

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, CONSTITUENTS' ACCESS AND REPRESENTATION

Motion

Resumed from 9 November on the following motion moved by Hon Paul Llewellyn on behalf of Hon Giz Watson -

That following the widespread changes in political representation due to recent reforms in the Western Australian electoral system, this house -

- (1) Calls upon the government to initiate a review to be conducted by an independent body, such as the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal, to investigate methods of improving access to and representation by elected members, and to recommend methods of providing equitable services to electors and elected members regardless of proximity to population centres.
- (2) This review should include evidence collected throughout the state and consider but not be limited to -
 - (a) provision of telecommunication facilities such as teleconferencing and free telephone services to contact members;
 - (b) extra electorate offices and extra staffing;
 - (c) travel allowances for staff to move throughout electorates; and
 - (d) the establishment in non-metropolitan regional centres of "electorate shared service centres" where constituents can contact all members representing that region and access information about parliamentary processes such as inquiries and proposed legislation. These would be in addition to a member's own electorate office.
- (3) Requests a further independent review three years after the first election conducted on the basis of the Electoral Amendment and Repeal Act 2005 to determine whether regional and metropolitan electors have reasonable access to democratic processes.

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West) [2.06 pm]: The motion refers to the Western Australian electoral system and the resourcing of members of Parliament to do their job within the electoral system. I commend both Hon Giz Watson and Hon Paul Llewellyn for putting this motion before the house, because it is vitally important, if we are to do our job properly in this place, that we all be resourced properly and fairly. The word "fair" is often tossed around, and we all pay homage to it. However, when it comes to delivering fair outcomes, governments are not always prepared to implement their rhetoric according to the letter of the law.

I am very regretful, in view of the comments made by Hon Paul Llewellyn, that he was not in this chamber prior to 21 May this year. It is possible that we would have had a different outcome had Hon Paul Llewellyn been in this chamber prior to 21 May this year, because I sense that he may have adopted a different attitude to the legislation that was before this house at that time to change the electoral system than did his predecessor, Hon Christine Sharp. If members refer back to those debates, they will see that I may not have been too charitable to Hon Christine Sharp, because I thought she did the South West Region, which she represented, a huge disservice by leading the charge on that legislation and helping the government get the numbers to implement that legislation. I have no compunction in saying that I believe she also sold out the state to the detriment of representation from that area of the state. The end result of those electoral changes will impact on both the South West and Agricultural Regions, but principally the South West Region. At least three, and possibly four, of the Legislative Assembly members representing the South West Region will lose their electorates, as will another member in the Legislative Council who currently represents the South West Region. Therefore, the total representation from the South West Region will be six. The Agricultural Region, of course, will also be impacted because it will lose numbers in the Legislative Assembly but will gain an extra member in the Legislative Council, taking the number of members from five to six. The Mining and Pastoral Region will have a net gain from the changes. It will retain its five lower house members, and there will be an extra Legislative Councillor for the Mining and Pastoral Region. Of course, the big winners are the metropolitan regions, which will have substantially more members representing their districts in both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council.

I got pretty angry at stages during that debate, because the region I represent was shafted, quite frankly. In terms of representation, the south west was treated very shabbily. Therefore, I was pleased that Hon Paul Llewellyn, in his comments, at least recognised the issue. I do not believe his predecessor, Hon Christine Sharp, did to the same extent. In that sense, I applaud the member's comments because I think I have seen some evidence that he is trying to do his job of being a representative, in a representative democracy, of the area that he was elected to

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represent, and is not just paying lip service to it. Therefore, I believe the member's motion deserves support and encouragement.

Hon Paul Llewellyn is also a country-based member who lives and works in his electorate in the south west. I know that I have commented on that issue before. However, it is an issue about which I feel very strongly. This Parliament - by that I mean the whole Parliament, involving both houses - is a representative democracy. It is not a Parliament elected on the basis of political ideologies. However, regrettably, this house is moving towards that, and the electoral laws that were enacted earlier this year will move this house towards that sort of scenario, which will be to the detriment of Western Australia. If members live and work in a region, they have a far better chance of understanding it, caring about it and fully appreciating all the issues that arise in that area.

I know that Hon Paul Llewellyn mentioned his difficulties with establishing his office in Denmark. Members from country regions can identify with that. I am sure that Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm can also. The fact is that some people seem to have the attitude that it is always at least twice as far for them to travel from Perth to whatever country destination it may be than it is for us to go to Perth. That attitude really gets up my nose. Meetings are called at the drop of a hat by people who are centralised in the Perth metropolitan area, without any thought, let alone understanding, of how much time it takes to get from the country to Perth and the dislocation involved. Quite frankly, at times it is contemptible. My electorate office is in Margaret River, which is a very attractive country destination. I may suggest to people who contact me that I will be in my electorate office on Friday afternoon and that they should drop in. However, when they work out that it is in Margaret River, God forbid, they could not possibly make it there. Even if they do, and they are metropolitan-based people, we can bet that they will organise their meetings, particularly if they are public servants, to coincide with a Friday or a Monday so that they can incorporate their "official business" into a long weekend. That is one of the occupational hazards of being a country member, I suppose.

When equipment such as photocopiers, fax machines and computers need to be serviced, we often wait two, three or four days, or sometimes a week, before somebody is available to service, say, a photocopier that has blown up or something like that. I am sure that a comparison with the situation in Perth metropolitan areas would not stand up very equitably.

I have some very strong concerns about the way in which the electoral changes in Western Australia have directed representation in this Parliament. In this Parliament, the representation of the Western Australian community is getting narrower and narrower. In the Liberal Party, we pride ourselves on the fact that the Liberal Party has a very broad representation, not only across the state but also across a wide variety of backgrounds and people who understand different issues, areas, businesses, industries and environments in this state. The Liberal Party has farmers, schoolteachers, doctors, dentists, businessmen and bobcat drivers - a whole range of people who represent a variety of issues, and that is the essence of representative democracy. On the other side of the chamber, I can see Labor Party representation coming from only a narrower and narrower base. The trade union movement provides the overwhelming majority of Labor Party members, particularly in this chamber.

Hon Kate Doust: Don't you think that they have the capacity to have experience working with the community and have a range of life skills and experience that qualify them for representation in this place?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Sure; they do. I am not denying that they have something to offer this place. However, I am saying that most of them offer the same set of skills to this chamber. Within their political party, they represent a narrower and narrower base. The bulk of Labor Party representatives in this chamber come from that background. I see a real problem with that. What is the percentage of union membership in Australia? I think it is 20 per cent or so, is it not? Quite frankly, it is not very high. Therefore, it is not a fully representative sample of people from the community of Australia, and Western Australia is a fair reflection of that.

The other problem with the electoral changes in this place is that the representation has become more centralised. The selection of candidates is more centralised. Even within the Liberal Party, it is getting more and more centralised. By comparison, it is still much better than that in the Labor Party. However, members are picked from a narrower and narrower base. The experiences of a centralised selection committee are, by their very nature, much narrower than those of people from all parts of the state, with the full set of issues that are involved. That must be an issue. It would be a backward step if the parliamentary process in this chamber was dominated by people who were selected from centralist elites within political parties and who represented a very narrow set of backgrounds. Regrettably, I believe we are seeing significant moves towards that. The whole context of that is that if members do not live and work in an area, if they do not work with the people who are facing the issues every day and if they do not talk with the people and fully understand the issues, not only will they not understand the issues, but also they will find it harder and harder to represent those people and deal with those issues in a house of Parliament.

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This house will comprise 36 members after the next election. The last thing we want is a house of Parliament that comprises 36 political appointees. We are moving in that direction at the moment, and it would give rise to a very poor legislative chamber. We have heard people criticise the House of Lords by saying that its members are not elected and they are not representative; they are appointed. That is a fair criticism, but are we not doing exactly the same thing here, via a different route? In some respects we are and that is to our detriment.

Hon Paul Llewellyn touched on the south west diversity. Previously, I have also mentioned this issue in this house. I will always mount the case that the South West Region, which includes all those towns between Mandurah through to Albany, is harder to represent than most of the other areas. Only one dedicated airline service from Perth flies into the south west; that is, to Albany. We do not have the luxury of representing a country area that we can fly into on a regular transport service. In the Agricultural Region there are regular transport services to Geraldton, Esperance and Albany and in the Mining and Pastoral Region there are dedicated airline services into most of the major centres. Therefore, it is easy to hop on a aeroplane in Perth and get to those areas to make a guest appearance at a function.

The south west includes many distinct and unique communities within which there are distinct and unique towns. These towns cannot be lumped together, because all of them are different from each other. They are diverse and unique in their own way. I could give heaps of examples. People may say the south west can be categorised into three main regions - the south west, part of the Peel region and part of the great southern region. Quite frankly, that is a generalisation that does not wash with me. If we talk to people in Pinjarra and lump them in with the people of Mandurah on every issue, there will be an argument each time. If we talk to people in Mt Barker and lump them in with the people in Albany, there will be an argument. Mt Barker is a very distinct community. If the people in Collie are lumped in with the people in Bunbury, they will get very offended. The people involved in each community are distinct and unique and they have their own sets of issues that they consider important to them. Waroona is different from Harvey, and Harvey is different from Brunswick Junction, yet there are certain common elements running down the South Western Highway. In the coastal areas - Bunbury, Busselton, Margaret River, Augusta, Albany and Denmark - there are distinct and unique communities and they do not want to be lumped together. It is offensive to them if they are lumped together.

There has been discussion about why local authorities should amalgamate. The local press in my corner of the south west has published articles about why the local authorities of Busselton and Augusta-Margaret River should amalgamate into a Cape to Cape region. Quite frankly, it would not work.

A very foolish decision was made to fund one business enterprise centre for the Vasse region. Funding has been made available for one business enterprise centre to be based in Busselton, but it has to service the whole region. Quite frankly, it does not work. A very successful business enterprise centre had been operating out of Margaret River for the best part of the past 15 to 18 years. It has been rudely shoved aside and is no longer funded. It has been told that it no longer exists and the business enterprise centre objectives will be delivered through one BEC, based in Busselton. The Busselton BEC could make the decision to have an outpost in Margaret River. I certainly hope, at the very least, that it makes that decision. It will not work if services are centralised, even within a region as small as that.

The South West Area Health Service is a classic example. Sixteen hospitals and medical centres are spread throughout the area covered by that health service. However, there is a tendency by that health service to centralise services out of the major regional centre; that is, Bunbury. Of course, a good case can be made for centralising the more acute services to obtain greater efficiencies. The service providers and the health service that are provided in each of the communities - Manjimup, Pemberton, Bridgetown, Donnybrook, which has an excellent hospital, and Harvey - cannot be dismembered. Like all the distinct towns in the area, they have their own requirements. They all have issues in terms of education facilities, health care, which I have mentioned, and transport. The linkages in the transport world are more important in the country than in the metropolitan area because it is taken for granted in the metropolitan area that roads, railways, buses and a host of services are accessible simply because of the critical mass of numbers. In the country there is not always a critical mass of numbers, but the service is still required to exactly the same extent in those areas.

If we consider any other areas - environment, science, planning, agriculture, fishing, forestry, water resources, mining and a whole range of social issues and infrastructure, particularly in the arts world - it can be seen that they are all distinct and operate within their community. Community arts councils operate in a different way while catering for different aspects of the arts communities, and to a different degree of effectiveness. The strength of the south west is its amazing diversity. However, in some respects, it is its weakness when it comes to representation because it is not appreciated, understood or acknowledged by decisions that have been made by this Parliament or by the community.

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Another issue raised in this debate is the inequity in resourcing between the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council members. The decision made by the Premier earlier this year was probably the most insulting unilateral decision that any Premier has handed down in this place. Unfortunately, it is a product of the fact that decisions regarding members' entitlements lie with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, so they become political. We have seen clear evidence of that. The Premier made his decision about increasing staff entitlements to only Legislative Assembly members, purely on political grounds. It was easy to add up the different columns and reach the view that there are more Labor members in the Legislative Assembly, and after the next election there certainly will be more in the metropolitan area and, therefore, he decided to allocate the resources in that area and starve the rest. "Starve the rest" means starving the Legislative Council members; a very insulting decision. Those decisions should not rest with the Premier; those decisions should lie with the joint houses of Parliament; and those decisions should lie with you, Mr President, as one of the Presiding Officers. The Presiding Officers jointly should preside over parliamentary members' entitlements. We are not the executive; we are the Parliament. The Court government was equally to blame in this respect; it did not change those guidelines, although it should have. Those decisions should come under the auspices of the Presiding Officers of the Parliament. We should be resourced to do our jobs as members of Parliament, not according to how we fit into the executive. Everybody should be treated equally. There should be no inequity and no repeat of the insulting decisions that have come down from on high recently. The decision by the Premier to starve Legislative Councillors of those extra staffing resources given to Legislative Assembly members is insulting. There is no argument for it. Legislative Councillors, I am sure, will all agree that we have the same policy work and representation duties as the members of the Legislative Assembly.

I have just made a case that it is actually more difficult for us to move around the South West Region. I have to drive everywhere, as do my other colleagues in the South West Region. Covering 60 000 to 80 000 kilometres a year involves a lot of driving, and I have been doing it for 18 years. That driving would just about qualify as a job by itself, yet there are all the other aspects of our jobs that we must attend to. That is also a real occupational health and safety issue. It is a miracle - touch wood it will not happen - that no members have written themselves off on the roads. I know our former colleague Hon Murray Montgomery came very close to doing so a few years ago. He rolled his car on a gravel road and it caught fire. He was extremely lucky to get out of that accident, and I know he was very badly shaken up. That situation could very easily have ended in tragedy, and could easily be repeated for any number of the members who must travel over large areas. In the recent Salaries and Allowances Tribunal determination, one suggestion - I do not know whether it resulted from the suggestion that I made - was that South West and Agricultural Region members could both equally mount a case for four-wheel-drive vehicles with roo bars and spotlights, as are granted to members in the Mining and Pastoral Region. Thankfully, the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal took up that suggestion, so that we now have access to what I consider to be safer vehicles for country travel than was previously the case.

The basis of my comments is that the rules for the electoral changes and for the resourcing of members of Parliament, particularly those in country regions, are increasingly being made by people who do not understand the issues. The really scary part is that I do not think that they care either. For political advantage, they will completely override any fair consideration. Of course, this will get worse as a result of the electoral changes that will strip members out of many areas of country Western Australia, particularly the South West Region. There will be more members representing city electorates. The electorates of Victoria Park, Cottesloe, Churchlands and South Perth will all be reduced to about two-thirds of their present areas. Quite frankly, that is a joke. The areas that country members have to represent will expand proportionately. They do not just expand by a couple of square kilometres; they expand by a couple of hundred square kilometres, and the extra area may include 10 country communities, each with its diverse and unique issues and each with the desire and the right to be represented in the Parliament. Such representation will become harder and harder to achieve, and their voices will be harder to hear.

I disagree, to an extent, with some of the remarks made by Hon Paul Llewellyn about the capacity of a member to service an electorate. He intimated that he would like more capacity for his staff to travel. I do not necessarily disagree with that. Our federal colleagues from all around Australia have the capacity to take a staff member to Canberra with them. That would be a great advantage, and I am sure that country members in Western Australia would find it a great advantage if it were available here. However, I have always been reticent about staff attending meetings in a representative capacity. That can only be done to a very limited extent. People who have elected members of Parliament expect to see their member; they do not expect to see a puppet on a string put up at the meeting saying that he is there representing Hon Joe Bloggs. That wears thin very quickly. People have a right to see their member, otherwise we do not have a representative democracy; all we have is a system with avenues for sending a messenger somewhere. In the age of modern communication people might argue that, with all the modern technology - e-mails and text messages - that is enough. God forbid if what we have been hearing about Telstra in the past few days comes to pass. A cartoon in today's newspaper

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summed it up very well. The big boss on high sends out a text message on a mobile phone saying that dismissals will now be texted to staff. If our way of communication descends to that level, we may just as well have robots representing people in this place, because it will be a nightmare. It is a nightmare now, as a member, trying to keep up with communications. I have 17 or 18 different items of communication by which people can contact me - fixed telephones, mobile telephones, computers and fax machines. That is helpful to an extent, but after a while it gets complicated and bewildering. The number of e-mails we receive is becoming bewildering. I am not in a position to carry around a laptop everywhere I go, and I would not want to anyway. It is invasive for someone to be sitting in a meeting fiddling around on a computer; it is as bad as people fiddling around with a mobile telephone while others are trying to communicate with them. Put simply, a member representing a country community, which involves a lot of driving, cannot spend time mucking around with a laptop looking at e-mails, let alone do any further research using computer technology. Representation must be real: representing real people. Gadgets may help but they will not substitute completely. We have to be aware of that.

I have spent a bit of time making the case that the South West Region is more difficult to represent than other areas of the state. It is easy for city members to get around their electorates, and it will be easier to get around their electorates when those electorates are even smaller. The Agricultural and Mining and Pastoral Regions revolve around Perth as a hub. At least there is better access -

Hon Murray Criddle: Some people revolve around Perth!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Absolutely. That is a point I was about to make. There is a tendency, regrettably, for members in this place who represent country electorates to not live in the country and to not even have their offices in the country. I have never agreed with that, and I never will. It is not the way to represent their electorates. I know that Hon Murray Criddle works from and maintains a presence in the Northampton and Geraldton areas. Frankly, that is our job, and if we do not do that, we are cheating our electorates. It is a position I have always held and will always maintain. Those members owe a duty to base themselves in the country; otherwise they get more and more removed from the areas they represent. In the end, they do not understand the local issues, and the people who make the rules from centrally based Perth get another ally to make decisions that further alienate representation for the country. That is certainly not a solution.

On the issue of more resources for minority parties, as I have said, we are all members of this Parliament and we should be treated equally. For the life of me I cannot understand why the government did not recognise that in the previous Parliament the Greens (WA), with five representatives, had as sufficient a case to be considered a minor party as does the National Party in the Assembly. I do not think Hon Paul Llewellyn's party pushed the issue hard enough. The five Greens members in the previous Parliament became the lap-dogs of the government and did not push the issue hard enough. There are only two Greens members now, but they still have the critical position of the balance of power in this place. The issue will not be sheeted home to the government until they are prepared to hurt the government. They must do that by way of some piece of legislation that is critical to the government or by some other means. I am sure that they will think about those means and work something out. In my mind, there is no case to be made for Greens members to be treated as they have been treated. By the same token, there is no case to be made for Council members to be treated inequitably either. It would be an interesting case study to examine the contributions to debates of members of the opposition parties and the Greens in this place. I suggest that our contributions to debates would probably outnumber those of government members by nine to one. We very rarely hear from many members of the government back bench. If we looked at their contributions to debates over the four years of this Parliament, at the current rate we would find in three years that some of them would not fill half a page. Opposition members have to do their own research. I am sure that some members of the government who have been in this place for a while can recall being in opposition. I know that they do not want to recall it, but the fact is that it is a helluva lot harder. Opposition members have to do their own research. They do not have the government department facilities to provide them with the information pertinent to a debate. I am not saying that it is a good training ground; I am just saying that I have had enough of it.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Hear, hear!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: It is very difficult. I think I have made most of the comments I want to make. I am happy to support Hon Paul Llewellyn's motion. It portrays some of the issues that are important to members of this Parliament. I am pleased that Hon Paul Llewellyn is exercising some degree of independence. As I have said, I was very critical of his party because of the way in which it, as the party with the balance of power, merely went along with the government without applying much pressure to it. Maybe that pressure was applied behind the scenes where it was not obvious. However, the only way that members will receive equity in representation and, in the same sense, achieve it for all members of the Legislative Council is to exercise the authority they have. I know that his colleague Hon Giz Watson has always been respected as a logical and fair

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person by members of this chamber. I am sure that she would apply the same sort of logic and would be as upset as other members by recent developments.

I do not think there is a need for me to say any more, other than to reiterate that the changes to the electoral system will compound recent decisions made in this place about resourcing Legislative Council members to provide a two-tiered representative system in the Western Australian Parliament. That is unjust and inequitable. For those reasons, the motion should be supported.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [2.47 pm]: Like Hon Barry House and other members on this side of the chamber, I support the motion. There is great merit in it. I will comment on two issues. The first is the role that the Parliament plays, and the role that the electoral system plays in constituting that Parliament. The second is the current inequities in the staffing formulas for the two houses of Parliament. Any electoral system should be equitable; it should represent the people of the constituency that the Parliament represents. Western Australia is unique. We must not forget where our electoral system came from. We wanted within Australia an electoral system that represented the very diverse and unique geographical structure of this nation. Western Australia is quite isolated from the rest of Australia. At Federation, it was regarded as one of the smallest states because of its population. The electoral system that was promulgated within the Constitution in 1901 represented the interests of both the people and the states. That is why we have the electoral system we have today. It is unlike a unitary system, in which there are no states. In Australia we have a Federation, so we needed an electoral system that represented the people and the states. We got that and we ended up with a fairly good system of electoral representation. Upper house representation was changed to proportional voting in 1949, which some would suggest was a positive move. Other people were not quite so happy with it. It was intended to represent a broad cross-section of the community. I do not necessarily have a problem with that. The lower house was represented by popular vote through a preferential voting system. Like other parts of Australia, Western Australia is geographically unique. The people of Western Australia, particularly in rural and remote areas, need special consideration. That is why we had the electoral system that existed until 2005, when changes were made to the Electoral Act. These changes were a travesty of democracy. Under the previous system, the people of rural and regional Western Australia received concessions for the very real challenges that were placed upon them. Some people of an adverse nature might suggest that it was a gerrymander, which is sheer nonsense. A gerrymander is a direct manipulation of electoral boundaries to suit a particular political party. There was no manipulation of electoral boundaries. It was a situation in which rural Western Australians got a voice in the Parliament that they deserved. That has since been removed. I deplore that move and I deplore the changes that were made to the Electoral Act.

I now return to what Parliament represents and whether Parliament can adequately represent all the people of Western Australia and whether all the people are equally and equitably represented. I would suggest that is not the case at this stage. That is firstly because of the changes to the Electoral Act. Secondly, there is fundamental discrimination because of parity and staffing issues between the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. For the life of me, I cannot fathom why the government would make such an illogical and ill-considered decision. Before I pursue that, let me return to why we are here today.

The Legislative Council should stand as a beacon of what bicameralism and parliamentary democracy is. We are equally as representative of the people of Western Australia as members in the lower house. In fact, we are more so because we scrutinise in great detail - a lot more detail than our counterparts in the other place - every single piece of legislation. Piece by piece, we scrutinise it. We listen and use committees very effectively. We debate at length every single piece of legislation to weed out some of the problems that arise from the other place. That is first and foremost our fundamental role - to review legislation that comes from the other place. How do we do that? Of course, part of it is through party allegiances. That is quite evident. We also do it through the fact that we are equally as representative of the people. We have regions and each of the regions has a significant number of people and interests that we have to represent. That must not be forgotten. We have much more to represent than representatives in the other place. Our role within the Legislative Council is equally, if not more, significant than the role of the other house. The whole notion of bicameralism is to ensure that we do not have a unitary system in which there is only one house of Parliament, which is basically open to abuse. In their wisdom, the founding fathers created a bicameral system in Australia nationally and at the state level. They took the best parts of the British and American systems - they left out the President, which is a good thing - to create a bicameral parliamentary system. That ensures that the people are heard. They placed in the system meticulous checks and balances to ensure that the rights and privileges of the people of this nation - that is, the mandate of the people - was expressed through the Parliament. The Parliament is not one house; the Parliament is two houses. This is a bicameral Parliament. The Legislative Council holds the same weight. However, at the moment, there is possibly a question mark over that notion.

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I will talk about the role of members of the Legislative Council. I have found it a tremendous experience being here. It is a wonderful experience. I thoroughly enjoyed my previous occupation. I was extremely busy in that occupation. I was teaching at Scotch College and had numerous responsibilities within the school as a head of department, a house head and head of tennis. At the same time I was also the coach of a tennis club. I was very busy. I had no idea what I was letting myself in for when I came to this place. I have been busier than a bricklayer in Baghdad! I find it very difficult to imagine that I could be any busier. In my previous occupation I thought that I did not have much time. Members of the Legislative Council have a role that goes far beyond the scrutiny of legislation. Members of the Legislative Council also represent the people of their regions. I heard a bit of chest beating going on from various members over the past few weeks concerning the role we play and how large some electorates are. I have a tremendous amount of sympathy for members of the Mining and Pastoral, Agricultural, and South West Regions. Speaking on behalf of my colleagues in the metropolitan regions - they will support this when they speak as well - I must say that our responsibilities and roles are equally as significant. Members of the Legislative Council with city electorates have an enormous amount of responsibility placed on their shoulders. As an example, the North Metropolitan Region contains 14 Legislative Assembly seats. If the seat of Wanneroo is removed because it is exceptional due to its size, the average size of a Legislative Assembly seat in the North Metropolitan Region is 27.6 square kilometres. The North Metropolitan Region is 996 square kilometres. The average number of electors in a Legislative Assembly seat in the North Metropolitan Region -

Hon Barry House: It is almost a suburb of Northampton!

Hon PETER COLLIER: I can appreciate that it is probably minuscule when compared with some of the regions but I can assure the member that we certainly make up for it! However, I take his point. I will not start having a go at my rural colleagues! They should not forget that I am a country boy. I have a great respect for country members.

The average number of electors in a Legislative Assembly seat in the North Metropolitan Region is 27 645. My six colleagues and I, who represent the North Metropolitan Region, are responsible for 391 214 electors. The North Metropolitan Region contains 21 hospitals, 57 nursing homes, 235 primary schools and 53 secondary schools. Even though I take on board the jests of my colleagues about the geographical size of country electorates, we certainly have more than our fair share of responsibilities in who we have to service. I am not complaining; I can assure members of that because I am living the dream. I am doing what I want to do. I am sure that we are all doing that. Are we doing it adequately and competently to ensure that the best interests of our electors are being serviced? I suggest not. In all sincerity, I suggest that we are not doing as good a job as we possibly could. There are a couple of reasons for that. The primary reason is that we simply do not have adequate time to, firstly, service our electors comprehensively and, secondly, at the same time prepare adequately for legislation. I find that the longer I am a member of this place, the more time I am spending preparing for debate on legislation. I spend an exorbitant amount of time researching legislation, and seeking details from special interest groups and the electorate at large. I am a little concerned that I am doing that because the longer I am spending in this job, the more I am ignoring the very people who elected me in the first place; that is, the electors of the North Metropolitan Region. I am not spending as much time as I spent when I was first elected listening to the very real concerns of members of the educational community or with members of small business. Initially, I spent an enormous amount of time specifically targeting special small business groups, and the educational and recreational sectors. As I have become more attuned to my role within this place - I am sure my colleagues will agree; a number of us started in May this year - I have come to realise that an enormous amount of research is required to get our heads around legislation. As I said, I am spending much more time stuck in my office in Joondalup when I should be out listening to my constituents. My part-time staff member works almost full-time but is paid for only 0.4 portion of a week. She spends an enormous amount of unpaid overtime doing much of the research that I need and that I consider essential if I am to adequately represent my constituents. My electorate officer cannot do any research. Her job is taken up doing things like sending letters to 300 schools once a month, or whatever it might be to 14 000 small businesses in Stirling alone. I will have real problems at the end of December when I sit back and try to tick off boxes in an appraisal showing what I am doing and what I can do better. Physically, I cannot do any more than I am doing. I am not claiming to be Superman. I am not saying I am a beacon showing how members should act. I am saying that I am typical of members of the Legislative Council and the role we play today.

I tip my hat to the two members of the Greens (WA), Hon Giz Watson and Hon Paul Llewellyn. I have great respect for the role they play. I can be a little selective in the bills for which I prepare. Obviously, I follow up and speak on bills that are of interest to me or that come within my portfolio responsibilities. Unfortunately, the Greens members do not have that luxury. They must address every bill and read every clause to consider how it impacts on their fundamental philosophies. I cannot imagine how two members can do that on every bill with 1.4 staff members. I tip my hat to them. It is difficult for me, so I cannot imagine how difficult it is for them.

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As I said, I respect that the Greens members are always prepared when they speak in this place. I am sure that they are under enormous pressure.

Getting back to the point at hand, I found extraordinary the decision made a few months ago to give Legislative Assembly members an extra 0.6 staff member and not Legislative Council members. I could not quite work that out. How could the government be so discriminatory? How could it possibly discriminate on the value of a member of Parliament based on which house he is a member of? The discrimination between the two houses is unwarranted. I find it very difficult to understand, and I will be very interested to hear how the government can justify discriminating between the houses. I appreciate that our roles are different. Although I am not described as the member for Cottesloe or the member for Nedlands, as a member of the Legislative Council I still represent all the constituents of Cottesloe, Nedlands, Girrawheen, Wanneroo, Joondalup, Mindarie and Hillarys. I am a member for all those electorates. I feel that in no shape or form am I any less significant to those electorates than the members of the Legislative Assembly for those electorates. In fact, if anything, my role is more significant. When bills pass in the other place that concern the community, each and every time, as I am sure members are all aware, e-mails and phone calls are made to members of the Legislative Council from concerned people asking them to please do something. In response, members might meet a group of people, make a number of phone calls or e-mail people and do an enormous amount of research. We then make a value judgment based on the evidence before us. We must then try to win the argument in this place, when we have an opportunity to win the argument. The Liberal Party has no chance of winning the argument in the other place. Seven will always beat six, and nine will always beat eight. We will not win the vote in the other place but we have an opportunity to win it in this place. That is not to say that, in any shape or form, members opposite play a less significant role. I would like to think that, ideally, they are doing exactly the same thing that we on this side of the chamber are doing; namely, identifying problem areas of the legislation that have slipped through because they have not received sufficient scrutiny. We will find those areas. We will examine every clause and debate them. We will identify them in the second reading debate, debate them in committee and vote on them. Sometimes we will see eye-to-eye and sometimes we will not, but at least we will have given legislation due consideration.

Imagine if this house did not exist and the state operated under a unicameral system, as occurs in New Zealand. What would happen then? We could not possibly say that legislation would be given adequate consideration. We should value our bicameral system of government in which one house introduces legislation and another house reviews it. The government is saying that the second house, the house of review, is not as important as the house that introduces legislation. In effect, the government is giving a slap in the face to the very role for which this house exists to perform. I would like to think that, in its wisdom, the government will rectify the situation. I assure the government that I for one would very much value a full-time research officer. It would free me from the enormous amount of time that I spend in my office, and allow me more time in my electorate. I could be cynical and suggest this deprivation of staff is a ploy by the government to prevent Legislative Council members from spending time in their electorates. Perhaps it is saying that it does not want us in the electorates; it does not want me, for example, in the northern suburbs trying to help win back for the Liberal Party the seats of Mindarie, Joondalup or Wanneroo. Perhaps the government wants to keep me in my office doing my preparation so that I cannot do that. However, I would like to think that the government is more altruistic than that and has just as much regard for the electorate as my colleagues and I have.

I believe this situation can be resolved. I cannot do anything about the first issue that I raised with regard to the changes to the Electoral Act. I was very disappointed that that occurred. However, regardless of that, the government should change the inequity that exists in the staffing formula. Even though the government has taken away from the people of Western Australia with the one hand, it should now give something back with the other hand to ensure that all members of this chamber are given the opportunity to adequately represent their electors. The members of this chamber are being discriminated against at the moment. This matter could easily be resolved and at nominal cost to the government. It would have universal support within this chamber. There would be no opposition from any party. How can the government possibly argue against that? For the two reasons that I have identified today, I strongly support the motion.

HON GEORGE CASH (North Metropolitan) [3.11 pm]: I also support the motion. Notice of this motion was given by Hon Giz Watson, but the motion was actually moved by Hon Paul Llewellyn. I support the motion notwithstanding the introductory comment in the motion -

That following the widespread changes in political representation due to recent reforms in the Western Australian electoral system, this house . . .

It then lists various matters. It seems to me that, notwithstanding the changes that occurred in the last Parliament, the various elements that comprise the motion were a real need even before the legislation was changed. However, in the time since the legislation was changed, these issues have come to a head. I am reminded that in September 2001 two bills were introduced into the Legislative Council. The first was the

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Electoral Amendment Bill 2001, and the second was the Electoral Distribution Repeal Bill 2001. The government wanted those bills, which were often referred to as the one vote, one value bills, to be put through the Parliament as quickly as possible. The opposition believed that there was an immediate need for some consultation. Of course "consultation" was a word that the government had used on numerous occasions to try to suggest that it was involved with and always talked to the community. However, when we raised the question of consultation on the one vote, one value bills, the government said there was no need for any consultation; we should just put them through. Fortunately, the opposition and the Greens got together and succeeded in having those two bills referred to the Standing Committee on Legislation. The Standing Committee on Legislation met, and - fortunately in my view - a majority of the committee agreed that the committee needed to travel to country Western Australia to find out what the people in those areas thought about the proposed one vote, one value bills. The committee reported in due course. Hon John Ford, now a minister, was the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Legislation at the time. Just to indicate to members what a rushed visit the committee made to country Western Australia, on 21 October 2001 the committee visited Kalgoorlie and Esperance; on 22 October, Bruce Rock and Lake Grace; on 29 October, Kununurra and Fitzroy Crossing; on 30 October, Broome and Port Hedland; on 31 October, Karratha and Tom Price; on 1 November, Carnarvon; on 2 November, Geraldton and Meekatharra; on 4 November, Wagin and Jerramungup; and on 5 November, Mt Barker and Manjimup.

Much of what the people of country Western Australia told the committee they were looking for could occur only if the issues raised in this motion were put into effect. One example is the question of travel. As I recall it, in every place that the committee visited during those hearings, the electors made the point very clearly that face-to-face consultation with members of Parliament far outweighs any of the modern toys that we now have in the telecommunications system, such as faxes, telephones, SMS messages, and e-mails. They said face-to-face consultation is critical.

In due course, when the committee returned to Perth, we talked about the various issues that had been raised. The mere fact that there are approximately 900 000 voters in the metropolitan area compared with 300 000 in the country creates a huge inequity. An elector in the North Metropolitan Region would need to drive for only three or four kilometres to get to a member of Parliament's office, whereas an elector in the country might need to drive 500 kilometres, or even up to 1 000 kilometres, to get to a member of Parliament's office. Another issue that was raised is that many people in country Western Australia assumed that the notion of one vote, one value meant that it would be one vote, one value across Western Australia. They recognised that that would affect country Western Australia to a significant degree. However, they would never have anticipated that in the Mining and Pastoral area there would be quarantined seats, which would give that area a greater benefit over equivalent areas elsewhere in the state. Equally, the people of the North Metropolitan Region would never have believed that their representation in the Legislative Council, which is currently seven members for about 400 000 voters, would be reduced to six members, and that the Mining and Pastoral Region's representation in the Legislative Council, which is currently five, would be increased to six, for about 80 000 people.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: It is actually 65 000.

Hon GEORGE CASH: I was being generous, because of the huge amount of development that is occurring in the north west at the moment. Inequities were shown up.

The reason I support the motion is that although it is ironic that everything that is included in the motion was discussed during our various committee visits, and certainly in the committee hearings and its later deliberations, the need for these items still exists today. Part (2)(b) of the motion notes the need for extra electorate offices and staff. The committee recommended at page 141 of its report, in recommendation 11, that the research capacity of all members be increased from 0.4 FTE to 1.0 FTE. As has already been noted, that has occurred in the Legislative Assembly but not in the Legislative Council. It strikes me that when the government works out just how much legislation has gone through the Legislative Council it may scratch its head and ask why. The answer to that question is obvious. It is that members of the Legislative Council are required to research the various pieces of legislation that come before this house. It clearly takes a lot longer for a member who has 0.4 FTE to research legislation and related parliamentary matters than it does a member who has a full-time research officer. I do not run away from that proposition, because, in my view, the work that is done in the Legislative Council, including the research and the substance of the debates, is unquestionably better than that which occurs in the Legislative Assembly. The fact is that each Legislative Assembly member is now allocated one full-time equivalent research officer. Perhaps that will change in due course and there will be an improvement. However, the history of the Legislative Assembly in Western Australia, because it is the place in which the government has the numbers, has been that it rams the legislation through no matter what, and then sends it to the Legislative Council, which is a place that I have previously described as a panel beating shop, to make good the damaged legislation that comes before it.

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Hon Paul Llewellyn: A spray-paint.

Hon GEORGE CASH: We also give it a spray-paint sometimes. It is just that the green paint has been used, and we must get some more of it!

I do not need to spend too much time on this motion. I indicate that I support the motion without question. I say again that it is ironic that the motion should be moved, because the decision for one vote, one value in Western Australia was, in part, the result of a combined Greens and Labor Party vote. It was certainly not agreed to by the opposition Liberal Party or National Party in Western Australia. However, the need for those additional resources exists. If we want to speed up the flow of legislation in the Legislative Council, it seems to me that the government would be well advised to reconsider its position on research officers allocated to Legislative Council members. The proposition that three research officers might be attached to the Legislative Council, perhaps located in the library or some other place, and be available to all members is doomed to fail. It will not work and it should not be contemplated any further. Members should be entitled to have their own research officer so that they can get on and do the job that the people of Western Australia expect them to do in a proper manner. I support the motion.

HON ROBYN McSWEENEY (South West) [3.22 pm]: I find it rather interesting that this motion has come from the Greens, given that I was sitting in this chamber when the electoral reform bill was passed. I remember the Premier and the Minister for Electoral Affairs sitting in the President's chamber, and we could hear the champagne corks popping outside. However, this is a different Parliament, and Hon Paul Llewellyn has realised how the Greens have been duded by the Labor Party. The Greens now have only two members, who are very overworked. Like me, Hon Paul Llewellyn travels great distances. My office is in Albany and my home is in Bridgetown. I can fly from Perth to Albany. However, I cannot fly from Perth to Bridgetown where I live. Therefore, the only option available to me is to drive from Perth to Albany, which takes some four and a half hours, work a full day, and then drive for another three hours to my home in Bridgetown. A few members in this chamber, such as Hon Barry House, travel a great deal. However, I believe it would be fair to say that only Hon Barry House and I travel great distances, simply because the south west is unique.

I heard Hon Barry House mention an accident that Hon Murray Montgomery had when he was a member of Parliament. When I was first elected, I came home from Perth very late and I had to be in Albany very early the following morning. It was in winter, and there was a very thick fog. I missed a T-junction and went through a fence. I was very lucky that the roo bar on my car acted like a plough as the vehicle went along. Before the mud came up over the car, I could see two trees, and I just hoped that I would miss them. As I said, the roo bar acted like a plough, and I went between the trees and ended up facing the road. I was very shaken but extremely lucky.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: Were you charged by CALM?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, I was not charged by CALM, but I had to stop at a neighbour's place and make a telephone call, because there were sheep in the paddock that I was lucky enough to miss also. Politicians who live in the country travel vast distances.

The South West Region extends from Mandurah to Albany. I act like a lower house member, as my office is in Albany and I am the only Liberal member based in the Albany area. The areas in which I travel a great deal have no Telstra service; therefore, telecommunication facilities are not much good to me. Phone lines in country areas drop out constantly. I find it rather interesting that I can get a phone connection out the back through Frankland, yet I cannot get a connection on the Albany Highway and in some parts of the South Western Highway. I cannot even get a connection when I go from Bridgetown to Manjimup. Phone lines and telecommunication facilities do not do a great deal for me. As for the Internet and e-mail, I find e-mail a really good tool to use. However, I prefer the good, old-fashioned face-to-face contact. Misunderstandings can easily occur via the written word, whereas if I am standing and talking to somebody, 70 per cent of what is communicated is done through body language. I am paid to be the elected member. I live and work in the country. People want to see me, not my electorate officers, for whom I have the highest regard. However, as I said, I am paid to talk to people. I look over to the other side of the chamber and I see mostly a union-dominated Labor Party - city dominated mostly. Some Labor Party members -

Hon Kim Chance: All Labor Party members present are from the country.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I did not say all; I said that some Labor Party members are more interested in serving the factions than the state. I notice that some of the newer members are hardly ever in the chamber. As Hon Kim Chance would understand, a country member drives many kilometres. As a minister, Hon Kim Chance obviously has a driver now, but as a member he would have driven many miles. Country members also

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sit in this chamber and do their work. For me, it is a little frustrating when I look over to the other side of the chamber.

When I dealt with the Environmental Protection Amendment Bill in this Parliament, I discovered the lack of knowledge and understanding in this chamber of city-dominated members. It was like hitting a brick wall. Hon Kim Chance understands my point. I refer to trying to make the Labor Party understand the lack of practicality in that legislation and what it would do to the farming community. I have a bit of sympathy for Hon Kim Chance, because he probably went into a city-dominated cabinet. I know that that would be a hard thing to do, because those other cabinet members do not understand the situation either.

Hon Kim Chance: Has there been a cabinet since 1920 that was not city dominated?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: This one certainly is.

Hon Kim Chance: Before that, it was Kalgoorlie dominated.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I was not around then.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: Hon Norman Moore was just considering that and trying to bring back his memory of it.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Is the member insinuating that I was -

Hon Kim Chance: It is just a fact of where people live.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It is very difficult to make city people understand what goes on in rural areas if they have never lived and worked in those areas.

Hon Kim Chance: That is very true.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: To illustrate that, the debate about the forest industry was interesting. The forest industry was decimated, people were put out of work, trees became more important than people and emotions took over. There was no need for that to happen. We had the world's best practice in forestry, but emotions got in the way, commonsense went out the window and the result was nonsensical.

Private property debates mostly involve property in country areas. The Liberal Party fights for the rights of individuals to have economic freedom and to make decisions about their properties. I have spoken on that issue from Gingin to Mt Barker.

Mental health, a subject I will debate tonight, is a huge problem for everyone in the south west, including young people. Youth suicide is a huge problem. Yesterday I mentioned that in Queensland the statistics show that every month one young person commits suicide.

Hon Kim Chance: Suicide, generally, in the country is a huge issue.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes. I know that there was a spate of 12 suicides, mostly 24-year-old males. I understand that the government carried out an inquiry into that, which is good. Sadly, suicide is still occurring.

Fruit growers in Donnybrook are dumping their produce because of cheap imports from China. I have not heard anything from this government about this issue. I realise it is a federal issue, but it is happening in our state. It must be so heartbreaking for those fruit growers to produce that beautiful fruit, which is classed as seconds, and then have to dump it in big holes on their properties because of cheap imports. They should have the capacity to market their seconds. I do not know whether members understand how the decision to import fruit from China hurts a fruit grower and his family not only economically but also physically. Such an action would make a fruit-growing family physically ill.

Dairy farmers are having an incredibly hard time. Our cows are being exported to China, and I am scared that Australia will import milk from China. That is so wrong. In Northcliffe, the Daubney family is producing its own milk and marketing it; putting it into shops for sale. One family has invested millions of dollars to do that.

Hon Kim Chance: It is a tremendous initiative and I hope a lot more people do it.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I hope so too. I buy that milk and every time I am in the shop I point out to people that it is local milk and I suggest to them that they buy it to help get the project off the ground.

Hon Kim Chance: There is a similar operation in Toodyay.

Hon Paul Llewellyn: And in Mt Barker.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, there is a similar operation in Mt Barker.

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Friends of mine, Beth and Derek Dilkes, have a dairy farm in Greenbushes. They were very efficient farmers, but now they are selling their dairy cows - some are going to Mexico and some to China - and a young family will lease their property. They could not have been more efficient; they were excellent farmers. Another farming family will be gone from the country. Their son, Nigel, was working on the farm with his dad. Nigel, his wife and two little kids are now moving out of the area. We are losing our young people.

Hon Kim Chance: We are aware of that.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Hon Kim Chance is well aware of that, but I am trying to reinforce that farmers are leaving their property. A lot of these farms are now being planted with trees. I would be the first person to say that I can do what I like with my property and can plant trees if I so desire. However, good farming land is disappearing. I find it sad, but I would not say it has to stop. It does the beg the question: why is beautiful land going under trees?

I refer to the education choices in country schools compared with city schools. We debated the Acts Amendment (Higher School Leaving Age and Related Provisions) Bill yesterday, and the school leaving age will be 16 next year and 17 in 2008. I am concerned that country children will not have the choices that are necessary to keep them interested in school. A mechanical workshop cannot be easily put into country schools. We could do it, but a lot of money would be required to keep these country kids interested. In the city, the kids have a lot of choices, but that is not the case in country towns. Some of the country schools go only to year 10. In my area most of the children go to Manjimup for years 11 and 12 - a whole region comes into one school in the south west. I repeat; country kids certainly do not have the choices that city kids have.

City members may have no idea that in the country little children get up at 5.30 in the morning to catch the school bus at six and do not get home until five in the afternoon. I should also mention the recent debacle with school bus contractors.

Hon Kim Chance: Then they complain that we do not support daylight saving.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I do not support daylight saving.

Hon Kim Chance: Neither do I.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am very pleased to put on record that I do not under any circumstances support daylight saving.

Country towns would not exist without volunteers. City electorates are provided with professional ambulance officers and firefighters. Country towns rely on volunteers, and they do a wonderful job. Our country areas would go downhill if people did not become involved in the communities.

What do city people know about genetically modified organisms? Hon Bruce Donaldson and I travelled throughout Canada and America.

Hon Kim Chance: And you did an excellent job.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Hon Bruce Donaldson was the chairman and the trip was excellent.

What do city people know about canola and wheat? They have bread -

Hon Kim Chance: All those who joined you on the committee would thank you.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Who can forget about local government? How many authorities are there?

Hon Bruce Donaldson: There are 142 on the mainland and two offshore.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Local governments were threatened when they wanted to donate money to help the Country Alliance fight against electoral reform. They knew it would be a lot harder for them to get services in particular areas without a politician going into bat for them. That is how it is done. In the south west, three representatives will be taken away. I could go on about services, or the lack of them, in country towns. The government's arrogance in taking those seats out of the country and putting them into the city is beyond belief. We have had the argument before and I will not go over it. What will another eight politicians in the city do? Seriously, I wonder what some of them do now.

Hon Kim Chance: Some of them have electorates with 47 000 electors.

Hon Ray Halligan: How many?

Hon Kim Chance: I know of one.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: What we get is something like 42 city and 15 country politicians in the lower house. It is being set up for a huge divide. The city - where the people are most dominant - will have, will get. The 500 000 or more people in the regions will miss out. Our state has a geographical area the size of Europe

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and stretches 2 500 kilometres from north to south and about 1 800 kilometres from east to west. It covers several climatic zones with clearly defined regions. It is a huge area and we cannot hope to service it. It is the height of arrogance of any government to have city-based representation in the lower house, where government is formed. It will be 42 to 15, something like that. Government members are put here because they wear a skirt or the factions put them there - they comes up through the unions. It is not to say that they do not have an understanding of city issues. However, at the beginning of my second term, I do not believe that there is a great deal of understanding about country electorates. I am particularly sad that this has gone through. I support the motion of Hon Paul Llewellyn because I support any measure that makes it easier for us to service our electorates. That is what we are elected to do. I find it very hard now to do that, and anything that can help us will make things better than they are now.

HON NIGEL HALLETT (South West) [3.41 pm]: I support the motion moved by Hon Paul Llewellyn. As a new member, I find it very difficult to accept the contempt of this government for the people of rural and regional Western Australia. I was part of a committee that fundraised to fight the electoral bill in the High Court. I would have thought that any government would accept the umpire's decision and go along with it. However, a certain member of Parliament would stop at nothing and would bend any rule to get what he wanted. I consider the integrity of some of the people who pushed this issue and wonder what drove them. It certainly was not for the good of rural and regional Western Australia.

If I supplied the resources that are made available to a member of this chamber to the staff in my business, I would probably keep them for a day, if I was lucky. The work required of a member of Parliament, in either house, is enormous. I have found scrutiny from within and from the public to be a lot harder than I thought. The area represented by Hon Ken Baston and Hon Norman Moore covers some 450 000 square kilometres, and it must be serviced with 1.4 people. It is impossible to do that. The travelling time is enormous. To travel from Exmouth to Karratha or to Broome, it is necessary to fly back to Perth and then fly to Karratha or to Broome. It is the same in my electorate. For the first three months I was based in Perth; it was so much easier than losing one to one and a half days a week in travelling time, as Hon Robyn McSweeney finds. She probably loses closer to two days a week in travelling time now. I agree entirely with Hon Barry House.

If we were audited for safety, none of us would do anything more than drive in our cars. That would be a full-time job. I sincerely wonder how members opposite, particularly Hon Kim Chance, can look people in the eye and say that they work hard representing country Western Australia. Hon Kim Chance was able to vote eight members out of country Western Australia and into the city. I find it inexplicable that he can claim to represent the Agricultural Region. I will get back to having a Perth office. It was so much easier having everything at my fingertips. However, when the 0.4 full-time equivalent was not there, getting my electorate officer to get things to me was far more difficult. I also agree with what Hon Barry House said about how quickly one can get out of touch with what is happening in one's electorate. I defy anyone to say that regional Western Australia will still get good representation without the members there. It just cannot be done; the areas cannot be covered, and time will show what a disaster this has been for Western Australia.

I agree with Hon Paul Llewellyn that we need far more resources to operate effectively. I disagree with his point about sending staff members in our places. We must have the time to be there ourselves. The electorate wants to see us, not our staff. In general, this is a good motion and it will get very good support.

The claim that the voting system in Western Australia was gerrymandered is an absolute lie. Our state is huge and towns are small in size and population. We cannot be compared with a Queensland model, where the cities in the regional areas have populations of 50 000 to 60 000. Bunbury is a large city, but is quite small in comparison with many Victorian and New South Wales cities.

There is inequity of population in the various fly in, fly out areas. Many people working in country areas are actually based in the city, but their conditions are governed by this government. We have all seen the decline of facilities in rural and regional areas and this will not stop. Some people talk about ending fly in, fly out. I do not agree with that. There is a balance between a stable population in towns, and fly in, fly out population, which adds another dimension to the areas and brings in more services. This must be kept in balance. The town of Karratha has a population of 14 000 or 15 000, has 14 or 15 doctors and a couple of flights every day. It certainly gives families a great opportunity to commute to anywhere else, particularly the city. If they want to go to the football, they can get good low-cost flights and give themselves a very good lifestyle. If those services are taken away, people will not even go to live there.

How the Premier can just ignore the workload of this house is beyond my realms of thinking. The contempt he has shown for this house has utterly amazed most Western Australians, and hopefully he will be judged accordingly. There is not a lot more I can say on this motion, except that I hope the Legislative Council is given the resources that are badly needed. There should be no difference between the two houses. I hope that this

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inequity can be addressed straight after Christmas, and that the Leader of the House will be able to tell us that we will be resourced.

HON RAY HALLIGAN (North Metropolitan) [3.49 pm]: I support the motion, and certainly the concept of the motion. The government has treated the members of this house abysmally. At this point I will not go into the whys and wherefores of the so-called one vote, one value legislation. The government has gone down a particular path to totally exclude and ignore members of this chamber. Parliament is made up of two houses, and each house has equal rights, as well as equal responsibilities. I am more concerned about the responsibilities, and they revolve around the fact that it is incumbent upon every member of this place to research in the best manner possible the legislation that comes into this place. When one considers that each member of this chamber must, in the majority, look after two lower house seats - that is an absolute minimum - one can expect that the demands on the time of members of this place are a lot greater than those on members of the Assembly; yet members of the Assembly are given more resources. Legislation appears to pass through the Assembly at the drop of a hat, as they say, because, of course, the government has the numbers. This government also tends to be quite happy using the guillotine, time management - call it what we will. However, the point is that legislation passes through that place quite quickly, and often to the detriment of the legislation itself. I would like some research to be done on the many pieces of legislation that have come to this place after not being debated in that place in the manner that they should. Members should consider the number of amendments made in this house that have been sent to the Assembly for ratification. The Assembly has often accepted the amendments made in this place. That shows the important role that this house plays in the parliamentary process, a role that one hopes members of the community understand. Hopefully, they will advise the Premier in no uncertain terms that what he needs to do is resource this house in a manner equal to that of the Assembly.

Legislation often takes longer to go through this house than the other, and there is a very good reason for that. I am fully aware that the Leader of the House quite often castigates members on this side of the house because legislation is not going through this place as quickly as the government would like. There is one very good reason for that; that is, we do not have the resources that we believe we deserve. I hope the government recognises that government members in this chamber also lack those resources, or they might bring amendments to this place instead of the opposition or they might be in a position to convince their colleagues in the other place that amendments should be moved in the other place. Unfortunately, the Legislative Council gets deficient legislation that takes much longer than it should to debate - I do not deny that - purely because of our lack of resources. It is incumbent upon the government to do something about that. All we hear at present is that the issue is being looked into. Is that the decision-making capacity of the government, that it should take that long to decide whether there are sufficient resources for members of this house? Does it take the government as long as it has to compare the resources given to members of the Assembly with those given to members of the Council? Does it really take that long to make those decisions? We are told that this is a consultative government. We are repeatedly told that it consults. Has it consulted with members on this side of the chamber on this issue? The answer is most definitely no. Why does the government not wish to consult? It does not wish to consult because it knows that it would lose the argument. It could not possibly win the argument because it knows full well that the issue of resources is a gerrymander. It talks about our electoral system as a gerrymander. At this point we have a gerrymander. The government has over-resourced members of the Legislative Assembly and left out members of the Legislative Council. The government knows it and we know it, but the government will do nothing about it. If the members of either chamber in this Parliament need additional resources, it is those in this chamber. I would like the Leader of the House at some stage to stand and say the opposite if that is what he believes. Let him have the gumption to stand and say that we have all that we deserve and all that we need, and that the Assembly has what it has.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Graham Giffard): Members will have observed that the notice paper indicates that one hour and 50 minutes remained for debate on this motion. That time having elapsed, I am required to put the question.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Extract from *Hansard*
[COUNCIL - Wednesday, 16 November 2005]
p7327f-7340a

Hon Barry House; Hon Peter Collier; Hon George Cash; Hon Robyn McSweeney; Hon Nigel Hallett; Hon Ray Halligan; Deputy President

Ayes (15)

Hon George Cash
Hon Peter Collier
Hon Murray Criddle
Hon Anthony Fels

Hon Nigel Hallett
Hon Ray Halligan
Hon Barry House
Hon Paul Llewellyn

Hon Robyn McSweeney
Hon Norman Moore
Hon Helen Morton
Hon Simon O'Brien

Hon Barbara Scott
Hon Giz Watson
Hon Bruce Donaldson (*Teller*)

Noes (12)

Hon Shelley Archer
Hon Vincent Catania
Hon Kim Chance

Hon Kate Doust
Hon Sue Ellery
Hon Jon Ford

Hon Graham Giffard
Hon Sheila Mills
Hon Louise Pratt

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich
Hon Ken Travers
Hon Ed Dermer (*Teller*)

Pairs

Hon Ken Baston
Hon Margaret Rowe
Hon Donna Taylor

Hon Adele Farina
Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm
Hon Sally Talbot

Question thus passed.