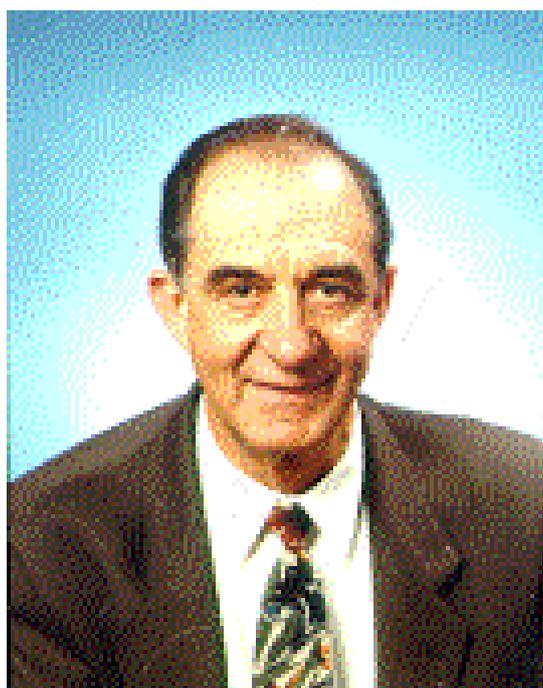




PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON MURRAY NIXON, MLC
(Member for Agricultural Region)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply — Motion

Wednesday, 2 May 2001

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 2 May 2001

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

HON M.D. NIXON (Agricultural) [5.36 pm]: I support the motion moved by Hon Ken Travers. I thank His Excellency the Governor, Lieutenant General John Sanderson, AC, for his speech. I congratulate him on the way he conducts his tasks and I extend my best wishes to him and Mrs Sanderson.

Usually at this stage the Leader of the Opposition makes his speech, but kindly on this occasion Hon Norman Moore has stepped aside, because a number of members, for one reason or another, are retiring shortly and it is an opportunity for them to have their say. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that courtesy.

All members of Parliament must retire sometime. The lucky ones choose their moment of retirement and those who are not so fortunate have it forced upon them. As a member of Parliament and a servant of the electorate, I cannot criticise the electorate. However, I am human and I hope that members give me a little latitude to make a few comments about how this situation came about.

I believe the upper House was better served when it had smaller electorates and fewer members. Under the old province system, the people in the electorates had a better chance of knowing their members; certainly, members had a better chance of knowing the people in their electorates. Overall a better situation developed than that which exists with larger electorates. In 1986, the National Party and the Labor Party supported the change to the current system. It is true to say that, although the electorates were larger, most people believed that with proportional representation the number of members would represent as near as possible the proportion of the electors that supported each party. One would expect that if one party had two-thirds of the vote, it would have two-thirds of the members, or as close to that as it was possible to achieve. Of course, that is not happening. It is interesting to note that in the recent state election, the Greens (WA) received 8 per cent of the primary vote, but that vote returned five members, or 14.7 per cent of the representation in this House. The Agricultural Region is even more disproportionate than that. In that region the Greens, with 4.57 per cent of the primary vote, received the same representation as the Liberal Party with 30 per cent, One Nation with 22 per cent, the Labor Party with 20 per cent and the National Party with 19 per cent. It is interesting to think about how this situation developed.

Another issue in the Mining and Pastoral Region is how the votes are counted, and I am sure Hon Greg Smith will comment on that at some stage.

Hon Tom Stephens: Wouldn't that be sub judice?

Hon M.D. NIXON: It is true to say that the system is not producing proportional representation and therefore it should be looked at. Some voting systems using proportional representation have what is called a "fairness clause", which states that before a party can be represented it must have a minimum number of primary votes. This is something that could be looked at. The surplus votes from the leaders of the team are handed down, and under that system more than one member can be elected from any party. That is fair and reasonable. The problem seems to be when it goes the other way and the preferences are distributed from the bottom up. It is complicated because, unlike the simple preferential voting system, the votes are transferred at different values and they go from one member to the other and back again. Unlike a normal preferential system where the votes are only counted once, under this system they tend to compound. If there are five candidates in an Assembly seat and there is no absolute majority, the one with the lowest vote goes out, his votes go to wherever, and at that stage they are not counted again. In other words, the next member out has his second preference distributed and so on, until one member has an absolute majority.

Of course, in the upper House it is a totally different situation with quotas, and candidates must get 100 per cent of a quota rather than 50 per cent of the votes. This makes the situation very complex and is one of the reasons for distortion in the system. One appropriate system could be to hand the surpluses down through the teams, more or less as they are at present, but at the end of that procedure perhaps it could become first past the post and any candidate who had more than 50 per cent of the quota would be elected. Under that system I do not think more people would have more than 50 per cent of quota than are required to fill the places because the quota would still have to be filled.

That was one little grouch I wished to voice. Obviously, that is the system under which this election was conducted. I am a three-way looser because I must admit that on three occasions I have lost and on two occasions I have won under this system. The odds are slightly against me, and it is something that should be looked at.

Another matter that disappoints me is that the One Nation party advised electors on the very day that it had to register its how-to-vote card with the Electoral Commissioner that the Liberal Party would be the beneficiary of its second preferences. One Nation went on to say that its preferences should not go to the Greens (WA) and Australian Democrats because they were non-performing parties. That went statewide at two o'clock on the day that the how-to-vote card had to be registered with the Electoral Commissioner, but by five o'clock it had been changed and the Greens had been put ahead of the Liberal Party. That, of course, is the reason I am retiring. I think this is inconsistent. When a party registers its how-to-vote card, it is only fair that it indicate to the electors where its preferences will go. One Nation certainly had a "1" in the One Nation box. There is absolutely no doubt that that party received sufficient votes to have its members elected, but it is unfortunate that those who voted One Nation were not necessarily aware where their preferences would go.

Hon J.A. Scott: Were you aware that it was not the only party to do that?

Hon M.D. NIXON: The Liberal Party usually does that; it certainly does in our electorate, but I cannot speak for all electorates. It is the usual process. If we are to have this of voting above and below the line, or preference votes or party votes, it is essential in this very complicated voting system that the electors be informed of the effect of their votes. The Agricultural Region count has more than 400 pages of calculations. I suggest that nobody in the State understands the system, and that probably includes the electoral officers. It is a very complicated system.

Hon Greg Smith is an expert. I used to say I was the expert because I had been beaten twice before, but he has caught up. He has done a crash course and is probably better informed than I am, so I will give him credit for that. A voting system should be as simple as possible; at the end of the day the electors should have an opportunity to express their views, and those views should result in the election of the candidates of their choice.

My mother, who was a very strong woman with all sorts of principles, had a saying that I could not have my sweets until I had eaten my pumpkin. I am afraid that at this stage members may have to eat a bit of pumpkin before they get to the sweets.

I leave this Parliament with quite a bit of unfinished business, because I did intend to stay on for a while. One of the things I regret is that the B milkos received less than a fair go. I refer to those who distributed milk mainly to the supermarkets and shops rather than house to house. I believe, and reports from this House have indicated, that they received less than a fair go. Every indication is that their businesses were discounted. I believe they have received some compensation, but in my view and in the view of quite a few members of this House that compensation was inadequate. The previous minister commented that he had received legal advice that he could compensate only for those products which were licensed and which were controlled, but there is no doubt that individual business people, because of the deregulation of the system, lost enormous capital value from their businesses. I believe that injustice has not been corrected. I know that the third and sixth reports of the Standing Committee on Public Administration spelt out what the committee believed was a fair solution to the problem, and recommended that the undistributed funds in the Distribution Adjustment Assistance Scheme be utilised to pay former vendors. Of course, since then the farm sector has been deregulated as well, and that may create some difficulties. The reports stated that if the legal advice was that the surplus DAAS funds could not be distributed, for whatever reason, the rules should be altered or an ex gratia payment made.

The previous minister did agree to this matter going to an independent arbitrator, and claimed that the matter was in the hands of the Ombudsman. It is certainly true that it has been in the hands of the Ombudsman for a number of years and that vendors did approach the Ombudsman, but my understanding is that the Ombudsman would not comment because he could not overrule a ministerial decision. We will be waiting a long time for the Ombudsman to make a decision.

My question without notice to the Minister for Agriculture is: As a person with a good understanding of the situation, in his new capacity will he re-examine the matter to see whether justice can be provided to this small group of people who I believe have suffered a great injustice?

Hon Kim Chance: Yes, I will. I can tell the member that I now have the Ombudsman's final report.

Hon M.D. NIXON: Another piece of business which I leave unfinished is that of property rights. Members of the Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs, and quite a few people who have given evidence to that committee, have raised all sorts of matters about the inequities in relation to property rights. Sometimes in the public interest it is necessary for the Government to resume land. Unfortunately, that must be done from time to time, and the old argument "there will be no development in my backyard" probably arises from that. However, the important principle is that if somebody's individual property rights are interfered with for the common good, the community should pay compensation for any damage. There is a wide area of difficulty in respect of private property rights.

One person who gave evidence to the Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs said that more than 120 statutes contained the power to resume land for public purposes. That is a very complicated system, and the committee is looking at what can be done to overcome it. It is interesting that a few years ago Hon Mark Nevill presented a report about the proposed reform of the process used by government agencies to resume land, and I believe it is still relevant today. One of the main recommendations was that all legislative provisions that had anything to do with property resumption should be in the one Act, and any other Act, whether it was within Main Roads or whatever, had to be in accordance with that one Act.

I believe something similar has been done in New South Wales. As I said, this is unfinished business. I will not be here to follow it through, but I implore the Parliament to accept that this matter will become more important because as the State develops more pressure will be applied to private land and property. Unless we are careful, the individual will become less significant as the community gets bigger. This issue must be addressed.

Another area that will cause immediate problems is planning. We all agree that planning needs to be done, that the community has to plan forward and that sometimes an individual's rights have to be set aside for the common good. However, this creates two problems, because until the planning process is completed, the Ministry for Planning does not have the opportunity to provide compensation. Private property rights are interfered with as soon as a line is drawn on a plan. A planning decision might result in an easement through the middle of a property to put in a power line, a water pipe, a railway line or whatever. While only a small part of the property might be resumed, it could create an enormous problem for the owners because the property may no longer be suited for the often legitimate purpose for which it was purchased.

Hon Barry House: Even a draft plan could cause this.

Hon M.D. NIXON: Yes; anything that signifies the Government's intention to interfere with someone's property rights can have an immediate effect on the value of a property. In all fairness, sometimes it works the other way: If the plan increases the value, the property owner will benefit. We need not feel sorry for that person. However, people who suffer an infringement on their property rights require some assistance. That needs to be looked at. Perhaps the Government should be prepared to buy the property for the current market value as soon as it draws a line on the map. That should happen if it is the wish of the landowner. Many landowners would not take up that option even if it were available, so it probably would not cost much. The most important thing is for the Ministry for Planning, when identifying future developments, to make an early decision so that the threat of resumption does not hang around for years. Obviously, decisions must go through the proper processes and there has to be community consultation. Overall, however, it is important that planning decisions be clear-cut and speedily implemented.

Another issue which needs to be considered and which is perhaps more difficult than legislation is the matter of regulations and policy. A matter in which I have become interested is a recent review by the Environmental Protection Authority of the Swan coastal plain lakes policy, a policy laid down in late 1993 that clearly identifies certain lake areas that should be reserved and protected. These areas represent 1 per cent of the Swan coastal plain - the area from Lancelin to Augusta. The report, which was supposed to be a review of the policy, roped in about 50 per cent of the coastal plain on the basis that it was necessary because the Federal Government is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention. There are a couple of things wrong with that. First, I consider a study that increases the defined area of wetland lakes on the Swan coastal plain from 1 per cent to 50 per cent to be a complete change of policy, not a review, particularly as such a suggestion was rejected by the previous Labor Government. I have copies of those proposals. The problem is ongoing. It is unfair because if a planning development or policy change is a burden on a property, there must be a consultation period for the recommended policy. Anyone driving past can submit an application to the effect that the land has great importance as a wetland. On the other hand, the property owner must defend his actions, as if he were guilty and must prove himself innocent. It would be grossly unfair if the proposal were to come into force. The worst feature of the review is that what it claims is in accordance with the Ramsar Convention is completely different from the definition of wetlands as spelt out in the convention. In other words, it is grossly dishonest. I suppose that these are the sorts of problems that are likely to develop when a department is given freedom without a great deal of responsibility.

A similar case is a memorandum of understanding agreed to by several agencies regarding the clearing of lands in the Agricultural Region. Supposedly, this is in accordance with a cabinet decision. One could argue whether Cabinet has the authority to override the statutes and whether something is legal if there is no regulation governing it. However, the MOU supposedly has the force of the law. The problem with this MOU is that it is not in agreement with the proposals agreed to by Cabinet. That is a tremendous worry. Once again, the bureaucracy has taken it upon itself to change the law outside Parliament. One of the great threats to come - I notice it was mentioned in the Governor's speech - is that the Environmental Protection Act is to be examined during this session. One of the changes to be made is that references to "environmental pollution" will be changed to "environmental harm". That is an all-embracing statement that will create a minefield because, as Hon Jim Scott can tell us, one of the greatest threats to the environment is cattle because they give off methane gas. Does this

mean cattle will be prohibited from eating because they might give off methane? It is a catch-all term. It could prevent people from breeding cattle and it would certainly prevent them from driving cars. It is so vague. Obviously the Bill will be considered when it is introduced but, once again, it is unfinished business. I will not be here, but I implore members to take an interest in this issue because the trouble, as I have mentioned, is that no compensation is payable for infringement and loss of property rights for the sake of the environment. That is something else I leave with the House.

Another area in which I have taken a great deal of interest is road safety. There is a need for greatly improved road safety. The current accident rates and death rates are unacceptable, and they have plateaued. The death rate fell from almost 350 deaths a year in 1979 to about 200 in 1990, which is a dramatic change. Since then it has fluctuated slightly. The latest figures are for 1999 and were published in a book that I know all members received. The figure in Western Australia is 218 deaths for the year, or 11.7 deaths per 100 000 people. Those figures are also presented according to the number of vehicles and kilometres travelled. Whatever system is used, there is no doubt the death rate has plateaued. Western Australia has had great difficulty in recent years trying to reduce the road toll. The reasons for that are interesting. The State with the best record is Victoria, with 8.1 deaths per 100 000 people. Not surprisingly, the road safety gurus in Western Australia use Victoria as a model. That is the reason for those horror advertisements on television. However, they have made no difference.

We have all seen the advertisements suggesting that if speeds were reduced by five kilometres an hour, the accident rate would be halved. The evidence in Western Australia is completely the opposite, because when we went from no speed limits on open roads to speed limits on open roads, the death rate increased by 20 per cent. It rose from 250 to 350 before it came down again. More recently, when the speed limit was increased on the freeway from 80 to 90 and then to 100 kilometres an hour, there was no difference in the number of deaths. I suggest that reducing speed limits will not make a great deal of difference. Now, of course, we see an advertisement in which a driver runs over a toddler on a tricycle. It is horrific and none of us would like it to happen. Interestingly, however, the statistics in this book indicate that in 1999 only one pedestrian was killed because of speed. I do not have the complete record, but I doubt that it was because the driver was doing 61 in a 60 kilometres an hour zone. It may well have been because it was somebody driving very dangerously. That is something that we need to look at.

There are many differences between Western Australia and Victoria. For example, Victoria generally has more winding roads and small towns. Therefore, there are more interruptions and people are kept alert. Also, there are fewer trees, particularly in the western districts, where there is not a tree standing. If somebody does leave the road, he has some chance of surviving. The official statistics say that of the people killed on country roads, 36 per cent hit an object, such as a telephone post or a tree. Twenty per cent of deaths were "non-collision", which means the cars ran off the road and rolled over. Head-on collisions accounted for 15 per cent of deaths. The majority of those accidents took place on sealed, straight roads. I suggest that very few of those were caused by speed for the simple reason that if someone is to have a speed-related accident, it will occur on a corner that is in excess of the vehicle's capacity to go around it. The other interesting fact is that in the majority of cases alcohol was not evident in the driver or motorcycle rider.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm

Hon M.D. NIXON: Before the House suspended for dinner I made the point that the majority of fatal accidents do not involve drivers who have consumed any alcohol. However, figures show that in 55 of 189 fatal accidents, some alcohol was present in the blood of those drivers. That is a high percentage - somewhere in the order of 30 per cent. Drugs other than alcohol were found in 43 of 125 surveyed drivers. The testing was mainly for illicit drugs, but it also included a small proportion of medicinal drugs. Of the drivers tested, 34.4 per cent had traces of drugs other than alcohol in their blood. I made the point that some of these were medicinal drugs; however, that was only a very small proportion. Often a cocktail of drugs was found, in which case only the major component was recorded. It is interesting that cannabis was the most common drug evident in the blood tests of the drivers involved in these accidents. Nearly 35 per cent of drivers in fatal accidents had non-alcoholic drugs in their blood. In other words, it is a major factor in fatal accidents.

It is obviously something that must be examined because no real study has been made of the effect of illicit drugs on the ability of people to drive. There are all sorts of difficulties with a study of that nature and I believe there is no simple way of running a test, as there is with the breath test for alcohol.

There is no doubt that we must improve the statistics on road accidents. At 218 deaths a year, Western Australia now has one of the highest rates of motor accidents. All attempts in the past 10 years to improve the situation have made very little difference to the number of road fatalities, and we must examine the situation again. Improvement will occur only when drivers learn to drive according to the conditions. We cannot create a police State in which people are told the safe speed at which to drive at any given time of the day under differing circumstances. In the end it comes back to responsible motorists driving according to the conditions.

A major improvement in road safety is due to an improvement in cars and I believe this will continue to make the biggest difference. Anyone who has watched accidents in motor sports will know that accidents that occur at speeds of 200 kilometres an hour very rarely result in fatalities. It is evident that much safer cars can be built to withstand crashes. It was found in Britain that the easiest way to improve road safety was to remove objects from the side of the road. I note my Greens (WA) colleagues are absent on urgent parliamentary business, but the matter requires their cooperation because there is a view today in the community that the best thing to do is to plant the roadside with trees. It may be difficult to remove the trees that are already on the roadsides. However, commonsense indicates that small plants like wildflowers could be planted on the verges - perhaps shrubs like Geraldton wax - and they would slow down any vehicle that left the road. Certainly, there should be no big trees anywhere near a major road.

It is obvious, but has not been recognised, that boredom is a major factor in road accidents. Only in the past two to three years has fatigue been recognised as a problem in accidents. Before that, any accident was said to be caused by speed but people are beginning to realise that fatigue is a major factor. Fatigue can be attributed very largely to boredom. Anybody who has driven for long distances on country roads knows that the most dangerous time is after lunch on a warm afternoon, as it is easier then to lose concentration. I have driven trucks in the past and have found it hard to maintain concentration when driving an empty truck without having to change gears. However, boredom and fatigue did not occur when I drove a heavily-laden truck and was busy constantly changing gears. In the almost three million kilometres I have driven, I have never gone close to having an accident because of speed. However, on many occasions I have suffered from boredom and fatigue, which was something I had to watch.

I have mentioned that when open road speed limits were introduced, the death rate went from 250 a year in the following two to three years to a peak of 350 in the next 10 or so years. It is now coming back to the order of 200 a year and has plateaued. Something must be done if this problem is to be solved.

One matter that causes me the greatest concern is the respect in the community for Parliament. We in Australia are used to 150 years of parliamentary democracy and we are about to celebrate the centenary of federation next week in Melbourne. It is interesting that Australia is one of the oldest parliamentary democracies in the world. I believe five other countries have had parliamentary democracies longer than Australia. We take it for granted; however, the rest of the world has a great deal of difficulty introducing it. The parliamentary system is not perfect; it is an ever-evolving system. However, it requires respect from the public. In my maiden speech I made the point that the respect for members very much depends on the performance of the members of Parliament. It has become fashionable for the media to criticise Parliament and parliamentarians in a manner that creates interest and destroys people's respect for the Parliament. One of the main problems is the media. I am not normally in the limelight very much. However, as I have been mentioned three times in the past fortnight, I believe it is fair that I make a comment.

The West Australian published an article stating that members were off around the world at taxpayers' expense. I went to London to attend a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting, and I do not apologise for that. I put my name forward for the trip before the election. I would like to have been re-elected, but I was not, and it is not my fault that I was not. I was very pleased that when my good friend Fred Tubby was deemed ineligible to attend, the trip was offered to me. I am pleased that I went, I do not apologise for doing so and I believe that I made a contribution. At some later date I will provide a report on the very worthwhile seminar I attended. Do journalists from *The West Australian* believe that members of Parliament should not attend such meetings? My ticket to Italy was splashed across the front page of *The West Australian*, but the journalist who wrote the associated article did not bother to ascertain who paid for that part of the trip - which was private. My wife and I paid for it. I intended to comment and ask for an apology, but decided that that would be tantamount to pouring petrol on a fire.

A further editorial in *The West Australian* pointed out that members of the upper House brought the Parliament into disrepute when they travelled at taxpayers' expense after being defeated. The editorial stated that only two members were involved. I have every reason to believe that Hon Dexter Davies and I were the two members to which it referred.

Hon Norm Kelly interjected.

Hon M.D. NIXON: The member cracked a mention too.

Hon Norm Kelly: Yes, in one of the articles.

Hon M.D. NIXON: I am in good company. The only reason we read about it is that *The West Australian* decided to make an issue of it. The amount expended was not excessive. However, more importantly, it must be pointed out that members are entitled to undertake such travel. It is ridiculous to suggest that any member who utilises his entitlement is acting improperly.

It gets even worse. An article in *The West Australian* went on to state that members of Parliament destroy their credibility by voting themselves pay rises. Surely the journalist who wrote the article could have established the method used to set parliamentary salaries. Most members are not here for the money - we are here to do a job. However, if these are the conditions of employment for a member of Parliament, one cannot blame the member for availing himself of them once he has been elected. Everyone involved in the political system realises how difficult it is to get someone to stand for Parliament. Prospective candidates ask why they should destroy their family life and business. If they are elected, they might get thrown out at the next election and be faced with re-establishing their career. They also do not relish being criticised as a politician, so they refuse to stand. At the end of the day, unjust criticism will make it more and more difficult to get worthy members. Australia is a great country largely because of its political system. All members have a responsibility to ensure that respect for Parliament is upheld. More importantly, the media have a responsibility to criticise if criticism is warranted. However, when doing so, they must report the truth. In addition, journalists must do the appropriate research to ensure that what is published is correct, and must not misinform or selectively report. There was a time when reporters were reporters - they reported what people said and left the people to form a view. Today's reporters indulge in interpretive journalism; that is, they put a point of view that they believe the public should accept. I am very surprised about their selectivity. When members of their profession - such as John Laws and company - behave less than objectively, the criticism is very muted. Newspapers do have a responsibility to make profits and people always like a good scrap, whether it be at a football game or a boxing match. However, unless members of the media act more responsibly than they have in recent years, Australia will be the loser.

One of the things that I regret most is that I will no longer be able to represent the Agricultural Region. It comprises 65 shires and is Australia's biggest grain producer. It also produces livestock and wool and has tourism, mining, education, service industry and health services. It is a particularly interesting electorate.

The history of farming is based mainly on the theory of seven lean years and seven good years. Before Hon Bruce Donaldson and I came into Parliament, the Agricultural Region had suffered its seven lean years. Generally speaking, since 1992, the seasons have been favourable and prices have picked up. Until a couple of years ago, the Agricultural Region was probably as prosperous as it has been for a number of years. Since then there has been a run of misfortune, particularly in the south east areas. There have been frosts, droughts and locusts. Farmers have suffered a great deal of stress. Some members of the farming community, and particularly those who depend on the farming community, have been under tremendous stress. Anybody who has tried to operate a machinery business has had a very difficult time. One dealer I spoke to had 40 people on staff, so he was paying payroll tax. He was paying about \$35 000 a month in interest on his floor plan. The machinery he had bought the year before, which he thought he would sell last season, is still sitting there; nobody wants it. He must still pay interest and maintain as many staff members as he possibly can because if he lays them off, it will be hard to get them back to the country. That is a problem.

Although the Government has done much in the way of providing sporting facilities, the patient assisted travel scheme, new hospitals, new health facilities, improved TAFE colleges, the Esperance Community College, better airfields, better roads, deep sewerage, improved water supplies, uniform power and improved family services, there has been a view among many members of the Agricultural Region that the country has been neglected. If one looks at it objectively, it is a view that is hard to sustain. The Court Government did care for the rural sector, so I am not particularly ashamed of its record. However, as a practising farmer, I know that there has been a tremendous change in the terms of trade of farmers over the years. At a family function the other day we were talking about my uncles who bought a D4 tractor in 1948. It took 13 tonnes of wheat to buy a D4 tractor. If one could still buy a 42-horse power tractor that weighed about five tonnes, my guess is that today it would cost about \$120 000 or \$130 000; that is, one would need 600 tonnes of wheat to buy an identical tractor. This gives members an idea of the stress and cost pressures on agriculture. If that is true, we as a Government and as members of Parliament must ensure that no undue cost pressures are put on the agricultural sector. It needs a critical mass to survive. Every time a business is lost, a schoolteacher, a policeman or other support staff is likely to be lost. It is getting more difficult for people to survive in smaller towns. Generally speaking, the larger regional centres are doing very well. Obviously, Bunbury, Geraldton and Albany are still expanding. The Merredin electorate, which consists of a lot of smaller towns, is certainly suffering. There is stress on these businesses and it will take a tremendous effort to make sure that these country areas do not fall below a critical mass, which leads to a wind down of services which in turn leads to people choosing to go elsewhere.

Being objective, the problem is not confined to Australia; it is happening worldwide. The reduction in the value of the Australian dollar means that exporters will get a bit of an increase. If the dollar had gone down perhaps 10 or 20 years ago, it might have been of real benefit. Today, because we have lost most of our agricultural manufacturing sector, we now import most of our fertilisers for chemicals. At the end of the day, the extra money the wheat grower gets for his wheat will largely be absorbed by the extra costs of his inputs. At this stage, devaluation will not be much help. We will have to look at other ways. Every industry believes that the Government will come in and help it. This is a false hope. The trouble with false hopes is that if people pin their

hopes on them and they do not eventuate, they will die anyway. The Agricultural Region will survive only if it has industries that are competitive on the world market. That means it will have to use the very best methods and will have to have some of the best brains involved in the industries. Probably the greatest loss to the Agricultural Region in recent years has been caused by the brain drain. Many young people come to Perth to further their education. They find that they can get a job in other industries in the city which will pay more than those in regional areas, and they do not go home. I am only a young fellow but, believe it or not, mine is about the average age of the farmers in the Agricultural Region. Replacements must happen over the next few years or the agricultural sector will change for the worse. I have finished with pumpkin.

Hon Bob Thomas: I like pumpkin.

Hon M.D. NIXON: That is all right. I will now start on the ice-cream.

Members of this House are generally a hard-working group. Members may not always agree but that is the reason they are here. The parliamentary system is designed to sort out disagreement, so that wherever possible, we can come up with policies and laws which suit the majority of people. People cannot expect all of us to agree. At the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association seminar, an African delegate was extolling the virtues of the one-party State because he said that there was no corruption under such a system. At the end of the day, although we may not all agree, we must sort out our differences. We have done that very well.

Since I have been here, the House has tackled many controversial issues. One was the Industrial Legislation Amendment Bill, which was probably the daddy of them all. Although my good friend Hon Tom Helm and his comrades were in the Chamber for some time during that period, I was very disappointed that the media never reported to the people of Western Australia that for a while this House could not operate. I can forgive my good friend Hon Tom Helm for his behaviour. He was doing what he believed to be right, but the media acted very irresponsibly in never making clear to people that period when this House could not operate. That is unforgivable.

The abortion debate demonstrated clearer than anything else the need for political parties. Although everyone says that it would be nice if all politicians could agree, when there is no party structure with leaders and organisers of meetings - even worse, self-proclaimed leaders rather than elected leaders - it is difficult to conduct a proper debate.

As a member of Parliament I have visited places and met people, which would certainly not have been possible were I a private citizen. I am very grateful for those opportunities. I have been able to gain tremendous satisfaction from being able to help and represent individuals, shires and organisations to overcome their problems. I take credit through my intervention in the Veterinary Surgeons Act, for ensuring that stock owners were not burdened with unnecessary costs when conducting routine stock husbandry practices and obtaining veterinary supplies. Amendments to the Horticultural Produce Commission Bill prevented the minister of the day being able to impose levies on industry without its consent.

I believe that it is through the Constitutional Affairs Committee that I have had the most influence. I thank the members who have served with me over the past eight years. They include Hon Barbara Scott, Hon Alannah MacTiernan, Paul Sulc, who was a Labor member for a short period, Hon Muriel Patterson, Hon Ray Halligan, Hon Tom Helm and Hon Ken Travers. I thank them for their support. I thank particularly the staff, including Chris Richards, Kelly Campbell, Karry Smith, Penny Griffiths, Felicity Beattie and David Driscoll. As a small committee, it worked extremely well, based on the principle of trust which people developed. One of the greatest things about the committee system is that members get the opportunity to know each other in a manner which is not possible in the larger forum of this House.

We members will not let our colleagues trespass upon certain patches or property, which is fair enough. The important thing is to know those areas on which members can agree to debate and those areas on which a person's mind will never be changed because for party, philosophical or whatever reason, their minds are made up. The committee system has developed an appreciation of this aspect. I am proud that as a committee we produced almost 60 reports, with only one minority report from my good friend Hon Tom Helm. He did not really disagree with the committee but disagreed with the Government for putting forward uniform legislation which he believed was unnecessary. I particularly thank Hon Ken Travers for his remarks yesterday.

I will mention some of the committee's achievements. The committee introduced voluntary fisheries officers, and enabled the loading of millions of tons of iron ore out of Esperance without a complaint due to the strict and sensible environmental controls that were applied. It prevented the establishment of a railway shunting yard in a residential area against correct planning procedures, and it gave time for the Denmark community to develop plans to save a heritage building of huge local significance. The committee presented reports which dealt with issues as diverse as attention deficit disorder, homebirthing and euthanasia in a manner that will enable informed debate in the future. Many reports on uniform legislation were well received by the House and led to speedy passage of the Bills at a later date. The committee functioned well because it was small and operated on trust.

Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the committee, of its own volition, was its recommendation that led to the Parliament going on the Internet. No doubt that would have happened eventually anyway, but people would be amazed at the resistance to change the committee ran into just five or six years ago. Parliament had always printed its documents on a certain size sheet of paper and it certainly could not be changed to suit a computer program because that was the way it had always been done. As time goes by that will perhaps be recognised as the committee's greatest achievement. I am not saying it would not have happened, because I believe it would, but we were able to give the system a bit of a needle and it happened a bit quicker than it otherwise would have.

The committee visited a number of regional centres and demonstrated that Parliament is accessible to the people. We were even greeted with a round of applause at one meeting, and that must have been the first time in history that a group of politicians was thanked that way.

I know that in my absence the House will continue to perform the tasks before it with vigour and conscientiousness. I am pleased to have had eight years in this Parliament; I have enjoyed them thoroughly. I would like to thank the Liberal Party for that opportunity and all those who made it possible. I was particularly pleased to be in Parliament during the Court Government, and I think history will treat that Government kindly. It restored financial and economic welfare but it will be remembered for much more: New hospitals and educational facilities; incredible improvements to roads; it was perhaps the greenest Government this State has ever had, and it provided huge new areas of national parks; it tackled salinity; expanded deep sewerage; beautified the city and its approaches; and it put Western Australia on the tourist map. Perhaps Hon Norman Moore had something to do with that with the assistance of Elle.

In particular, I thank my 42-year-old wife, who is in the gallery, for her support over so many years and for the way she has undertaken her duties, because members would know that their wives often have other duties to perform. I also thank the support group, some of whom are still here today. I have worked with people in the Liberal Party, such as Marcia Sullivan; I worked with Adrienne Bartrop for 15 or so years; my first electorate officer was Kath Wyatt, who gave me great support when I was particularly green, and she is a lady with tremendous experience who was able to guide me in those early days. Catherine Morgan, a long-time friend of mine who is also experienced in party matters, also came to assist. In more recent times I was lucky to have the services of Rosemary Rose - obviously, a rose by any other name. She had been farming in Esperance for a number of years and when they came to Perth I was lucky to have her services. We have been a great team and have worked well together, and I am sure friendships have developed that will last forever.

I congratulate you, Mr President. You have conducted yourself in your position with the greatest of decorum and before that, of course, as leader of the party. I extend my thanks and congratulations to Hon Norman Moore for tremendous leadership. Two great professionals. I also thank my good friend, the Whip, Hon Muriel Patterson. I make the point that that chair on the other side is one of the most polished in the Parliament and whenever I needed a day off I was able to draw on that to make a point.

I thank all my colleagues. It has been great working with them. We have been a very good team. I thank all the members in this House for eight wonderful years.

[Applause.]