

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan - Minister for Local Government) [10.00 pm]: I move -
That the house do now adjourn.

Fitzroy Valley Education and Health - Adjournment Debate

HON HELEN MORTON (East Metropolitan) [10.00 pm]: Last Tuesday I asked the house to listen to the women from the town of Fitzroy Crossing and to help them to develop strong families and have safe kids. I spoke about the courageous role that June Oscar and Emily Carter are playing. I met Emily Carter when I was in Fitzroy Crossing last year, so it was wonderful to meet with both her and June Oscar last Friday when they were in Perth. These very intelligent, educated and passionate women were in Perth for one week to plead for help. Amongst others, they met with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Hon Michelle Roberts; Hon Tom Stephens; the Commissioner of Police; and the Director General of the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor. The women want a parliamentary inquiry to ascertain the true state of health and education in the Fitzroy Valley. They are also seeking a moratorium - a circuit breaker - on the sale of takeaway alcohol in the town. They have written to the Premier about setting up a parliamentary inquiry. The Fitzroy Crossing community comprises about 4 000 people. It might be useful for members to think of Wagin, Kojonup, Moora or York to get an idea of the size of that community. Last year there were 13 suicides in the Fitzroy Valley community. When I was travelling through that area, I was very surprised by how desensitised people were to the notion of suicide. They were starting to talk about suicide as though it was just another option to get out of some of the terrible situations in which they find themselves. June Oscar and Emily Carter told me that 500 women from the Fitzroy Valley had used the local refuge to escape abuse and violence in the past 12 months. They also said that 20 per cent of children born in that area have alcohol foetal syndrome. That figure is backed up by specialist paediatricians who have worked in the Kimberley. The women have provided me with copies of letters from two paediatricians, which I think have been reported in *The West Australian*. The current paediatrician for the area wrote -

A large percentage of the mothers I see are alcohol dependent, and intergenerational FAS has emerged: young women with intellectual developmental delay from FAS, who themselves are alcohol dependent, giving birth to babies with FAS.

This is beyond being a public health issue. It is a civic tragedy and insult to society, and a moral challenge. Self-determination does not mean the freedom to damage your child's brain in the womb.

Why is there no outrage over this?

The letter concludes -

I strongly support the moratorium on alcohol sales in Fitzroy Crossing and I will be pleased to support you in your public endeavors.

A former paediatrician for the area outlined the situation even more clearly. He was the paediatrician for the Kimberley for seven years from 1998 to 2004. In his letter he talks about his experience of foetal alcohol syndrome and states -

The tragic consequences of drinking alcohol during pregnancy have been well documented in world literature; sadly, in Australia, . . . are lagging behind . . .

He undertook an audit that -

. . . looked at the incidence of drinking during pregnancy and showed that around 20% of women were drinking harmfully during pregnancy whilst over 40 % of women were drinking to some level in pregnancy.

He spoke about some of the secondary problems associated with foetal alcohol syndrome, such as -

1. Mental Health Issues including depression, . . .
2. Inappropriate Sexual behaviour including sexualized crimes against children . . .
3. Contact with Justice system . . .
4. Alcohol and other drug problems . . .

He went on to say -

Even if only 10% of the children born in the Kimberley each year have been affected then with a birth rate of 800 per year that would be 80 brain-injured children born each year. Take those figures and expand them over the last 20 years and we have a problem that is devastating to the community.

These women are incredibly courageous in seeking help. They said that there is only one child health nurse in the area for 500 children. They spoke about children's education not being acceptable. That was certainly what I found to be the case in Halls Creek. Ms Judith Butters, the manager of the Yura Yungi Aboriginal Medical Service, told me that she went to primary school in Halls Creek and then went to high school in Perth. She said that her grandchildren now attend the same primary school but that the students who attend that school are lucky if they are able to read and write by the time they finish primary school. In the space of three generations, the situation at that school has changed significantly. June Oscar and Emily Carter said that they consider it to be a problem of out of sight, out of mind. Drugs are very common in that region and are becoming more so. People in Fitzroy Crossing can buy a \$10 starter pack containing a bit of ice and some gunja, and can graduate to a \$50 or a \$100 pack without too much trouble.

The women want a parliamentary inquiry to gather reliable, objective, baseline data about the health and educational status of people who live in the Fitzroy Valley. They want the needs of the people to be clearly identified. They also want some performance measures to be put in place, with an assurance that, if implemented, those initiatives will be objectively measured and monitored. The women are glad that the Australian Securities and Investments Commission is investigating an issue concerning the disbursement of funds. They made a special plea to me, which I have subsequently passed on to federal members of Parliament, to not allow the commonwealth government to leave them out or to get out of its responsibilities in the Kimberley.

The women know that there is opposition to their call for a moratorium on the sale of takeaway alcohol in Fitzroy Crossing, but it is by only a small minority, including the people who drink alcohol and those who make a profit from the status quo. They do not underestimate the difficulties associated with a moratorium. They talk about needing a "can do" attitude rather than a "can't do" attitude in the region. They know that a number of things would need to be put in place to support a moratorium, such as education and information programs, alerts, signage, additional policewomen and men, support services for drinkers and their families, and an ability to monitor the highways. They know that some people will be inconvenienced and will bear the brunt of the moratorium because they are responsible drinkers. However, these women continue to press their case, and I am incredibly impressed by the perseverance and courage they are showing. They made it very clear to me that this is a cry for help; if they do not achieve this circuit-breaker, alcohol will strip away what little hope there is for Indigenous women in the valley. I say again, forget the politics; this is a town in crisis that needs our assistance. Members should put themselves in the shoes of these women and their families. We need to work together to help rebuild their strong families and make their kids safe.

National Rural Education Conference - Adjournment Debate

HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (South West) [10.11 pm]: Last Thursday and Friday, 30 and 31 August, it was my pleasure to attend and open the twenty-third National Rural Education Conference run by the Society for the Provision of Education for Rural Australia and held at the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education. Delegates came from overseas, interstate and many parts of Western Australia for a conference that promised much and delivered a heck of a lot to those who attended. As chairman of the Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council, I opened the conference on Thursday. On Friday, the deputy chair of RREAC, the member for Wagin, Mr Terry Waldron, talked about RREAC's activities over the past 12 months, since its reformulation by the previous Minister for Education and Training. RREAC basically provides strategic advice to the minister of the day on equitable opportunities for students living in rural and remote Western Australia. That is very similar to the terms of reference, or the thrust, of SPERA's activities. The uniqueness of RREAC's activity in Western Australia is that it represents a bipartisan approach to issues in rural and remote education, with the current emphasis being on supply and demand of the education workforce in Western Australia. On the other hand, SPERA, which was formed in 1985, has a more generalised approach, as is reflected in the excellent conference agenda.

I will mention some of the papers for the benefit of members. The first keynote address was delivered by Professor John Pegg of the University of New England, who presented a paper on developing a national holistic approach to addressing issues in rural and regional school education. That was followed by a presentation from Dr Colin Boylan and Dr Andrew Wallace from Charles Sturt University entitled "Reawakening Education Policy and Practice in Rural Australia". Those keynote addresses were followed up by a number of workshops and concurrent presentations. I will give members some idea of the variety provided in the sessions that I attended. First of all, Tom Jamieson from the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education presented a workshop on flexible learning in schools. This was followed by the presentation of Dr Graeme Lock from Edith Cowan University entitled "The Student Teacher Rural Experience Program: Preparing Pre-Service Teachers to Live in Regional Locations". Another very interesting paper was delivered by Dr John Halsey, from Flinders University, on rural-urban school partnerships and Australia's sustainability. Sonia Ferns and Megan Ellis from Curtin University of Technology gave a presentation entitled "Empowering Regional Communities -

Partnerships for Sustainable Education Programs in Regional Western Australia". Phil Idle, an architect, presented a paper on designing schools for Indigenous communities. Another paper was from Malcolm Plester and Paul Gallash of the Port Hedland School of the Air on building relationships with parents. As members can probably imagine, those papers and workshops were very interesting, and engendered much debate. They were very much relevant to RREAC and its terms of reference, and invaluable to my role as chair of the council.

I will make mention here of the organisers and workers, and congratulate them all on the magnificent efforts in putting this conference together. As members can imagine, with presenters coming from places as far afield as Alaska, this was quite an achievement. I particularly mention the executive of SPERA: Anne Napolitano, the president, from Kalgoorlie; Kate Haddow, vice president, from Katherine in the Northern Territory; Don Boyd, the treasurer, who is director of rural and remote education in Western Australia; Rosa Lincoln, the correspondence secretary, from Western Australia; Emmy Terry, the new SPERA president for 2008, from Western Australia; Bronwyn Ellis, from Whyalla in South Australia; Sheila King, from Toowoomba in Queensland; and an expatriate Western Australian, John Borserio, also from Toowoomba. Their endeavours and professionalism ensured highly successful outcomes and a great two days.

In concluding, I put into perspective the issue of inadequacy generally in rural and remote education by referring to Professor John Pegg from the University of New England. At a recent forum on rural and remote education in Albury, he said -

I believe the underachievement of rural students, approximately one-third of our student population, is one of the most pressing issues in education in Australia today.

It impacts on all Australians. RREAC, with its bipartisan approach, is working hard to address educational issues in the bush and to provide strategic advice to our minister. After the SPERA conference, I believe we have an even more informed view of these issues and how we might inform our minister of some of the solutions he may entertain. I look forward to future conferences across the country and thank the organisers for the opportunity to participate in this year's event.

President of the People's Republic of China, Visit to Perth - Adjournment Debate

HON GIZ WATSON (North Metropolitan) [10.17 pm]: I feel that I must rise to make some comments on the visit to Western Australia of the President of the People's Republic of China, Hu Jintao, and mention some matters that members should be aware of in considering our relationship with China. I became aware that the President was visiting the state by way of an invitation from the Premier to the state dinner, which I appreciated, but which I declined. I will read to members from the letter I wrote declining the invitation -

Thank you for the invitation to the State Dinner in honour of the official visit to WA of the President of the People's Republic of China.

I will not be attending the dinner as I can't in good conscience honour the President of the People's Republic of China. I cannot honour the leader of a country that continues to have an appalling record of: human rights abuses; suppression of media; arbitrary detention; and the continued use of death sentences and executions for nonviolent crimes. Not to mention genocidal policies in Tibet.

I went on to comment that the Premier might, while the President was in the state, take the opportunity to raise some of these issues. I understand that that suggestion was unfortunately declined.

I raise this matter because it is important for Western Australia to understand that, when we do business with other countries, it is important to not complacently make arrangements for economic advantage without taking into consideration exactly who we are dealing with. China tortures and executes prisoners at an exceptional rate; in fact, it executes more people than all other countries combined. Amnesty International estimates the number of executions as somewhere between 8 000 and 20 000 a year, often without adequate trial and for nonviolent offences. China also brutally oppresses its political opponents and those seeking to express their religious or spiritual beliefs. Of course, members will be aware of Falun Gong. Indeed, quite a few members and supporters of Falun Gong chose to express their feelings about the President's visit outside the Hyde Park Hotel last night, as did representatives from the Western Australian Tibetan community whom I joined in support of their action. I just wanted to take a few minutes to remind members of some of the issues about Tibet and to put on the record that somebody made some comments on behalf of Tibetans around the world about this state honouring the President of China.

Despite a few positive steps, China has made no attempt to introduce the fundamental legal and institutional reforms necessary to bring an end to its serious human rights violations. In Tibet and other ethnic Tibetan areas, freedom of expression and religion continues to be severely restricted. China continues to use the international war against terrorism as a pretext for cracking down on peaceful dissent. According to Amnesty International's 2007 report, Tibetans in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other areas experience severe restrictions on their rights to freedom of religious belief, expression and association, and discrimination in employment. Many are

detained or imprisoned for observing their religion or expressing opinions, including Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns. Excessive use of force against Tibetans seeking to flee repression in Tibet continues. Around 2 500 to 3 500 Tibetans make the dangerous crossing by foot over the Himalayas into exile in Nepal and India every year. The reasons for escape include religious oppression, China's discriminatory economic policies, lack of quality education, and political repression. Having had the good fortune to visit Tibet, I know the geography of the country and how difficult it is for people fleeing Tibet on foot. It is extraordinary that that number of people are able to do that.

In September 2006 witnesses saw Chinese border patrol guards shooting at a group of Tibetans who were attempting to reach Nepal. At least one child was confirmed killed. According to the International Campaign for Tibet report of 10 August 2007, the situation in Lathang, eastern Tibet, remains tense after a local Tibetan nomad was detained after speaking about the importance of the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet to a sympathetic Tibetan crowd gathered for a horseracing festival within the present-day Chinese province of Sichuan. A group of Tibetans in the area have led a process of dialogue with officials in the county in an attempt to secure the release of this particular person, although according to reports, officials have indicated to local people that he has committed a serious offence by speaking about his hopes for the Dalai Lama's return. In 2006 the annual report of the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy documented 26 known Tibetans arrested for alleged political activities. There are currently 116 known Tibetan political prisoners in Tibet. This year's most prominent cases of imprisonment of Tibetans stand out from the rest owing to their harshness and particularly long sentences of between eight and 12 years' imprisonment.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the leader of the Tibetan nation and people, fled Tibet from Chinese aggression into exile in 1959. In the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, he has become one of the world's greatest exponents of non-violence and for this he has won the admiration of the world and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. I point out that despite the fact that the Dalai Lama visited Perth within the past few months, nobody from the government felt that it was important enough to meet with a Nobel Peace Prize winner. I note that the representative of another group of people was not given a state dinner. The Dalai Lama has developed his middle way initiative to resolve the Tibetan issue in consideration of the interests of both the Tibetans and the Chinese people. Facing the threat of religious and cultural extinction and the rising economic power of China, the Dalai Lama relinquished the goal of independence for Tibet in favour of genuine autonomy, a proposal that is not inconsistent with the Chinese Constitution. This approach also takes into consideration the People's Republic of China's security and stability concerns. Many people believe that the Dalai Lama is the only person with the moral authority to ensure that such a solution could be implemented in Tibet.

I just wanted to raise those issues and to put on the record that the Greens (WA) were supportive of yesterday's demonstrations by the Tibetan community in Western Australia, and hope that in future not only members of the government, but also other political and public leaders might consider that we have an obligation to deal with human rights and to raise these issues not simply when it is convenient, but at all times. It is not acceptable to simply turn a blind eye to the serious transgressions of some of the people we choose to do business with.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.25 pm
