

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING — REGIONAL AREAS

7. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

Before I start, I acknowledge the members of the Country Women's Association who attended the rally today and ran it very successfully. I also acknowledge Ken Seymour, the Shire of Moora president, who is here and who has been a wonderful support; and Tony Seabrook from the Pastoralists and Graziers Association. My apologies to anyone I have missed. A concerted effort has been made.

I refer specifically to the government's cuts to regional education, which include closing Moora Residential College and six camp schools; raiding the trust fund of agricultural colleges; the backflip on closing the Schools of the Air; the cuts to the gifted and talented program; and the closure of Northam Residential College. When will the Premier restore public confidence in the state's education system by sacking his Minister for Education and Training and reverse the remaining cuts?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the Leader of the National Party for the question. Of course, we inherited a difficult financial situation. One of the parties that was most to blame was the National Party. National Party members are the greatest economic vandals in Australia. If members talk privately to any Liberal Party member, they will agree with that. They will agree!

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I do not tell tales. Let us imagine that I was at a Council of Australian Governments meeting talking to some senior federal Liberal members, some other Premiers or the like, or imagine I am walking down the corridor here; people often say that the National Party is the most grossly irresponsible political party in the country.

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Scarborough!

Mr M. McGOWAN: Despite that gross irresponsibility, the National Party's legacy was a 500 per cent increase in TAFE fees. In 2015, \$185 million was cut from school funding. At Moora at Central Midlands Senior High School, \$87 000 was cut; at Moora Primary School, \$46 000 was cut; and at Merredin College, \$584 000 was cut. If we go through the midwest, the wheatbelt and regions around Western Australia, we find huge cuts to school budgets. Guess who was sitting in cabinet at that time? It was the former Leader of the National Party, the member for Warren-Blackwood.

Dr M.D. Nahan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr M. McGOWAN: I want to say again that the situation the state now faces is regrettable but the Country Women's Association of all organisations understands the importance of proper budgeting. Country people generally understand the importance of proper budgeting. As a debt of \$40 billion was inherited from the Liberals and Nationals, some measures have to be taken to fix it.

Dr M.D. Nahan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, do you want to go home early?

Mr M. McGOWAN: As I said, at the same time, we are improving education in schools across Western Australia, primary schools in particular, because of our careful financial management. We are making sure that regional kids matter most during this process.