

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

HON LOUISE PRATT (East Metropolitan) [4.02 pm] I move that the following Address be presented to His Excellency -

To His Excellency, Lieutenant General John Sanderson AC, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and in its dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled need to express our thanks to our Most Gracious Sovereign and to thank Your Excellency for the speech he has been pleased to deliver.

Hon Ed Dermer: I second the motion.

Hon LOUISE PRATT: I join His Excellency the Governor in acknowledging the indigenous people of Western Australia, who are the traditional custodians of the lands on which we assemble as a Parliament. I also join with His Excellency in noting with great sadness the deaths of Hon Ray Owen, Hon David Grayden, Hon Bert Crane, Hon Tom Bateman, Hon Ted Cunningham, Hon Norm Baxter, Hon Robert Marshall, Hon Maurice Williams and Hon Francis Willmott. It is also appropriate today to remember two former Governors who have passed away - Rear Admiral Sir Richard John Trowbridge and Sir Francis Burt.

I hope that each member today feels a renewed passion and commitment to serve the Parliament and people of Western Australia. To members leaving in May, I say thank you. It has been a terrific four years and we have achieved a lot together, most often in a non-partisan spirit. I am looking forward to the next few sitting weeks. I know that the good works of departing members will continue because they have demonstrated a partnership with the community. This is not about our place in here; it is about our role as citizens, which I reflected on in my first speech in this place. The worth of the work of people in this place very much depends on the effectiveness of our links with people who are doing work at the coalface of issues confronting our community. I hope I have a chance to work with departing members at some time in the future.

Over the past four years I have grown in my appreciation of how Western Australia's vast and unique environment shapes our community, and, indeed, for better or worse, how our community shapes our environment. From whatever side of politics we come, we all know what a terrific place Western Australia is and how important it is for us to have a passion to work with people and communities, be they country towns, suburban communities, cultural and religious groups, women, unions, indigenous communities, schools, businesses and activists. We all know the importance of these connections. The success and worth of the community of Western Australia depends on the support people give each other and the spirit with which it is given as well as the vision and foresight behind it. We are an incredibly fortunate community in Western Australia. We have the capacity in our infrastructure, social networks, knowledge base and financial resources to provide people with high-quality government services and support. However, despite our wealth as a society, we know that people can be overlooked and marginalised, either economically or socially. It is great to be part of the Gallop Labor government, which has the drive and capacity to address inequality and create opportunity. I have great confidence in our vision for the future in Western Australia, our resources and our know-how in delivering it.

I note that the election campaign was hard fought. Many people dismiss campaigns as being about television media grabs, letterbox drops and advertising. Many members here and I can vouch that it was about winning the hearts and minds of electors on the doorsteps and in local communities. People found that through their concerted efforts in doorknocking and talking to community forums in their day-to-day work as members of Parliament. They were out there doing the hard yards. It has been about listening, working together, working with the community and taking action. It is terrific to be part of a robust and developed democracy. We have seen shifts and moves in it as we respond to people's demands, whether it was the demand to save old-growth forests, Ningaloo Reef, funding for mental health, the resourcing of our schools, fixing roads or the many issues we addressed as members of Parliament. Democracy is alive and well in Western Australia. I note that our political and electoral system is not perfect. It needs reform and I am very much looking forward to that reform in the coming weeks. We have the passion to ensure that, as a government, we remain strongly committed to addressing the inequities in our society, including those in our electoral system. It should be a fundamental principle of democracy that every citizen should have an equal say in electing government. I look forward to the introduction of electoral reform legislation. We need a balance between equal voting rights for all Western Australians and representation for people in rural and remote areas.

His Excellency also highlighted a number of key areas of reform for this Labor government. I will address some of those now. Education and training is the key plank in our plan. It is the key to our ability to deliver to the

community, now and in the future. As His Excellency pointed out, it is a cornerstone of Labor's second-term agenda. Sadly, under the previous coalition government, high school retention rates were in decline. More young students from years 11 and 12 were leaving school without completing their formal education or any other qualification. It is terrific to see that trend being turned around. In the past four years we have placed more emphasis on employing more teachers, discipline in schools, increasing the leaving age - that was done with great community debate - better technology, better school infrastructure and apprenticeships and traineeships. We cannot afford to fail our young people. We cannot let doing nothing be an option. However, in saying that and legislating, if necessary, to raise the school leaving age, there is a real liability on government, teachers and the community to fulfil our end of the bargain. If young people leave because the system has failed them, dragging them back into the system will not help. We need to change the system. We must work on flexible modes of study combining formal education with work. The resources are available in our society to do these things. Therefore, it is a key responsibility of government to make sure that all people have educational opportunities available to them. Some people fall down in education because of difficulties in other areas of life. We must look at what extra support will be required in that area. The government is certainly providing that support with the \$64 million worth of direct financial assistance being paid to parents. The government has 4 000 new training positions as a goal, with 30 000 people to be in training positions by 2009. These are our objectives.

There has been much talk in Western Australia of skills shortages. To make the most of the economic boom in this state, we need to have the skills to match the demand. It is not fair to Western Australian people if we are forced to import labour because we have not had the intelligence and foresight to make sure that Western Australians have the skills to match the demand. We will be failing our people if this remains the case.

Of the election promises that the government made I was really pleased to see an expansion of information technology in our schools. I note that many students in my electorate will benefit significantly from an increase in resources. We have been specifically targeting areas in which there are lower ratios of computers in homes. This \$30 million program will have a third of its funding dedicated to teacher development because, to make the most of this program, it is important that we back it up with professional development. I suppose there were no computers in schools when many members were students. When I was at school, computers were just being introduced. They were something we learned about. Today they are very much a learning tool. To make the most of this capital investment, we need to match it with professional development. Therefore, the issue of computers in schools is not just an election bidding war about how many computers a school has. It is about strong thinking in the educational approach and integrated and robust systems that can change as technology changes, and that needs to be matched with professional development. They are just some of the areas in education about which the Labor government is passionate and has a strong vision, because high standards of living, the protection of the environment and the ability to support people are not possible without a high skills and knowledge base in our society.

The government's second term agenda on health is also substantial. Vision and good planning are turning, and will continue to turn, the health system in WA around. We have already made available additional beds and recruited more nurses. Significantly, in our planning for new hospitals and major upgrades - this is a matter about which I am particularly pleased - we are looking at including childcare centres. We have put considerable effort into recruiting more nurses and training them. However, they will not stay in the system if they cannot balance their work and family lives. It is reasonable that child care should be built into the large workplaces that the government provides. Family friendly workplaces play a critical role in attracting and retaining staff. The government has committed to implementing other practical measures, such as childcare liaison services to help hospital staff identify childcare places. The government has also implemented measures relating to workplace violence, scholarships and better support for and professional recognition of enrolled nurses.

A lot of hard work has gone into planning and reforming the state's health system. As His Excellency highlighted, it is really important that we are creating more beds that are closer to where people live. This includes the new thousand-bed hospital in the southern corridor; in my electorate, a major upgrade of and the doubling of the number of beds at Swan District Hospital; and the upgrade of Kalamunda District Community Hospital.

I would like to turn to -

Hon Derrick Tomlinson interjected.

Hon LOUISE PRATT: I am simply highlighting some of the government's objectives. I do not have time to traverse the entire landscape.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The member will not be diverted by interjectors.

Hon LOUISE PRATT: I know the government is committed to continuing to make Western Australia a place with safe and secure communities. In the government's last term it recruited many more police officers, and it has made a commitment to do the same in this term. Interestingly, the government's plan to reduce crime appears to be working, because more police on the front line has, for instance, reduced home burglaries in Western Australia.

I am also particularly pleased from the point of view of my constituents that the successful Road Traffic Amendment (Impounding and Confiscation of Vehicles) Act 2004 will be widened and strengthened. Something which I already knew but which certainly came across on the campaign hustings is that electors are very concerned because these offences are much more than a daily nuisance. They are impacting on people's quality of life and creating concerns about community safety. People have felt powerless because unless the police have been able to catch hooners in the act, they have been unable to do anything. I am pleased to note that the government will put forward legislation under which vehicles can be impounded on the basis of sworn witness statements and photographic and video evidence. I know that this will please a great many of my constituents who have been living with this nuisance and have felt utterly powerless.

I am a passionate supporter of public transport, and I am glad that the government is too. We all know that the cornerstone in this area is the southern suburbs railway, which will link the whole of the metropolitan area, and connect with Mandurah in the south. With 400 000 passengers a year, it will take 25 000 cars off our freeways, which is a great objective. In my electorate, I am looking forward to a new train station in Herne Hill. Probably some members will not have noted that announcement that was made during the election campaign. That will connect the people of the Swan Valley to the *AvonLink* service, thereby further utilising an existing service.

I am also extremely pleased that the election result is a mandate for the government's approach to road infrastructure. For many years I have been a passionate supporter of the protection of Bibra Lake and the surrounding wetlands from the expansion of Roe Highway. As a government, our approach is not simply about building more and better roads, as it has been in the past; it is now about making our existing roads more efficient and getting more people onto public transport. I hope that we will now be able to lock away the integrity of the Bibra Lake wetlands forever.

I am also very happy with the introduction of the 50c fare for school students who travel to school on Transperth buses and trains and on country town bus services, regardless of how many zones they travel. I am looking forward to the implementation of that measure, because many people in my electorate live on the urban fringe, and if they do not travel to their local school, they spend a great deal of money every year. This represents savings in the order of hundreds of dollars for many families. It is important that we also commit to keeping increases in public transport fares at or below the rate of inflation.

I will now turn quickly to Western Power. In our last term I was disappointed that we failed to disaggregate Western Power. I am looking forward to having that debate again. In the interests of the environment and our economy, there are very sound reasons behind my hope that we will win the argument this time. I am also pleased that, as a government, we have made a commitment to the expansion of the use of renewable energy across the state. The government has made a commitment to increase renewable energy in the south west electricity grid to six per cent by 2010. I believe this is just the beginning of what is required, but it represents an important shift in energy use in this state.

I also note that delivering better services to and support for the community in WA depends on a strong economy. Over the past four years it has been great to see heightened business confidence and investment. We have had a much stronger growth rate than other states. Importantly, this has also meant jobs growth. Nearly 100 000 new jobs have been created in the past four years, and unemployment has gone down. The challenge now is to make sure, in dealing with the skills deficit I mentioned before, that we acknowledge that there is more work to be done, and there are still people in marginal positions in the workplace who deserve a stronger place in our economy.

I have also been impressed with the work done to keep our budgets balanced. Four balanced budgets in four years have meant that the government has been able to deliver in key areas of health, education and community safety. I look forward to this being the case in the future. Western Australia's economic future will depend on its ability to remain a leading source of exports. It is terrific that the government has set itself the ambitious target of doubling the number of exporters by 2006. As His Excellency highlighted, an important part of continuing strong export growth is the continuing improvement to the state's ports. I am pleased that a commitment of more than \$300 million has been made to such projects. As highlighted by His Excellency, to create economic opportunities, the government is looking towards our major resource developments, the regional investment fund, and tourism.

With a strong economy, the government and the Parliament can meet the objectives of enhancing the state's unique lifestyle while protecting its environment. One of those objectives is to make our cities, suburbs and

regions the most livable and vibrant in the world. We do indeed have a unique lifestyle, which must be preserved for future generations. His Excellency highlighted many of the advances to be made in the city, and we can begin now to imagine how the inner city will be transformed. However, it is also terrific to see a sense of renewal in my own electorate - in places such as Armadale, Brookdale and Midland. I cannot overstate the impact of these changes, which mean not only better physical amenity and enhanced lifestyle, but also a renewed sense of confidence and economic development opportunities for these communities. This is something we must strive to do well.

His Excellency also highlighted some major future environmental commitments, such as the future biodiversity conservation legislation, measures to address salinity, the greenhouse strategy, the Swan River park and marine conservation. We have already reached milestones in many of these areas, and I am really looking forward to the pursuit of those new objectives. In particular, I mention the new sustainability act, requiring government departments to report on sustainability performance. At the heart of this is beginning to transform the way we govern and do business, and hopefully it will progress into the wider community. It is a great first step in transforming government agencies to become leaders in sustainability issues. The Gallop government has a vision for a sustainable future in Western Australia. It is about meeting the needs of current and future generations while protecting our environment. This will require considerable transformations across society, and we are now beginning to take those steps. Although it is still in its infancy in Western Australia, the development of the sustainability agenda is perhaps the government's most significant achievement, and also its most significant challenge, bringing together its social, economic and environmental objectives.

I have great and well-founded hopes for what can be achieved over the next four years. It is terrific that the Gallop Labor government has a renewed mandate for its vision to protect and enhance Western Australia's unique lifestyle and environment. I am very much looking forward to vigorous debate in this house about the government's agenda.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon Bruce Donaldson.

House adjourned at 4.24 pm
