left Parliament, that their focus is on the second or third term and that payment will come after the commitments have been made, but that day of financial reckoning has been dramatically brought forward courtesy of the iron ore price. Yesterday the Premier finally said in Parliament that the issue was the government's recurrent expenditure; he finally admitted that that is the issue that he has ignored year after year. Now, after a plunging iron ore price that was warned about in every budget's statement of risk, that financial reckoning has come about. It was not a surprise, or it should not have been a surprise. Every single year, the budget always states to watch for a falling iron ore price. Every day we stand in this place and talk about the volatility of our revenue base, yet when that very volatility occurs, the government stands stunned, unsure as to how it could have got into this incredible situation. The time of financial reckoning has come.

Last week we saw a panicked response from the government as it tried to find savings in capital works and in the current account, as it desperately tried to cobble together a debt reduction strategy to save the Premier from his own statement about never leading a government that delivers a deficit. In fact, it was the reverse; he said that he would lead only a government that presided over surpluses. Now, looming dramatically before him at the end of his political career is the debt-and-deficit Liberal government we will no doubt see.

We have seen some small, incremental steps over the last couple of years, targeted particularly at seniors, and that is what I want to focus on. I note that the motion refers to seniors and vulnerable people. When a government spends big and assumes that the state's revenue is going to continue rising as it has done over the last decade, that assumption is eventually going to bite it; and that is what has happened. That is why we have seen the 2014–15 Barnett budget and the 2014–15 Abbott budget specifically target seniors, despite the election promises made by both the Premier and the Prime Minister.

The member for Gosnells went through some of the experiences he has had with his constituents, and I have had similar experiences. I am fortunate enough to chair the Victoria Park Seniors Centre and I am involved in the Harold Hawthorne Centre and SwanCare, which are all in my electorate, and I have been overwhelmed by the response of many seniors to the Barnett and Abbott budgets. As many other members have no doubt also done, I thought I would helpfully put together a newsletter for my seniors to explain exactly what Colin Barnett and Tony Abbott were doing to them through these budgets. It is the responsibility of members of Parliament to

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explain to their constituents exactly what their governments are doing to them. Members will be pleased to know that I pointed out to my seniors that the Barnett government's budgetary attack on seniors will impact only on those seniors who are on a WA Seniors Card; are in receipt of a pension; own their own home; drive a car; catch public transport; pay water rates; visit a GP; or intend to apply for the federal government's senior's Health Care Card. The Abbott and Barnett budgets will not affect those seniors to whom those categories do not apply.

I also helpfully advised my seniors about the cost-of-living increases under the Barnett government, and I included a little slip on the back of the newsletter—paid for by me—asking them to respond and to let me know what impact the Barnett government's budget was having on them. I will go through some of those, and I know that the member for Mandurah has done something similar with his concerned senior constituents. But, firstly I want to talk about two very interesting reports that appeared today. One of them told me that Australia is the world's richest country; that information came from a Credit Suisse report. We are the world's richest largely because of property; we have a very high percentage of property owners. The high Australian dollar has also helped with that. On one level, when one reads this, one might assume that things are pretty good in Australia. However, on the same day that Credit Suisse told us that we are the world's richest country, *The West Australian* today ran an article on page three titled, "Hungry WA kids turned away". I know that the member for Jandakot, the Minister for Corrective Services, read this with great interest. Both of us enjoyed the breakfast this morning where Foodbank launched this report, acknowledging that we are in the middle of Anti-Poverty Week. The newspaper report states —

The annual Foodbank hunger report reveals it gave food relief to 51,300 people a month in the State, up from 43,000 last year.

Agencies reported that an average of 8841 people, almost half of them children, were turned away each month because of not enough food and resources—down from a monthly average of 16,000 last year.

Foodbank WA chief executive Greg Hebble said demand for food had increased almost 20 per cent in the last quarter of the past financial year and the "hunger gap" was disturbing.

On the same day that we read a report telling us that we are the world's richest country, we also find out that we have a significant problem—that the cost of living in our city, our state and our country is causing an increasing hunger gap, as described by the CEO of Foodbank, Greg Hebble. He is quite right. I know that members who have got to their feet to defend the Barnett government's cuts to seniors are getting the same feedback that I am getting—that seniors are struggling. They are struggling with the most basic things, as is outlined by Mr Hebble of Foodbank—the provision of food, whether for themselves or for their children. We have heard other members talk about heating and air conditioning. That is exactly the feedback I got. I refer to a few of the feedback slips I received from some of my senior constituents. My newsletter was very much focused on senior constituents. I want to read a few of them into *Hansard*. I will not give their names, because I have not contacted them, but I will give their suburb and whether they are male or female. I will start with what I think is one of the best. It is from a lady in East Victoria Park. Her comment to me was —

Did Colin Barnett come out of retirement just to ruin everyone else's?

That is from one of my constituents in East Victoria Park. I have that stuck up in large letters across the window of my electorate office. A large number of people stop to read it, and come into my office and talk to me about exactly what Mr Barnett has done to them. Here is another one, from St James —

Barnett & Abbott are not obviously in tune to Pensioners. Gas-Electric-Medical items we should not have to struggle to pay. No respect at all.

Somebody from Bentley Park wrote —

Colin Barnett has let the aged down.

A woman from Bentley wrote —

I am an aged pensioner. Electricity & gas is my biggest problem as it is very cold now I am worried as to the cost will rise.

That is the other thing that the Barnett government has created. Year after year we have seen significant increases and the government will not give the seniors of Western Australia a clear plan for the future, so they do not know what is coming next. The next message is from a man in Carlisle —

These actions are making life that much harder. We had hoped and planned for a better standard of retirement.

A man from St James wrote —

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The Abbott/Barnett Liberal Govts has shown what liars they are. Their attitude is absolutely despicable disgusting in their attack on pensioners, the low paid and the least well off. I will never vote for or support a Liberal Govt.

Another one comes from Lathlain —

I am deeply concerned especially on Barnett's rising costs electricity, water and gas. As my savings are fading fast especially as my wife has Alzheimer's & is in aged care which is costing me approximately between 30 to \$40,000 per year to keep her in aged care home.

From Victoria Park, in Mackie Street, just around the corner from me, a woman writes —

Am completely disgusted with Barnett's decision to cripple all us pensioners in this Budget. No respect in very degrading am extremely worried, my sole income is the Pension ... Please help us all. I have worked hard and am now 87. Very distressing.

A male from Bentley writes —

I am very concerned about the impact on pensioners. I myself am wondering if I can keep my car or sell it due to all the price increases.

I am not going to read them all, but I will finish with this one, from Gallipoli Street in Lathlain, around the corner from where I used to live. It states —

It is most upsetting and degrading to experience just how badly the Abbott and Barnett governments are treating the most vulnerable sections of our community. So hard to believe that this is the only way they seem able to finance and balance their budgets. It is a well-known fact that the Liberal Government looks after the wealthy by way of income tax allowances etc — Whilst ignoring the needy. PS this is only one quarter of the feelings we have on this budget.

Here is another one from St James —

My husband and I are disabled. No way can we afford to pay disabled parking and we're talking about selling our car but we are not physically able on public transport.

Madam Acting Speaker (Ms J.M. Freeman), you will no doubt be familiar with some of these. It goes on and on. Some have attached letters, because the space I gave them was not sufficient to write their concerns. This one from a lady I know well in Goddard Street, Lathlain, finishes off with —

I hope I live long enough to see Barnett and his bandits kicked out of office. I would then leave this planet with peace of mind.

I say to this lady that I agree; I too hope she lives long enough to see Mr Barnett and his bandits kicked out of office. These are just some of the forms that I asked my office to drop off for me here. I will finish with that great quote from the lady in East Victoria Park —

Did Colin Barnett come out of retirement just to ruin everyone else's?

On this side, when we talk about the budget, we talk about a coherent and consistent financial plan, so that we do not have to give lurching responses to seniors and vulnerable people. One minute the government gives them an entitlement, the next minute it takes it away. One year something costs this amount, and two years later it costs that amount. The government is not giving a consistent financial plan to vulnerable Western Australians, which is why that period of financial reckoning that I have talked about for years is now upon us. It is not because of any particular forthright proactive decision of the Premier, but because the price of iron ore has bottomed out. It has forced him to say in Parliament, for the first time in six years, what he should have said four years ago: we have a problem with recurrent spending. He finally woke up; the scales fell from his eyes, and he worked out that he cannot continue the way he has done over the past six years.

I do not know how long we will all be in this place, but we have a government that has arrogantly assumed that it knows best for the next Parliament and the Parliament after that. It has arrogantly assumed it can make decisions now taking up the financial capacity of future governments. What an extraordinary position! What arrogance of a government to do this! Now, when the base assumption within the Premier's mind that revenue will continue to rise so that he can continue to spend at the rate to which his government has become accustomed is clearly no longer apparent, we get these lurching policy responses. We saw last week's panic \$2 billion savings response. We get the panicked rush to flog off land, but it is not part of a coherent strategy. It will not solve anything or resolve any problems. We will be back in the same position in 12 months or two years. Ultimately, the Premier just wants to get by on the finances. He does not want to plan; he does not want to bind himself with financial constraints. He just wants to get by, making commitments and spending money. We now have this ludicrous

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situation in which a Liberal government is getting out of education and health and getting into coal and luxury apartments. What an extraordinary position we find ourselves in! The government is getting into some of the strangest asset ownerships that I have seen in some time while removing itself from the delivery of key front-line services.

I applaud the member for Girrawheen for bringing this motion on, and I want to say to members opposite that they can continue to blindly follow their leader, the member for Cottesloe, or they can start standing him up. Ultimately the problem that has been created affects all of us. The debt and emerging deficit government is a problem for us all. I intend to make it a particular problem for the Liberal Party of course, but it is a problem for us all.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
