

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 25 May.

THE PRESIDENT: Before I give the call to Hon Donna Taylor, I wish to point out two matters. Firstly, this is the honourable member's inaugural speech; therefore, in accordance with our customs, members will not interject. Secondly, I draw to the attention of the house the fact that in the public gallery is Hon Chris Ellison, who is not only a senator for Western Australia but also a minister in the federal government.

HON DONNA TAYLOR (East Metropolitan) [12.14 pm]: I convey my congratulations to Hon Nick Griffiths on his election as President and Hon George Cash on his re-election as Chairman of Committees. I stand today in this house as one of two new Liberal members for the East Metropolitan Region. I am deeply conscious of the honour and privilege that has been granted to me by members of this community. I acknowledge my direct predecessor, Hon Derrick Tomlinson, who, with great distinction, served this Parliament and the Western Australian community since 1989. His eloquence, good humour and commitment to the East Metropolitan Region will certainly be missed and I place on record my personal thanks for his support and encouragement of me.

The East Metropolitan Region is as vast as it is unique. It is the largest of the three metropolitan regions and comprises the two largest metropolitan Legislative Assembly districts of Serpentine-Jarrahdale and Swan Hills. I pause to congratulate the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale on his recent election. The East Metropolitan Region encompasses, among many others, the towns of Bullsbrook, Gidgegannup, Chidlow, Bassendean and Midland; the Cities of Armadale, Gosnells, Belmont and Swan; the Shires of Kalamunda and Mundaring; and the historic towns of Guildford and Jarrahdale. The region boasts many of the attractions of Perth's surrounds, including the Swan Valley, Mundaring Weir and Araluen Botanic Park, to name but a few. However, it also has its dangers. The January fires that raged through the hills and devastated farms, orchards, pastures and indeed many people's livelihoods were a timely reminder of the destruction and heartache that can be caused by fire, which was made worse in the knowledge that they were deliberately lit.

In turning to my own background, my mother's family has a long and proud history in the East Metropolitan Region, dating back to my great-grandfather Scottie Jamieson, who was a local councillor for 21 years and also the Mayor of the then Midland Junction Municipal Council. He and his wife, Sarah, and 11 children, lived their lives in the Midland area and the family was known across the town for opening their doors to the sick and homeless. Today several of their grandchildren and many great-grandchildren still dot the east metropolitan landscape. For my part, I was born at Swan District Hospital and have lived all of my life in Bassendean. I went to primary school in Guildford and worked throughout the region during my university days. I am proud to be the daughter of two now retired police officers, Don and Joan Taylor, who are in the public gallery today. My parents instilled in me from a young age important values akin to our Liberal beliefs, from personal responsibility to being good to others and creating opportunities through hard work and effort in both employment and study. In applying these values I got my first job at the age of 15 as church organist. I progressed from pulling beers at the Rose and Crown Hotel to waiting on tables in the Swan Valley and since I began work full time some eight or nine years ago, I have learnt to juggle work, study and family life, much like anybody else.

By standing here today, I acknowledge that I am a relatively young member; indeed, the youngest Liberal woman to have stood in either house of this state Parliament. Therefore, there are many things that I have not yet experienced, but I feel that through my own experiences to date and those of my peers in their 20s, 30s and 40s, I can positively represent the issues, aspirations and challenges facing these Australians. Most importantly, I stand here as a representative of all members of the East Metropolitan Region, irrespective of age or political persuasion. I will listen and act on their behalf on the issues that are of concern to them.

Like many Western Australians, I am concerned about issues such as education, law and order and the future of Australia's youth, and I am focused on pursuing these and many other issues throughout my time in this place. In the area of education, as a trained teacher and school psychologist, I believe strongly in the need for quality schooling. There is no doubt that after parents and immediate family members, schools have the strongest influence on the development of Australia's children. Teachers charged with this great responsibility inevitably face pressure from a range of sources, and I acknowledge the invaluable work that they do on a daily basis. The quality of school education directly influences both learning outcomes and the opportunities that young people will have in the future workplace. Education also impacts on the quality of Australia's democracy and the values that its citizens possess. While some suggest that the focus of schooling should be on the secondary years, I believe that early childhood and the primary years of schooling are the most critical. It is at this time that a young child's skills, such as literacy and numeracy, are developed and it is these same skills that are vital for a child to inevitably cope in their high school years and beyond. It is essential that targeted assessment and

intervention in early childhood is available when needed. Learning difficulties can arise from a variety of causes, from a slight hearing impairment to a diagnosed disorder. Indeed, around one in 10 children present some form of learning difficulty. Thus, it is imperative that these are identified and strategies are put in place; if not, they can affect a child's self-esteem and confidence and may lead to problems such as crime and drug abuse later in life, which ultimately impacts not only on the child but also their family and the broader community. Of course, the area of education is one often fraught with difficulty. There are often conflicting opinions about how best to teach and the resources needed to ensure the best possible learning outcomes. Recent research titled "The Sufficiency of Resources for Australian Primary Schools" examined whether primary schools had sufficient resources to meet the national goals for schooling set in 1999 by commonwealth and state ministers for education. The researchers identified a number of areas for consideration, including the difficulty to teach all of the learning areas identified in the national goals during each school week; the additional demands and pressure placed on staff as a result of increased assessment and reporting; the need to improve the support allocated to teachers with students in their classroom who have special learning needs or are disruptive; and the requirement to better allocate resources according to student needs. Unfortunately, the ability to sufficiently and effectively tailor a statewide system to meet the individual needs of every child across every school is not only difficult but also perhaps doubtful when there are competing government priorities in areas such as health and law enforcement. However, it should be a priority of government, teachers and parents alike to strive for excellence at every opportunity. Indeed, often better and more focused strategies can be put in place or more effectively resourced to ensure that young people who inevitably hold the key to Australia's future are given the best possible opportunities and choices for their endeavours in life, whatever they may be.

One thought I have long held, whilst not directly related to education but undoubtedly linked, is the need for greater use of mentoring programs. Unfortunately, we do live in a society with ever increasing family breakdown, crime and isolation. As a child I was fortunate to have had a happy and caring upbringing. This is not the same story for many other children. Some live in homes characterised by violence and drug abuse; others are lacking in appropriate or positive role models. Not all mentoring programs have a positive effect on every child in need, but often they can, from increased participation in education and improved self-esteem to better social skills and behaviour. Sometimes a child might just need to talk to someone who listens in a non-judgmental way or have an opportunity to participate in a positive activity which he or she might not otherwise be able to share with a family member. I believe that governments of all persuasions should actively encourage the use of effective mentoring programs in schools as a form of early intervention to hopefully put a child on the right path to a happy and productive life.

I now turn to an area that I am particularly concerned about. As the former national illicit drugs strategy adviser to the federal Justice Minister, Senator Hon Chris Ellison, who is in the gallery today, I am particularly concerned by the apparent increasing acceptance of cannabis and other illicit drugs in our community, particularly among young Australians. Indeed, statistics show that one in five young Australians smoke cannabis every week and 10 per cent of those become addicted. I remain concerned by the term "harm minimisation", or rather the phrase "harmful drug use", which is being increasingly used by commentators, researchers and policy makers in a variety of ways. While I acknowledge that we must obviously help and treat those who are addicted and reduce the supply and demand for drugs, through law enforcement, education and rehabilitation, I believe that in no way should harm minimisation be seen to condone an acceptable or non-harmful level of drug use. There is no acceptable level, and we must have one united and unequivocal message: that illicit drug use in any form should neither be promoted nor deemed acceptable to society.

Illicit drugs represent one of the greatest scourges on our community. But I ask: how can we teach young children about the dangers of illicit drug use when we have laws in Western Australia that effectively state that cannabis, which is often seen as a gateway to harder drugs, is okay? Research suggests that for those who are vulnerable, cannabis use can lead to mental illness, paranoia, suicide and distress and can be exacerbated if the user starts early in life. The increasing popularity and trend towards the use of amphetamine-type stimulants in Australia is also particularly concerning. These supposed party drugs, which they are clearly not, can produce similar side effects to cannabis, but also can increase the likelihood of erratic and often violent behaviour. Amphetamines also present a particular problem for domestic law enforcement, given that much of the production is domestically based and is now moving to more transportable box labs. The cocktail of often volatile chemicals used for amphetamine production, with all their fumes and susceptibility to explosion, also increases the danger to innocent bystanders and nearby residents. Statistics provided to the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy last year from the United States enunciates this more fully. In 2002 some 8 000 clandestine laboratories were detected in the United States, of which nearly 3 000 involved the presence of children. Some 40 per cent of those children present were found to be affected by the drugs themselves or the chemicals that produced them. There were also cases of injury and even death. Australia must not go down a similar path. While I acknowledge the work being done in Western Australia and nationally to combat this particular drug endangerment problem, with the increasing trend towards these insidious drugs, it is incumbent upon

governments at all levels to continue to respond swiftly and effectively for the wellbeing, health and quality of life of Australia's children and young people.

Finally, it would be remiss of me if I did not mention one of the very issues that led me to join the Liberal Party in the first place, that being voluntary student unionism or VSU. Opponents say that VSU is just an ideological obsession of the Liberal Party. It is not. Rather, it is simply a pursuit of one of the fundamental principles upon which liberalism is based: that of freedom of association, including an individual's right to choose whether to join a union or not. Universities should not be seen as closed shops and the notion of no fee, no degree is, quite simply, unjust. Why should a student who does not use union facilities or necessarily agree with its activities be compelled to join a union on the threat that if he does not he will not be able to graduate? I note that the Australian government is again pushing ahead with the introduction of VSU nationally, based on the highly successful model introduced under the previous Court government in Western Australia by the then Minister for Education, Hon Norman Moore, who is in the chamber today. VSU does not mean an end to student activities or life on campus; rather, it ensures that guilds become more responsive to the needs of the students they represent.

Of course, I stand in this place not only as a representative of the East Metropolitan Region but also of the Liberal Party of Western Australia. I am deeply conscious of the important role that branch members and their divisions have in choosing candidates for election who they believe will best meet the needs of the wider community and the opportunities and honour that their roles afford to those who are successful. I am a proud member of the Liberal Party and am acutely aware of the great band of people who not only founded the party in 1944 but also those current members who continue to promote our ideals and make the Liberal Party possible. Our great Prime Minister Hon John Howard perhaps put it most eloquently in an address to the Australian Women's National League last year when he said -

The men and women who formed the Liberal Party embodied a particular ideal of Australian society based on virtues of individual freedom, personal responsibility and social obligation. These are virtues with a timeless place in the Australian Liberal inheritance.

However, can I say this: as a party we, at times, do not recognise enough our own achievements. For example, building on the work of Sir John Forrest and Sir James Mitchell, it was the Liberals in government in Western Australia who were the first in Australia to promote a woman to head a ministry; to transform Western Australia to an economic powerhouse for the whole nation under the leaderships of Sir David Brand and Sir Charles Court; to oversee major projects such as the North West Shelf gas project; and who restored Western Australia's credit rating and financial good name in the 1990s under the leadership of Hon Richard Court. Although I do not suggest that we should ever rest on our successes, Liberals do have a proud history, and I believe our achievements should never be forgotten or rewritten to suit other people's ends.

I now acknowledge this very Council. Having been a parliamentary adviser to a federal minister who is a member of the Australian Senate, I understand the importance of a bicameral Parliament and appreciate the necessity of the differing roles of the two houses. Checks and balances upon governments, such as the use of a second parliamentary chamber, are an essential part of our philosophy and the philosophy of all democracies. As Hon Peter Foss said in his maiden speech -

This House has a very important part to play in the Government of Western Australia.

He went on to say -

... we have a duty to the people of Western Australia to provide a sensible check on the power of the Executive. I hope by doing this we will have a better Western Australian Government than may otherwise be the case.

In conclusion, I wish to thank a number of people, many of whom are in the public gallery today, for without them none of this would have been made possible. First, I thank again Hon Derrick Tomlinson and Hon Peter Foss for their encouragement and invaluable advice. In this vein, I also acknowledge the federal Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, who had the faith to take on a young university student and who provided many professional opportunities and guidance over eight years. I recognise my Liberal East Metropolitan Region colleague, Hon Helen Morton and, in particular, Mr Bill Munro, a valued member of the east metropolitan team. I also thank all the divisional presidents that encompass the East Metropolitan Region, their committees and branch members, for their ongoing support and precious assistance. I thank Daphne Bogue and all the members of the Liberal Party State Women's Council for their encouragement. In particular, I acknowledge my own division of Perth, where I was honoured to be president of the women's division for some four years. I thank my friends both here in Perth and interstate for their support, patience and understanding and to my fiancé Scott Faragher, for his love, enthusiasm and ever-enduring encouragement of me. Finally, I acknowledge my family, particularly my parents. I thank them sincerely for all they have done and continue to do. Most importantly, I thank the east metropolitan community for placing their trust in me to represent them in this place over the next four years. I do not take this trust lightly. I say to them that they have my commitment

to work hard, to contribute and to strongly and effectively represent the interests and concerns of the east metropolitan community while at the same time upholding those beliefs and values that we as Liberals proudly hold. Thank you.

[Applause.]

The PRESIDENT: Order! I am about to give the call to Hon Margaret Rowe. Before I do so I should point out that it is her first speech and I think we all know how to behave.

HON MARGARET ROWE (Agricultural) [12.34 pm]: As an incoming member of Parliament it gives me pleasure to address the house first with a quote from an outgoing member of Parliament, Hon Bill Stretch who, after 22 years in this place said -

. . . it is not the huge things one does in the electorate for which a member will be remembered, because there are few opportunities for us to change the world. . . . The majority of the time of members is spent rescuing ordinary people and small businesses from the inevitable grind of the bureaucracy. It is important to realise that this happens whichever party is in government, because the very process of government is a slow and clumsy business. It is not like the law and it does not “grind exceedingly fine”; it grinds extremely roughly at times.

After 13 years as a Greenough Shire Councillor, two of them as deputy president, and 10 years as an electorate officer, I know too well the frustrations and inequities endured by some people in their dealings with bureaucracy. It has been said “that the wind speaks not more sweetly to the giant oaks than to the least of all the blades of grass”. Although giant oaks might topple if they are not well-rooted to the earth - a lesson for us in this lofty place - the grass is walked upon every day. The electorate office is the grassroots ear to the world. That is why I have chosen to locate my electorate office in the country in Geraldton.

Like many regional centres, Geraldton has a proud history. I follow in the footsteps of Edith Cowan, OBE, the first woman elected to Parliament in Western Australia. She was born in 1861 at Glengarry Station near Geraldton. The Premier is a Geraldton boy. An outgoing member of this chamber, Hon Derrick Tomlinson, taught literature at the Geraldton Senior High School. Award winning author Randolph Stow was born in Geraldton and immortalised the town in his book *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, Tim Winton’s novel *Cloud Street* has its origin in Geraldton. Actor Ernie Dingo was born at Bullaroo Station and studied at Geraldton Senior High School. Another famous Aborigine, Warrandy, was born in the Murchison around the 1830s, and was anointed as “King Billy” by Governor Weld. Former Western Australian Premier John Forrest is said to have given him a room in his Perth bungalow whenever he required one. I, however, am currently homeless. I understand that it might be several months before my permanent electorate office is leased and furnished. Perhaps this is inadvertently fortuitous, as it will give me time to begin to know the broad expanse of my electorate. This will take some time, as it stretches from Kalbarri in the north to Esperance in the great southern area. It comprises 68 local governments and in excess of 90 000 constituents. I am fortunate to share this responsibility with Hon Bruce Donaldson and Hon Anthony Fels.

I noted that in his inaugural address in 1993, Hon Bruce Donaldson observed the reluctance of most Western Australians to settle beyond the great Darling scarp. This reluctance continues today with the majority of people clinging to the long strip that hugs the coastline. How much do they know about life on the other side of the hill? My country experiences go back a long way. I was born and educated in Kalgoorlie, where my family ran a small business. I understand first-hand the issues affecting families who live in remote areas. As the second eldest in a family of seven children, I am well aware of the challenges faced by large families in rural environments. My colleague Hon Anthony Fels has already spoken extensively about Esperance in his inaugural speech. I have chosen to base myself in Geraldton because I have established a close relationship with the Geraldton community. In fact, I worked for 12 years with the Mid West Development Commission. I also chose Geraldton as my base because it has some important common links with other parts of the Agricultural Region.

Like Kalbarri and Esperance, Geraldton has a significant fishing industry that has progressed from the pioneering days of tiny wooden boats to the current multimillion dollar high-technology industry. Even in the 1950s, fishermen still had no easy communication with land. They said goodbye to their families and set up camp for months at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands. The wives and families stayed in port and waited for messages sent back on carrier boats, and they tuned into the local radio station in the evenings for the fishermen’s requests program when families could send brief messages. The boats these days are highly sophisticated, high powered and high tech. The skippers and their deckies can speak to their families and conduct their business with the push of a button, and they can read the bottom of the ocean like a map and track their catch. Their bounty feeds an international trade. Salt water is in their blood, and often their children will finish university or some landlubber’s job, and then come home to work the boat. These fishermen still brave

the open seas, especially those on the Great Southern Ocean and live with danger in pulling their pots, setting their wet lines or trawling their nets. They are the farmers of the ocean.

In port, the farmers of the land battle their own problems with salty water. Therefore, I was pleased to see that the government last week, after some prompting by the opposition, recommitted to spend \$315 million in the joint commonwealth and state programs that will include salinity control.

But Geraldton has more than salt water in common with the rest of my extensive electorate; it also has a hinterland of mixed farming that mainly involves grain and sheep. While people in the city tend to take for granted the fruit, vegetables, processed grains and trays of meat in the supermarkets, we often forget that they tell the story of family members who have waited with their eyes turned to the sky for the first drops of rain or cursed a downpour at shearing time or watched a crop, lush and ripe and ready for harvest, laid flat by hailstones. We do not think about the farmer driving around all night in a dark paddock ploughing and seeding. We do not think about the farmer carting hay to handfeed sheep, which are sold or have the gun taken to them when the drought in the bank matches the drought in the paddock. We do not think about country children waiting at the farm gate for a bus to take them 30 or more kilometres to a little school in the nearest town. We forget that women are more likely to die of breast cancer and men are more likely to die of prostate cancer if they live in the country. We do not think about the road trauma victims being flown to Perth for treatment away from their family support. We close our eyes to the terrible statistics regarding Aboriginal infant mortality and morbidity, and we cannot bring ourselves to think about the high rate of rural youth suicide. We forget that while we idealise, farmers have to survive the politics and realities of controversial issues such as the live sheep trade, genetically modified crops, the mulesing process and the flatulence tax on animals. We prefer to remember the days when the country rode on the back of a sheep and farmers reputedly charged around their paddocks in Rolls Royces with a ram or two in the back. Those days were short, and they have gone.

The Deputy Prime Minister was quoted this week as saying that Australia is in danger of running out of farmers in a decade because conditions on the land are so difficult. He spoke in response to the drought crisis in the eastern states, but what extra pressure will apply to WA farmers if eastern states farmers collapse? Will Western Australian farmers find themselves carrying the load of a nation? Will our farmers be able to survive without tax incentives for drought proofing their properties and for land improvements and the old killer, transport subsidies? According to the WA Farmers Federation, at least half of WA farmers are battling the cost price squeeze. It is not that farmers are not working hard. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported that 59 per cent of farmers, compared with 19 per cent of all employed people, worked 49 hours or more a week in 2001. Farmers often work beyond the traditional retirement age, with 15 per cent of farmers in 2001 being aged 65 years or over. Indeed, the proportion of farmers aged 65 years and over is greater than the proportion of farmers younger than 35 years of age. Fewer young people are becoming farmers. The Farmers Federation also stated that business imperatives and succession planning is a key risk for Western Australia's primary industry. Perhaps it is the quiet pride and tenacity of our farmers and graziers, and their remarkable capacity for economic survival in a changing weather global system and volatile international markets, that allows us to live our illusions about the good life. The reality is that farmers have no pay cheque in the bank each fortnight. Even when a fortnightly pay cheque arrives in the letterbox in the small marginal towns that service these farmers, the income and employment security in that town depends on the wool clip, the amount of grain delivered to the local silo or the size of the catch. Country WA also owes much of its existence to small business - retail, commerce and hospitality - and government-based health, education and housing input. We must recognise and support the retention of the townships and the small business model.

I am pleased to say, however, that there are some encouraging signs. Major findings of the 2003-04 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey include an overall increase in wheat production, with Western Australia showing one of the largest state increases with production up by 174 per cent. That was a welcome relief after the 2002 drought when production was effectively halved. Lamb and sheep numbers also showed signs of recovery following the low of the previous year. The largest increases were in New South Wales and Western Australia: our state's figure was up four per cent with a value of \$24.8 million, which is a credit to our farmers given that over 80 per cent of agricultural production is exported. In a globalised marketplace, farmers are the price takers rather than the price setters. All this effort and risk is for a 20c return on a \$3 loaf of bread.

On the other hand, real estate agents in my electorate are getting better returns. The high cost of housing in the eastern states is driving investors west. The City of Geraldton and Shire of Greenough are booming with some of the hottest real estate in the state. Esperance and Kalbarri have some of the most beautiful coastline and spectacular gorges in the nation and are attracting thousands of visitors. Geraldton now has more visitors per annum than is the case with Broome. One of my great passions is tourism. This passion was heightened when I served as chairman of the shire's standing committee for tourism and community development. We have seen a tourism explosion in the south west and our far north, and the mid west will be the next to experience this growth

when Indian Ocean Drive is completed. All that remains is an approximately 40 kilometre section between Lancelin and Jurien Bay, and I intend to work stridently for that completion date to be brought forward.

It is not surprising that city dwellers are drawn to the country to refuel their souls, not only because of the open skies and big horizons, but also because of the people. The strength of the family unit has served the Agricultural Region well, and has my support and respect.

Mr President, I congratulate you on your election as President of this house, and I congratulate Hon George Cash on his re-election as Chairman of Committees in the Legislative Council. Although I appreciate the privileges and protocols of this house, I am under no illusion that being a member of Parliament will be glamorous. My introduction to my new role kept my feet well and truly on the ground: I doorknocked in temperatures in excess of 40 degrees, lost six kilos and was bitten by a dog. The Liberal Party's pre-selection personnel must have recognised some tenacity in me, and I thank them sincerely for their faith. I thank all the people who assisted so capably and selflessly during my election campaign, especially my family and friends for their love, support and friendship. Although there are too many to mention by name, I record my particular thanks to my father, Arch Trahair; my son, Bradley, and his partner, Rebecca; my daughter, Donna, and her partner, Nigel; and my wonderful grandchildren Hannah, Jonah, Ruby and Daisy; as well as my close friends Bill Perry and Kim Stokes.

So, what brings me to this place? Although I always made a contribution to the community as a shire councillor, an electorate officer and a sportsperson, I felt I could make a more extensive contribution as a member of Parliament. In this position, I can endeavour to ensure that my constituents receive their lawful entitlements; however, I can also represent their views in how those laws are formulated and amended. According to the Western Australian Farmers Federation, there are 31 acts with 86 high-level regulatory areas governing agriculture. In Western Australia most of these are under the jurisdiction of two, and sometimes three, departments.

The Westminster system of government is based on representation. I will make no apology for the fact that I will speak for the bush. At a time when the country voice is smaller in Parliament, I will just have to speak more loudly. Despite adversity, in 2001-02 the gross value of agricultural production in Western Australia was \$5.5 billion. However, when all the other industries tied to agriculture are factored in, agriculture fuels in excess of 12 per cent of the state's gross domestic product and between 17 per cent and 20 per cent of the jobs. The Agricultural Region is the heartland of Western Australia, and I am proud to speak on its behalf. I would like to think that when it comes my time to leave this house, I can rest comfortably with the words of poet Robert Frost -

Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -
I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference.

[Applause.]

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Bruce Donaldson**.

Sitting suspended from 12.51 to 2.00 pm