

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

*Motion*

Resumed from 25 November.

**HON SHELLEY ARCHER (Mining and Pastoral)** [5.47 pm]: I take this opportunity to draw to the attention of the house the link that exists between the deplorable state of housing that is available to Indigenous people in Western Australia and the deep social problems that have been highlighted by a number of reports and inquiries, especially in relation to my electorate of the Mining and Pastoral Region. Adequate housing is a basic human right that is explicitly set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Australia has ratified and is legally and morally bound to adhere to. Unfortunately, many Indigenous Australians do not enjoy adequate housing. In fact, in a 2006 report to the United Nations Human Rights Council by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Miloon Kothari wrote of being particularly disturbed by the adverse housing conditions in the Indigenous communities he visited in both urban and rural areas in all states. Mr Kothari summed up the situation as a severe housing crisis for Indigenous people that is likely to worsen in coming years as a result of the rapid rate of population growth in these Indigenous communities.

This view is supported by a plethora of research and documents that have analysed the poor conditions of Indigenous housing. I would like to mention a couple of the reports that I have read. In 2007, the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* published an article entitled “The state of health hardware in Aboriginal communities in rural and remote Australia”. In this article the authors discuss the need for healthy living environments to have functioning health hardware, a term borrowed from the late Professor Fred Hollows. Health hardware relates to items such as lights, power outlets, water outlets, hot water temperatures, showers, basins, baths, toilets, laundries and kitchen areas—all essential elements required to keep anyone healthy in any housing environment. Between January 1999 and November 2006, 4 343 houses in 132 Indigenous communities in four states and the Northern Territory were assessed to determine their ability to provide healthy living hardware. The survey identified 71 869 items that required repair. This averages to 16 items per household, and the items were categorised as requiring repair for the following reasons: routine maintenance, 65 per cent; faulty installation or equipment, 25 per cent; and damage or misuse, 10 per cent. This in my view demonstrates how Aboriginal housing has failed to provide the basic requirements for healthy living for these communities. Only 11 per cent of houses passed a standard assessment for electrical safety. In 50 per cent of houses it was not possible to wash a child in a bath or basin, functioning showers were available only in 35 per cent of houses, and adequate facilities to store, prepare and cook meals were present in only six per cent of all these houses.

The authors of the survey note that there is more than two centuries of public literature on the relationship between housing and health, yet nothing has changed. The bulk of this evidence confirms that improved housing improves health. In particular, the literature emphasises the harmful mental and physical effects of poor housing on children in their later years in life. This work has important implications for health and housing policy for Indigenous people in Western Australia and around Australia. It emphasises the major causes of “house failure” as a lack of routine maintenance and poor initial construction.

Other research has highlighted the deficiencies in the law in relation to tenancy rights. Remarkably, the Residential Tenancies Act and the building legislation do not apply to remote and rural Indigenous communities. This can result in inappropriate or unfair mainstream standards, and housing in many cases is in a substandard state before being tenanted. Not surprisingly, homeownership for Indigenous Australians is relatively low. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals that just 8.4 per cent of Indigenous Australians own their own home, compared with 38.1 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians; and 19 per cent of Indigenous people are purchasing a home, compared with 34.1 per cent of non-Indigenous people.

The 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey showed that 69.6 per cent of Aboriginal people aged 18 years and above were renting, compared with just 24.3 per cent of all Australians. This figure is higher in remote areas, where 85.3 per cent of Indigenous people rent their homes. Due to the low level of homeownership and therefore a lack of ratepayers, remote local governments struggle to resource communities with essential services, such as roads and rubbish collection.

In 2006, a national study by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute reported that two-thirds of the dwellings rented to Indigenous households and managed by Indigenous community housing organisations were mainly in rural and remote locations. The remaining one-third were managed by state-owned and managed Indigenous organisations concentrated in major cities and other urban areas. The study analysed the real costs of providing housing to Indigenous communities in metropolitan, rural and remote locations. As expected, it was found that the average annual operating deficit was between \$2 400 and \$3 800 per dwelling for Indigenous housing, compared with \$269 for mainstream public housing. The main drivers of operating deficits were

insufficient rent and the high cost pressures on dwellings in remote and very remote areas. The revenues for Indigenous community housing organisations have not been sufficient to provide adequate levels of maintenance and, as a consequence, serious stock deterioration has been occurring. The report further suggested that more than \$705 million would be required to bring dwellings up to standard in remote areas alone. The research further highlighted the serious gap in the financial recording of Indigenous community housing organisations. Currently, 50 per cent do not report to government on their incomes and expenditure.

This issue of accountability has been raised on several occasions, including by the State Coroner, Mr Hope, in his investigations into a number of Indigenous deaths at Fitzroy Crossing and in the Aboriginal community of Oombulgurri. The coroner found that much of the housing at Oombulgurri was of a low standard and in poor repair. Having visited there on numerous occasions, I can attest to that. Similarly, a representative from the Department of Housing and Works agreed in the coronial hearings that much of the housing was a disgrace and that approximately one-third of the homes were uninhabitable. It was found that over a period of at least one year no money had been provided for maintenance due to the department's suspicion that tens of thousands of dollars had gone missing and there was no available audit trail for that money. Additionally, there had been no rent collection in the community, and this created a problem in that the housing in Oombulgurri was never maintained.

Similar findings were made about housing in Fitzroy Crossing, with the coroner calling for leadership and accountability to address the abysmal failure of the Western Australian and federal governments' approaches to appallingly bad living conditions in Kimberley Aboriginal communities. He said that there was no real leadership or coordination by the governments in response to the disaster of Aboriginal living conditions. It is unquestionable that these issues have been around for many decades and continue to exist. The "Agreement for the Provision of Housing, Infrastructure and Essential Services for Indigenous People in Western Australia" from November 2005 to June 2008 between the state and commonwealth governments sets out clear outcomes for achieving better Indigenous housing. These outcomes were adopted by all housing ministers in 2001 based on new directions and strategies outlined in "Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010". Among these outcomes are: housing that meets agreed standards; better housing services; better well-managed and sustainable growth in the number of houses; improved financial accountability and performance reporting—that is, by both Indigenous and government departments—and coordination of services with a whole-of-government approach. The total pool of funds available for housing and infrastructure in WA resulting from this three-year agreement, I understand, is more than \$226 million—a substantial sum of money. I would argue that even with this substantial amount of money, not much has changed in the area of housing for Indigenous people; any member who visits the communities in the Kimberley or Pilbara electorates will see that.

I ask this current government to acknowledge that previous efforts to alleviate this serious problem, however well intentioned, have failed and that a new approach is needed. I would really like, and sincerely urge, this government to consider taking the matter of Indigenous housing out of the hands of government agencies, as despite their best intentions, they have not been able to come up with a lasting solution. The Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Dr Kim Hames, has made an excellent decision in my view to reappoint General Sanderson, who I understand will help the government determine a structure, composition and terms of reference for a new board. I understand the board will have responsibility for a large component of the Department of Indigenous Affairs, and I hope that one of the issues to be looked at and dealt with will be Indigenous housing.

Albert Einstein is said to have remarked that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. I am suggesting that if we want different outcomes, we may just have to try different approaches to the problems.

The Gordon inquiry was a huge wake-up call to all Western Australians. It showed that, despite literally generations of promises and heavily funded bureaucratic policy solutions, many Indigenous people, especially children, still live in abject poverty and at great risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

*Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm*

**Hon SHELLEY ARCHER:** I will continue my comments on Indigenous housing in my electorate. In Indigenous communities there is a clear link between the quality of housing and poverty and the risk of abuse. Inappropriate Indigenous housing in community design is another major impediment to improving the living environment of Indigenous people. After people have seen photos in the newspaper or vision on television, I hear them ask why these communities are so untidy. Some of the questions they ask include: why do these people not take their mattresses inside; why do they not get rid of the old car bodies; and why do they not cook in their kitchen rather than outside? These questions demonstrate a clear lack of understanding of issues facing Indigenous communities. These communities do not have the infrastructure to remove car bodies, slash long grass or remove the rubbish. They do not have access to local government services. In many communities the municipal services that were provided through Community Development Employment Projects funding are no

longer available, and that is a consequence of the actions of both the former federal Liberal government and the current federal Labor government. Why are the mattresses left outside? The answer is simple: the Indigenous people might like to live outside. Another issue that has come to my attention is that most of the air-conditioning units in these homes no longer work. In the wet season, when it is incredibly hot, they take their mattresses outside because they find it more comfortable.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney** interjected.

**Hon SHELLEY ARCHER:** The problem is that most of the mainstream housing in Indigenous communities are relevant to white fellows. If their housing was constructed relevant to their needs, we might not have these problems.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** What is relevant? I am not asking this question out of nastiness.

**Hon SHELLEY ARCHER:** The government should go into Indigenous communities and ask them what sort of housing they want. They do not want the concrete housing that we have in the metropolitan area. They want housing that in the dry season allows them to go outside and in the wet season, when it is really hot, allows them to close up their houses, but they need air conditioning to do that. In the dry season they might want to cook outside, but in the wet season, when it is hot, they want to pop inside and use a proper kitchen. There is no way I would go outside to cook unless, of course, it was on a barbecue, but then I would send Kevin to do the cooking!

The needs of Indigenous people in remote communities are completely different from ours. In most houses the hardware does not work. The air-conditioning units, hot-water systems, kitchen stoves etc, do not work and once they break down, the people move outside.

In many circumstances the housing that has been provided in these communities is culturally and geographically inappropriate, and that results in overcrowding and promotes unhealthy living practices. I see that on a regular basis when I pop into these communities to say hello and see how they are going. If members have lived in a shared house, they would understand how difficult it is to keep one bathroom clean when up to 30 people are living in the same house. This is what is happening in these communities. On one of my visits to a community along Gibb River Road, I found that there were about 27 houses but only two water systems were working. Therefore, the entire community had to use the showers of two homes. They had a roster—the old people showered in the morning, the kids showered in the afternoon after they had finished school and the middle group of people would try to shower in the evening, but by that time it was too cold and most of them would not have a shower. It is a real issue in those communities.

During the dry season, many family members return to these communities for shelter. As I have said, some houses accommodate 20 to 30 people. Overcrowding is also commonly due to cultural ceremonies and festivities that bring many extended family members and friends into small communities. Some of these cultural occasions can last up to six weeks. Therefore, there is enormous overcrowding in these houses. I understand that significant groundwork has been carried out on Indigenous housing design frameworks and specifications, settlement planning guidelines and the like. However, I do not believe there has been the impetus or political will by either the former or current state government or federal governments to get the work done to implement many of these new design ideas on the ground in Western Australia. The mindset seems to be that this is the sort of house people have and this is what people will get, and it does not really matter how relevant it is to a community.

Such decisions and delays result in other hideous consequences. One Aboriginal organisation said in a submission to the Gordon inquiry that public housing is not well maintained and there is inadequate security, so many children have been molested in the night by outside intruders. Would we tolerate that situation in the suburbs of Perth? I do not think so; it would be front-page news, and there would be an absolute uproar. However, because Indigenous people live in remote and very remote areas, the problem is ignored or just brushed under the carpet as a problem that is too hard to fix. A lot of the state government departments that I have worked with—I cannot comment on the current government, because it has not been in power long enough, but it was certainly the case under the former government—put it in the too-hard basket. Ms Gordon wrote in her final report —

A lack of adequate housing contributes significantly to the complex and interrelated difficulties experienced by Aboriginal people.

...

Overcrowding in particular exacerbates health problems, increases the likelihood of damage to property leading to debt and eviction, and creates social conditions conducive to family violence and child abuse. Many Aboriginal people in remote communities in particular are in insecure or unsafe accommodation

...

A lack of infrastructure in remote communities and amenities such as sewerage, roads and recreational facilities, similarly contributes to poor health and a lower quality of life for Aboriginal people.

As the member for the Mining and Pastoral Region, I have spent an enormous amount of my time visiting Indigenous communities in remote and very remote regions and I have seen for myself the state of the housing in those areas and the terrible, appalling lifestyles that this creates for these people. We also continue to see on a regular basis newspaper articles and stories and media vision beamed onto our television screens, so much so that I think there is a real danger that people in the city are becoming desensitised to the problems facing Indigenous people in our communities. Is the answer to spend more on state-owned rental accommodation? The Gordon inquiry report states that this is not necessarily the best approach. Ms Gordon wrote —

The Inquiry strongly endorses systems designed to move Aboriginal people into home ownership and mainstream housing rather than state housing.

Clearly, we need to change our thinking on Indigenous housing. The state and federal governments cannot go on providing insufficient numbers of inadequately designed and maintained houses. If they do, we will continue to see the same problems that we currently see. We need a new approach—one that recognises, as the Gordon inquiry did, that the traditional welfare approach to housing, state ownership and subsidies is not the best way forward for our Indigenous people. Most importantly, Aboriginal children need housing which is secure and in which utilities such as electricity, water and sewerage services are working adequately.

Challenges also exist in the private rental sector. The main problem in this area for Indigenous people is poverty, discrimination and rising rental costs, especially in major regional centres such as Broome, Karratha and Kununurra—I would also include Kalgoorlie. Many are priced out of the private rental market and, even with commonwealth rent assistance, it is almost impossible for these people to enter the private rental market. Although our antidiscrimination legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate in the provision of accommodation, it is very difficult to prove, and the poor perceptions of real estate agents towards Indigenous people as tenants are constantly ignited by media stories. We saw this with the infamous campaign against an Indigenous group of school students and their carers in the northern suburbs a couple of years ago.

We need to consider other programs such as the private rental access scheme, which assists tenants in finding secure rental accommodation in the metropolitan area. These should be extended to include our regional and remote areas. I understand that, under the scheme, tenants are educated about housing matters and properties are leased until the tenancy can be met by those tenants. This would be very helpful to Indigenous people. I understand the scheme is managed and funded by Foundation Housing. Other worthwhile government programs, such as the state Aboriginal home ownership scheme and the commonwealth's Indigenous Business Australia home loan programs, have been established to assist Indigenous people to own their own homes. Due to these programs, and, of course, improved economic circumstances for some Indigenous people, there have been very slight increases in the number of Indigenous Australians owning or purchasing their own homes. It is important to note, however, that most of those owning or purchasing their own homes fit the same profile as non-Indigenous people who own their own homes; that is, they live in similar geographic locations and experience comparable income levels and employment status. Therefore, those programs are not really looking after those who are in the very low income bracket.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, warns that Indigenous Australians living in remote communities experience the worst housing standards and are one of the most disadvantaged groups on every social indicator. Only a minority of these communities are in resource-rich locations with governance structures to advance economic opportunities and thereby take advantage of home ownership programs. Mr Calma stated in his speech to the Indigenous home ownership panel discussion —

I have some concerns for my fellow Indigenous Australians—one of the most vulnerable groups in the Australian population—being encouraged to take on increased levels of debt ...

...

... Given that we are starting to see mortgage defaults amongst the mainstream 'battlers'—we cannot pretend remote Indigenous home owners would be any different.

This comment came in direct response to the commonwealth government's plans to allow homeownership on Indigenous community land. This is yet another topic of immense controversy, which I will not speak about today, except to say that the issue of Indigenous housing is complex and multifaceted, and there are many different and varying views about what is required, as well as many different Indigenous groups, government departments, laws and special interest groups that are involved. There is no easy answer to this problem, and I certainly do not stand here and claim to have any of the answers or solutions.

I think it might be beneficial if the Sanderson board that will be set up by General Sanderson and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs could ask for submissions from those organisations that do have an opinion about this issue, and if the board could then make some informed recommendations to the current state government about what it believes are appropriate solutions to the homeownership issues for Indigenous people. What I am saying is that, as a collective, we need to try something different to resolve these problems, because what we have tried over the past 30, 40 or 50 years has not worked. Therefore, let us look at it from a different angle.

In my view, we need to spend some very serious money. I have said previously that one of the reports indicated that an amount of \$705 million needed to be spent. That covered the top end of Australia. I would suggest that for Western Australia, an absolute minimum of \$150 million needs to be spent over the next two to three years to fix the problems in our Indigenous communities. I am not suggesting that this money be thrown into yet another black hole, never to be seen again, which is what happens to a lot of our Indigenous funding. We need to see clearer outcomes in return for this investment. This is, I believe, where the Sanderson board might be able to make a difference for Indigenous communities and their housing needs. I would like the Sanderson board to be inclusive, with a variety of community leaders, both Indigenous and non Indigenous, who are appointed on the basis of their business and community expertise, and who know how to gain outcomes, but, more importantly, know what the issues are in the wider Indigenous community. In my view, the Sanderson board should be free from bureaucratic restrictions and the obligation to do things in the way they have always been done—which is what government departments currently come up with. The single overriding obligation of the board should be to achieve clear and meaningful outcomes that will make a real difference in alleviating this awful crisis in our Indigenous communities.

I want to conclude by expressing my congratulations to the federal government for making Indigenous housing the first priority of the new joint policy commission, chaired by the Prime Minister, Ken Rudd, and the federal Leader of the Opposition, that was set up following the apology to the stolen generations. I hope that there will be genuine collaboration between all federal members of Parliament in finding real solutions for the Indigenous people of Australia. I hope that state governments will also collaborate with the commonwealth government in finding these solutions. I also want to say that I agree heartily with the federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, who said on the ABC *7.30 Report* on 12 February this year that we need to be really serious about closing the gap of Indigenous disadvantage, and we will not be able to close the gap if people do not have a decent home over their heads so that their children can sleep safely at night. For the sake of these children, and their mothers and fathers, I sincerely hope that this government will have the courage and the vision to invest in a new approach to Indigenous housing, particularly in our regional and remote communities.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Barry House):** Before I give the call to Hon Carolyn Burton, I remind members that this is the member's inaugural speech, and the normal courtesies apply.

**HON CAROLYN BURTON (North Metropolitan) [7.47 pm]:** Mr Deputy President, I am truly honoured to stand in this place today on behalf of the Australian Labor Party as the new Labor member for the North Metropolitan Region. I have been bestowed with this great privilege of representing the electors of the North Metropolitan Region, and as an elected member I will exercise this responsibility to the best of my ability at all times and will always work in the best interests of the people of the North Metropolitan Region. I have always been a north of the river girl—from the day I was born until now. It is the place in which I enjoyed my childhood, went through my teenage years and raised my family. I am proud of the north and its people, and to that end I will now be servicing our community through my electorate office, which will be in the heart of the Dianella, Morley and Bedford area.

I now turn to the issues that drive me and that have influenced who I am and what I believe in. In doing so, I pay tribute to my parents, Don and Beryl McCulloch, because I believe that all the good characteristics that I have come from them. My parents grew up in an era in which all fathers worked and nearly all mothers stayed at home to take care of their children. My father worked as a slaughterman his whole life, eventually becoming a supervisor at Midland abattoirs. He was a hard worker, with a strong work ethic, believing in a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. He worked in abattoirs in Wyndham, Derby and Broome so that he could provide for his family—nothing was too much of a sacrifice for him—while mum stayed at home in Perth to raise the family. Mum was a dressmaker by trade before she married, and she used to sew at home for a bit of extra money. Like my dad, she worked hard all her life, to the extent that if she stayed in bed for a day, we knew there was something seriously wrong. Both my parents taught us that nothing in life comes easy and one has to work hard and be a good person if one is to succeed. Nothing has ever been handed to us on a plate. We had to work hard for everything we had. Like my mother and father, my husband, Rick, and I tried to instil these values into our girls, Nikki and Kristy.

I believe in the words of Ben Chifley in his “Light on the hill” speech because it truly represents what I, as a member of the great Australian Labor Party, stand for. It is a proud moment for me as a woman, wife and mother who upholds the values of the ALP to stand in this place and read the words of the great Ben Chifley. He said —

I try to think of the Labour movement, not as putting an extra sixpence into somebody’s pocket, or making somebody Prime Minister or Premier but as a movement bringing something better to the people, better standards of living, greater happiness to the mass of the people. We have a great objective—the light on the hill—which we aim to reach by working for the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand.

Mr Deputy President, I stand before you today wanting to offer that helping hand, and I stand here under no illusions. Although I recognise that my time in this place is limited, I see no reason to hold back about the things that are of concern to my constituents and to me.

There is so much to be done in the area of mental health and there is a need to encourage greater investment, care and support for Western Australians who have mental health issues. The Gallop Labor government introduced the state mental health strategy in 2004. This resulted in more than \$600 million in extra funding being pumped into mental health in Western Australia and made this state the national benchmark. Our spend per capita on mental health is the highest in the nation, followed by Victoria. We want our state’s position as a leader to continue. I urge the Barnett government to continue Labor’s fine record in this area. I also believe that we need to provide better support for the carers in our society. Further, we need to develop opportunities for our youth to participate in sport and recreation by providing better facilities for young people to play sport and be more active generally. I will strive to ensure that Labor’s record in these two key areas is recognised and that the Barnett government is held accountable in these areas.

I would now like to turn to the issue of unions and the pivotal and important role they play in our society. Indeed, unions have played a large part in my life as Rick, my husband, is a union organiser with the Transport Workers Union and has been for 18 years, working tirelessly to improve and protect employee conditions. Unions have been a part of the Australian industrial landscape for over 100 years. Union leaders are community leaders and, in conjunction with the Labor Party, have been at the forefront of major industrial reforms that have resulted in improvements in pay, safety and working conditions for workers across every industry sector in this great state and nation. The entitlements that workers enjoy today, such as annual leave, sick leave, long service leave, superannuation, occupational health and safety standards and workers’ compensation, were all hard-fought-for conditions that were won by unions and their leaders for their members. The union organisation and the Australian Labor Party have worked together and will continue to work together to create a better and more just society so that we can be a stronger and better educated nation for the future. I am proud to be a union member, especially to be part of the TWU family.

As I mentioned, my parents and the example they set for our family were the reasons I became a member of the Australian Labor Party. The way we were raised entrenched Labor values and beliefs into me. We are a down-to-earth party, composed of hardworking people who can and do make a difference in this world. We believe in an end to discrimination and a fair go for all, and strive towards these goals. I have been very fortunate not only to have worked with some incredibly talented people already in the Labor Party, but also to have been one of the privileged few who have been able to stand in this Parliament as part of the Labor Parliamentary Party. It is an honour and a duty that I will not take lightly in the coming six months. I never imagined that I would end up in this place; however, in the time that I am here I will work with the ethos of upholding and maintaining Labor beliefs and values and working towards restoring the Western Australian voters’ faith in our party and showing them that only Labor has the stability and vision to take WA forward. The last state election was not one that true believers will remember as their fondest, but what is done is done. Labor has great people and great ideas. Now is the opportunity for our party to listen to and engage with the community, to develop our policies and ideas and to reconnect with those voters who wanted a change, so that when the opportunity to cast their vote comes again they will look to Labor as the party of strength, vision and opportunity for all, regardless of class, creed or gender.

As one of the many female Labor members who now constitute the Western Australian Parliament, I want to recognise the role of women in this place. For the first time in its history, the parliamentary wing of the Labor Party in the Legislative Council is led by women in Hon Sue Ellery and Hon Kate Doust, and I congratulate them on this remarkable achievement. Seven of the 17 shadow ministers in Labor’s shadow cabinet are women, which is a record to be proud of. One of those senior Labor women is Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, with whom I am proud to share my parliamentary office for the short time I will be a member of this place. Although I am proud to be a Labor member of Parliament, I am even prouder to stand in this place as a female member of Parliament. Labor is the only party that is strong, inclusive and represents the aspirations and goals of all Australians, not just a select few men.

I will now acknowledge all the amazing people who have helped me along the path to this great place. I acknowledge Rick Burton, my husband, life partner, best friend and soul mate. Rick and I met 34 years ago and together we have been through thick and thin. We recently celebrated our thirtieth wedding anniversary. The truth is that there is no-one else I would rather have spent those years with than my husband, Rick, and I look forward to many more. I acknowledge my two beautiful daughters, Nikki and Kristy, who have been by my side all their lives and who today stand by me as I make my maiden speech. I also acknowledge Alice, my stepdaughter, and my mother, Beryl McCulloch, who this year celebrated her eightieth birthday and is still fighting fit. Unfortunately, my beloved father, Don McCulloch, is not here today as he passed away nine years ago, but I know that he is certainly here with us in spirit. I know that both my parents, as Labor stalwarts, are proud today as their daughter stands in the state Parliament as a Labor MP to deliver her maiden speech. I have been blessed also with three wonderful siblings: Gary, Debra and my youngest brother Graham, who sadly passed away 31 years ago. They have been the best brothers and sister anyone could ask for. They have been a strong influence on my life and they have helped make me a better person.

I also acknowledge the help and assistance of my best girlfriends, Kim Campbell and Noelene Smith, who have been my close confidantes over many years, and I thank them. Jim and Glenys Murie have also been great friends of the Burtons for many years. As fellow unionists and strong Labor supporters, members can imagine our conversations when we get together. Jim is the assistant secretary with the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union—CEPU—and was the number 3 Labor candidate for the Mining and Pastoral Region in the recent state election. Although he was unsuccessful, if he follows the path that I have followed, we may see him as a member of this place sooner than we think. I thank Trevor and Michelle Schorer, whom Rick and I have spent much time with over the years, for their support. To my colleagues from the WA Labor Party office, thank you. I especially thank Sue McGiveron, Fran Laine, Sue Hearn and Julie Bogle who have toiled away for many years making our state office the peak political party that it is today. Thanks also to Hon Sally Talbot for her kindness and friendship, and I look forward to continuing this new form of working relationship.

Thanks also to Bill Johnston, who, in his own way, has helped bring me here to stand in this chamber today. I could always say that I am proud that Bill followed my lead and he followed me into Parliament, but that might be a bit too much! I congratulate him on his election to the Legislative Assembly. The electors of Cannington have a fine and hardworking individual as their local member.

I also acknowledge my staff—Terry O'Brien, Sonja Garnett and Lyn Young. We are all going on this adventure together. We have until 22 May next year, so let us see what we can do in this time.

I would also like to pay tribute to my predecessor, the former Labor member for North Metropolitan Region and forever Hon Graham Giffard, who, as honourable members would know, represented the South Metropolitan Region and then the North Metropolitan Region in this place from 2000-2008. I am grateful to Graham, as I would not be here without his brave decision to contest a seat in the lower house. The electors of Swan Hills have missed out on a fantastic and passionate representative. Graham left this place with great respect and I know my colleagues in the Labor Party share this view. I will strive to make the most out of this opportunity and I wish Graham and his family well in the future.

In conclusion, I want to take this opportunity to again say thank you to the Australian Labor Party and to my colleagues for the opportunity to stand here today and represent Labor. When preparing for this speech, I found an old resume from when I was 15 years of age. In it, I wrote as my career objective that I was seeking a career with an organisation that was progressive in its outlook and in need of someone with my interpersonal and organisational skills. Obtaining a position that offers a reasonable salary, a new challenge and contact with the community was my objective. We are an organisation that is progressive in its outlook, and this is a place where my personal communication skills can be put to use. The next six months will certainly offer me both a challenge and contact with the community, and I look forward to that with great anticipation.

My life has certainly changed since being elected in September and I know it will continue to do so. This opportunity has allowed me to focus on what I can and will do in this place and how I can make a difference.

I have been a passionate and active member of the north metropolitan community for many years, and although I had never foreseen this path, believing it was out of reach for a working-class girl from a working-class background, I fully intend to embrace this great opportunity. It is my intention to fulfil my role to the best of my ability. Having been born in Mt Lawley and educated in Morley and working and living in the Dianella-Bedford community, I can truly say that the northern suburbs girl has come home! Thank you.

[Applause.]

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