

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

*Motion*

Resumed from 11 March.

**HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (South West)** [2.16 pm]: I am pleased to support the motion moved by Hon Helen Morton and I acknowledge the comments of the Governor in his speech to Parliament. In the past week or so I have been very much privileged to listen to a number of outstanding addresses. Prior to referring to them, though, I want to make mention of the Address-in-Reply speech of Hon Kim Chance. As most members realise, I will be replacing Hon Kim Chance in the Agricultural Region come 22 May. I daresay that they are enormous shoes that I will be required to fill. Although I do not want to talk too much about what Hon Kim Chance had to say late last year, I will say that in replacing Kim Chance I will take over from a person who has almost universal acceptance and respect in the Agricultural Region, and I daresay also in this chamber and the Parliament of Western Australia. He is a person whom I have admired for many years. He has outstanding knowledge in the areas of agriculture and food and a number of other areas. In particular I make mention of his contribution to natural resource management. Every year on the south coast in Albany we present a natural resource management medal. Hon Kim Chance has presented it in the past and the comments he has made at that time have been most appropriate and indicative of the way in which agriculture is moving in this state of Western Australia; for example, that we are moving down the pathway of sustainability. Kim Chance is certainly a man of great articulation, confidence, knowledge and ability, and he has taken the agriculture and food portfolio from 2001 to 2008—with no disrespect to the new minister—and turned it into one of his own.

I also make note of the other speeches in the Address-in-Reply. Hon Kate Doust gave a very honest appraisal of Labor's efforts in last year's state election. She certainly talked about the change of government and gave what I thought were fairly concise reasons for why we lost that election. I will not dwell on those points, but she mentioned various things that the Labor Party contributed to the development of Western Australia between 2001 and 2008. She talked about health and the Fiona Stanley Hospital. She talked about some broken promises and made a particular point about the move to export lead from Fremantle. She also talked about the Western Power split, and concluded by making mention of Bev Gallop. I did not know Bev all that well, but I obviously know Geoff particularly well. Tomorrow will be a moving day for all Western Australians and, indeed, Australians.

I make mention of Hon Barbara Scott. She is a person of great integrity and her knowledge and commitment to the children and youth of this state is something that I appreciate enormously. The Benson household really believes in the "populate or perish" doctrine. That seems to have amused Hon Kate Doust! I can assure members that in my family, double figures of sons and daughters are the norm rather than the exception. I certainly appreciate, acknowledge and respect Hon Barbara Scott for the comments she made about issues associated with the children and youth of Western Australia.

I move on to Hon Ed Dermer, our Whip. Ed, in typical educative fashion—not bad for a chap who has a Bachelor of Science degree in, I think, biology—has become a political scientist of some note, and I very much enjoyed listening to his comments yesterday about electoral systems and about what would have been or could have been, had things been different. I am as sorry for Hon Ed Dermer as I am for myself, but it is not going to happen in the near future!

**Hon Ed Dermer:** We live with what we've got, I suppose!

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** We certainly do! I certainly enjoyed listening to Hon Ed Dermer.

To finish things off, I turn to Hon Bruce Donaldson. I would suggest that over the next 10 years or so, he will very much become the peripatetic wanderer of the house. I wish him well; I know he is very pleased to be able to sit on the government benches for his last six months or so in Parliament. I have always enjoyed his comments and I enjoyed them yesterday. He is a very voluble person, but he is a person of integrity and I have certainly enjoyed working with him. I share his interest in things such as crustaceans and some of the finer things in life. Rest assured that in the not-too-distant future, we can share some of those. I do not quite have his capacity for travel, but I will give it a go. He has certainly set quite a standard in that regard.

Before I return to the Governor's speech, there are a few other things I would like to talk about. I will continue with the issues Hon Kate Doust mentioned about the election loss. Likewise, I will mention some of the Labor Party's achievements between 2001 and 2008. I will also look at the current government's plans, be they 100-day plans, 150-day plans or whatever. As a member for the South West Region, soon to become a member for the Agricultural Region, I will talk about royalties for regions issues as we see them. I am particularly concerned

about sustainability issues and I will talk about genetically modified crops in general and GM cotton in particular.

I will spare members the pain of listening to me on the subject of the wine industry, which is one of my big passions in life. However, I will say for those members who know their wine that a Kalgan River winery recently did extraordinarily well at the Sydney International Wine Competition.

**Hon Kate Doust:** Would that be you?

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** No, it is not; I only wish it had something to do with me! My winery is situated on the same river, but they are a little further upstream.

**Hon Ed Dermer:** Was it a former colleague?

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** No, it is not our former colleague, but it is certainly a highly respected wine concern in the region. It picked up the trophy for best red wine at the Sydney International Wine Competition. I can only hope that some of the good vibes, soil and moisture that flow down the Kalgan can somehow rub off on me. Who knows? We may be looking at something similar in years to come. It is the same winemaker, I must add.

I resume my comments about the address by the Governor, Dr Ken Michael. Dr Michael, as members will all agree, is an extraordinary person. He has had a distinguished career in business, engineering and local government—he played a significant role in the amalgamation of the city and shires of Albany—and now as Governor of Western Australia. A more distinguished Western Australian one will probably not find. Many in this house will understand the hardships endured by migrants to this state, and I dare say that Dr Michael and his family are no exception. I believe His Excellency knows full well what is required to be undertaken or committed to in this land we call Australia. Commitment, loyalty and hard work come readily to mind, as all members will acknowledge. I say to members that as a second-generation Australian, I am very thankful that my parents and grandparents had a similar philosophy to life in our great country.

In the current global economic crisis, I believe that Australians will, more than ever before, need to embrace the enduring qualities I have mentioned. I believe that they define our nationhood. The current economic environment is something that members will never have experienced, although I am sure that our parents or grandparents did. Hon Ed Dermer yesterday alluded to the fact that our parents and possibly grandparents gave us the lead in coping with the very difficult times of the late 1920s, early 1930s and World War II. My parents grew up in the Depression years of the 1920s and 1930s, and they were tough times in some of the more remote parts of Western Australia, where my family come from. My parents certainly showed a certain strength and resolve to battle the odds in those days, and I was reminded of it often enough! My father always used to say, “Don’t expect me to spend any money on myself”; he always spent it on his kids. His classic line was, “I’m a Depression child”. I think that sums up the sort of commitment that my parents made to me and, no doubt, other members’ parents and grandparents made to them as they were growing up.

I will also mention a thesis I wrote in the 1970s about the group settlement and soldier settlement schemes, particularly around the Northcliffe area where I was working and studying at the time. It gave me a great insight into the sorts of hardships that people endured all those years ago. I remember an old-timer telling me that they gave the settlers a crosscut saw, showed them a karri forest and said, “Make your own farm”. They gave them cattle, and I can remember him saying to me, “They gave us a cow with an udder the size of a golf ball and expected us to turn it into a dairy cow!” Some of those people and their families are still in places like Northcliffe today. They are testament to the enduring qualities that make Australians what we are. I acknowledge those people of the south west region, as I acknowledge the people who were pioneers throughout the rest of Western Australia. It so happens that post World War I, the group and soldier settlement schemes in Western Australia really took off.

As the current economic crisis deepens, we find ourselves in similar circumstances to our forebears. Despite the best efforts of the Australian government, I honestly fear that things will get worse before they get better. The American financial system is at crisis point. I do not believe that the news we have heard recently out of Japan and China gives us any cause for comfort either, particularly as they are the countries that traditionally have taken most of our primary industry’s commodities that are exported. I fear that more people will lose their jobs and superannuants will lose significant amounts of their life savings. It will certainly help to keep teachers in front of students and keep at work many people who might otherwise have decided to pull the pin. I talk particularly about baby boomers—people my age or a bit older—and my thoughts go out to them.

Families will find it difficult to cope and homes might have to be sold. It happened during the Great Depression. Again, I will resort to my family history. My father had an enduring memory of one instance that scared the living daylights out of him then, as it did before he passed away. In the mid-1930s the bailiff found—“found” is the operative word when it was in a karri forest—the family home only to nail an eviction notice on the front

door. Sadly for my parents, and I mentioned this the other day when I spoke about my family's experience with bushfires, the house burnt down several years later in the dreadful fires of 1937 that travelled across the south coast. These sorts of things may be repeated as time goes by. I hope they are not. I hope that the decisions being made by the world's big economies will ensure that those things do not happen; however, I am not confident about that.

House prices are down, unemployment is on the rise and people are finding it necessary to sell the family home. It is a dreadful state of affairs. I hope that we can get together to minimise the effect that could be occurring in our electorates.

We need strength, commitment and compassion, both as citizens and civic leaders. The federal government has a plan to help address this crisis and I call upon the state government to develop its own plan and liaise and work very closely with the federal government and other state governments. I trust that it will not sit back and rest on its laurels. It should not be relying on the hope that \$42 billion, plus the previous \$10 billion granted, will solve the problems we have, because I do not think it will. No matter what we look at, we need a state government—rest assured the opposition will keep the government honest in this respect—that gets into the community and helps people out.

I know that the Minister for Agriculture and Food and the Minister for Regional Development were in Harvey this morning. The collapse of Harvey Beef is a concern, as is the closure of the Ravensthorpe mine. One of the things I am critical about is that the Minister for Commerce, in his capacity as Treasurer, did not go to Ravensthorpe to talk to businesses. In late 2008, when the writing was on the wall for BHP Billiton, perhaps something could have been done. I have been to the area and those people are hurting. Businesses were established on an understanding from BHP Billiton that the mine would go ahead in leaps and bounds and jobs would be available. People were encouraged to move from not only Perth and regional Western Australia, but also around Australia. Now, having spoken to some education experts in the area, I am led to believe that the expected school population at Hopetoun Primary School, a magnificent school that Labor helped to build, could go from in excess of 200 to fewer than 50. It is a magnificent school, but businesses are closing and people are leaving the town in droves. Hopetoun will become a shell of a town and that is very sad, given the commitment by not only the state government but also the local people in the full knowledge that BHP Billiton had basically guaranteed the existence of the place. Labor helped build the Ravensthorpe-Hopetoun airstrip. I visited it on one occasion and witnessed the planes coming and going. That is a thing of the past. Many things in the twin towns of Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun will change dramatically over the next six months or so.

I will dwell on another issue, albeit a federal government issue. I am concerned about issues such as the Pacific Brands debacle and the associated corporate salaries and handouts. I am also concerned about the possibility of chief executive officers such as Sol Trujillo taking money—in his case, \$13 million from Telstra—and heading overseas. Australians, in these harsh times, need to give consideration to their fellow Australians. I am aware that many already have. The high profile companies, together with BHP Billiton, owe their workers, ordinary Australians, a bit more than what they are giving.

Speaking of the new state government, I would like, with the house's indulgence, to acknowledge that with the September election last year we saw a number of fine parliamentarians on both sides of this house and the other place move on. From this house Hon Graham Giffard lost his seat. He resigned from this house to contest a seat in the lower house. He will be missed. He was a valued work colleague and I am sure that most members enjoyed his light-hearted yet professional approach to his job. He is a big loss for the opposition, as is Vince Catania who has, as Hon Barry House acknowledged, moved to the other place. Yesterday Hon Kate Doust mentioned a number of members of the Legislative Assembly who did not retain their seat. I do not propose to go through them again. It is always difficult when people move on, particularly when it is not of their choosing.

Calling an early election was, as most Labor members will agree, a huge mistake. Obviously Labor has conducted its post-mortem. I should emphasise that Western Australians viewed the early call cynically and treated the election as a referendum. There were other reasons that I will not dwell on, despite the obvious enjoyment of members opposite. In typical fashion, Western Australians voted no to a referendum. The rest of it, as they say, is history.

As Hon Kate Doust acknowledged yesterday, Labor did lose, but there were many achievements, and with your indulgence, Mr Deputy President (Hon George Cash), I will go through some of those achievements again, because I think they beg some sort of response.

The Gallop and Carpenter governments achieved much for Western Australians, and indeed all Australians. Dare I say that royalties stemming from mining activities boosted government coffers and contributed significantly to the state's economy at the time of the September 2008 election. I also suggest that the current government inherited the healthiest of bank balances.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Recurrent expenditure was out of control and you wasted the whole lot.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** Hon Simon O'Brien, I have already taken 25 minutes and I do not want to go into any great detail. I respect the member's opinion, but we are seeing a blow-out of expenditure right now. I do not have time to go into it because I have a lot to talk about. I take the member's point on board, but if that is the case, his government is turning expenditure into an art form.

Of particular note, I make mention of training and apprenticeship issues. Under the guidance of Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, the Gallop and Carpenter governments revamped a critical area of education to facilitate the movement of the labour force into areas in which skills could be developed, thereby contributing to the dynamic economy that the Labor government left as its legacy, and obviously improving gross state product. The urgency of changes resulted in many trades courses delivering skilled workers in significantly less time with a much more focussed and relevant training program.

I was going to say that the government does not have a training policy, but Hon Peter Collier took the wind out of my sails earlier today by making a significant statement on that. It is not before time, and I thank him for that very much. The world economic crisis demands a coordinated, focussed and strategic approach to providing the workforce to address the needs of the state economy in 2009 and beyond, and I look forward to the implementation of the government's training package.

I will now provide a point of comparison in relation to the seven and a half years of Labor government. As a point of comparison, in the period February 1998 to February 2001, under a coalition government there was a 0.7 per cent decline in the number of apprentices and trainees in Western Australia. Between February 2001 and February 2005, the growth was 48.3 per cent; and from February 2005 to February 2008, the growth figure was 28.3 per cent. In the period 2003 to 2008, the increase in the number of apprentices and trainees in Western Australia amounted to 55 per cent, which is nearly eight times the national average. They are compelling statistics. Recent figures from the Department of Education and Training indicate a 43 per cent fall in the uptake of apprenticeships in 2009 and a 30 per cent fall in traineeships. The current government needs to be very much aware of those sorts of figures—I am sure it is—and in some way, shape or form it must address those particular trends.

I have already indicated my fear that the federal government's \$10 billion and \$42 billion packages will not be able to solve everything. This government needs to be very much on the front foot and not asleep at the wheel when addressing the sorts of issues that I have referred to. The state must act to ensure the skills required are available; and, of course, we need to make sure that the plan is in place.

There have been many other examples of Labor's commitment to education and training that I could mention, like the 60-plus schools constructed during Labor's seven and a half years in office, the extra 1 300 teachers employed, and there is now a requirement for today's youth to be in education and training until they turn 17 years of age.

In my electorate of the South West Region, the government responded in the Mount Barker-Plantagenet area with the development of the Mount Barker Community College concept. Although still incomplete, I believe it will prove to be a template for future education provision in rural Western Australia. If last year's TEE results from the college are any indication, it must now rate as one of the most successful public education institutions in the state, probably only one step behind Manjimup Senior High School, which continues to be the trendsetter for government senior high schools, not just in the south west but throughout the state. There is an air of confidence and an expectation of excellence in this community college thanks to previous ministers; namely, Alan Carpenter, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, and Mark McGowan. Also, staff, students, parents and the local community have embraced the changes resulting from the move from the primary school to the previous senior high school site, and the college is going ahead in leaps and bounds.

Another education success story for Labor has been the revamping in recent years of the Rural and Remote Education and Training Advisory Council, which as some members may know is a ministerial advisory group that provides advice to the Minister for Education and the Minister for Training. In the past, of course, we had one minister responsible for both portfolios, now we have two ministers, Minister Constable and Minister Collier. The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Terry Redman, has now assumed the role of chair of that council. I am the immediate past chair, but I have now become the deputy chair with the change of government.

There is a whole new focus on education in the bush resulting from RRETAC's involvement in, if members like, lobbying and putting in front of various ministers the sorts of issues that rural people experience and want addressed in relation to the education needs of their children, and also the training needs of people who live in the bush. The council's 2008 report is due for release soon. I very much recommend that when it is available members will take the opportunity—I was going to say country members, but perhaps it is even more appropriate for city-based members—to read about the day-to-day issues involved in providing education in the

bush. Having been a teacher-administrator in the bush, I can tell members that it is not always that easy. There are many pluses, of course, as some of my learned colleagues from regional WA would appreciate, involved with being educated in rural, regional and remote parts of WA. However, to me, it is an equity issue. I noted from one of the speeches made in the consideration of committee report procedure earlier today that Governor Stirling Senior High School is a bit of a basket case. I can assure members that a number of schools in rural, regional and remote parts of Western Australia likewise need much attention. As a rural-based member, it is the sort of thing that I put to previous ministers and I will continue to put to new ministers now that we are on the opposition benches.

I do not propose to deal with all the many achievements of the Gallop and Carpenter governments, but I have some further compelling facts that I would like to put in front of members. The previous seven and a half years saw strong economic growth compared with contraction in the last year of the Liberal government, so we started from a low base. Hopefully, that standard can be maintained. We delivered record low unemployment levels of 2.8 per cent in March 2008. Since 2001, there was a 207 000 increase in the number of people employed. The average youth unemployment rate has more than halved since the end of 2001 until September 2008. Employment growth resulted in something like 201 200 additional jobs being generated in Western Australia during that time. Massive capital works programs have been undertaken. One thing Labor always prides itself on is its commitment to rail transportation. The \$1.66 billion southern rail line almost doubled the size of the Perth rail network. I might need to have a chat with the Minister for Transport to see whether we can now do something about improving rail transport to the great southern. Some years ago, before I was elected, I suggested to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure that we restore the *Albany Progress*, but it did not go down too well. I do not know what Hon Simon O'Brien's thoughts are about the *Albany Progress*. As a young fellow who travelled to Perth quite frequently on the *Albany Progress*, it was quite an enjoyable experience. I dare say Hon Simon O'Brien has similar ideas to those of the former Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. If not I would like to have a chat to him another day. Labor also committed some \$1.76 billion to the new Fiona Stanley Hospital development and some \$631 million towards the construction of the crucial new Perth-Bunbury highway.

I mentioned the previous government meeting the skills challenge and I will not go over that again because time is brief.

To my way of thinking, financial responsibility has been very much a Labor strength. Labor delivered seven balanced budgets in a row, reduced state debt to a record low and retained Western Australia's AAA credit rating. Budget surpluses were used to retire debt and build things such as the southern rail line and the Fiona Stanley Hospital debt free. That was our commitment and, of course, none was done at the expense of the privatisation of key publicly owned assets.

Cutting taxes was something we engaged in throughout seven and a half years, albeit we did not do it all at once. If members look at the litany of taxation changes put in place by the previous government, they will understand what I mean. For example, from July 2008 we introduced a concessional transfer duty scale for residential property transfers. That may well be part of people's positive outlook, if there is such a thing, in the current economic downturn. We exempted caravan and camper trailer licence transfers from motor vehicle stamp duty. We exempted land use for aged care from land tax and—something very close to my heart—we cut Totalisator Agency Board turnover tax to boost funding to the WA racing industry. As one of the largest employers across Western Australia and, indeed, the entire country, the racing industry is a vital part of the Western Australian economy.

I have mentioned education and now training and community safety. Since 2001, the rate of home burglaries has been reduced. I note that a report in today's *The West Australian* details issues on this. Until late 2008, the rate of home burglaries was cut by some 35 per cent and the rate of car thefts by around 28 per cent on average. In terms of infrastructure, I have mentioned the Perth-Mandurah railway line. The desalination plant provides 17 per cent of our integrated water supply, with more desalinated water to come. Having travelled to the eastern states last year with Hon Barry House as part of the water inquiry by the Standing Committee on Public Administration, I noticed that Western Australia is regarded very highly throughout the rest of the continent in its capacity to deal with water supply issues. Our achievements are very much put forward as the model for achieving sustainability of water supplies.

Labor may well have lost the 2008 election; however, its record of achievement is considerable and something to be proud of. I am not saying, as Hon Kate Doust did, that the Western Australian public was totally satisfied with our achievements, although those I have just outlined are quite compelling. We did perhaps make the occasional mistake. As I have indicated, the election result reflected what people thought of the early election call rather than any other particular issues that may have presented themselves. Members opposite have inherited a strong and resilient economy predisposed to delivering strong growth and improved standards for all Western Australians.

I had intended talking a lot about the promises the Liberal Party made in respect of achievements during its first 100 days in office. However, I note the time and I think I may well move on because I do not have sufficient time to go through all that. However, I will say this much: the National Party's royalties for regions promises certainly struck a chord with regional Western Australians. Perhaps, in some respects, not before time, although many of the projects that Labor delivered and is delivering, such as the Albany waterfront project, are outstanding examples of what governments can do in regional and rural parts of Western Australia.

**Hon Ed Dermer:** The government is likely to move particularly slowly with its promises so you will probably have a chance to mention them in a later speech, I imagine.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** That may very well be the case, Hon Ed Dermer.

The royalties for regions idea was promoted very much in my electorate of the South West Region. I take my hat off to the National Party. This is not something that happened in July-August-September last year; it is something the National Party had been promoting throughout the previous 12 months.

I move now onto the final part of my response to the Address-in-Reply; namely, the issues associated with sustainability and natural resource management and the environment. Over many years, I have maintained an active interest in environmental issues and the like. I want to put on record that I am totally supportive of the anti-uranium push. But I see projects such as the many wind farm developments in Western Australia as central to the long-term economic and environmental future of Western Australia. Other areas throughout this particular Parliament that I will pay some sort of attention to include mallee eucalypts. I think they have an enormous future as part of the Western Australian economy in many capacities. Hon Paul Llewellyn also mentioned this morning that we need to take on board solar energy as something that can contribute to the long-term sustainable prosperity of Western Australia. I am particularly pleased to see that the government will invest \$12.5 million in a new low-emissions power station off the coast of Albany, which will generate electricity by harnessing wave energy. Nonetheless, I was a little concerned at comments attributed to the Minister for Energy that governments need to make it easier to encourage development within the sustainable energy industry and that this did not happen with the Carpenter government. I put it to the minister that one of his non-elected colleagues in Albany, Mr Andrew Partington, suggested that the project that is now being promoted was indeed encouraged by Alan Carpenter. Alan's decision to help in the generation of more renewable baseload power for Albany was something that Mr Partington acknowledged and wanted to see promoted. The 50 megawatt power station to be developed by the Carnegie Corporation is great news for all of us living on the south coast around Albany. The world's biggest wave power project will provide enough electricity for some 30 000 homes. Given that there are only 35 000-odd residents in Albany, that is a huge commitment. I acknowledge the government's clean green sustainable energy project in Albany and I hope we see many more of them.

I will now focus my sustainability statements on agricultural production. I believe that issues associated with genetically modified canola and GM crops generally raise many ethical and social concerns. They do, as I will point out, jeopardise natural systems and the health and possible welfare of people, animals and agricultural systems that we have helped establish over many years. They have the potential to wreak havoc in our agricultural industries and, dare I say it, in the markets for Western Australian agricultural produce.

I am not an expert. I am not an agronomist. However, I have certainly studied and very closely monitored the movements and progress of GM canola and crop systems throughout the world and I must say that I am particularly concerned. The point I will make is that contamination is inevitable. Farmers and consumers will have no choice and will be unable to avoid GM contamination.

My concerns about the proposed trials and the possible introduction of GM crops, especially canola, are echoed by members of the Network of Concerned Farmers. I would like to quote from the networks November 2007 publication titled "The economics of genetically modified canola". In this article the key argument, amongst many, against the introduction of GM food crops and especially canola, is that —

Key agronomic, market and coexistence issues remain to be resolved before the State moratoria on GM food crops can be lifted.

The commentary also makes the observation that for these issues to be resolved, sufficient time is required so that fair risk management can be introduced. This will necessitate the extension of current moratoria.

The article continues —

Prior to any acceptance of GM food crops, State governments have the legislated responsibility to assess economics, industry preparedness and the associated market risk. Although there are many vested interests in providing a path to market for GM food crops, State governments can not ignore their responsibility to retain a path to market for non-GM crops.

Calculations based on the biotech industry's own figures show that if GM canola was introduced to Australia and 20% of farmers adopted it, Australian farmers will be at least \$143 million/year worse off. The key problem is that non-GM farmers will be burdened with a large proportion of this loss, valued at \$65.52 million. According to the Australian Government, non-GM farmers will have little or no legal recourse against the GM industry for economic loss caused.

Canada is the only major canola producer in the world to have adopted GM canola, and the vast majority of the world's canola remains GM Free. Contrary to the rosey picture painted by industry, the profitability of canola production in Canada has crashed over the past decade. Canadian canola farmers are heavily subsidised, and if Australia adopted GM canola, farmers would be likely to need similar subsidies.

Australia's most important export markets for canola are Japan and Europe, accounting for 41% and 38% of exports in 2006. Australian canola has been attracting premiums and preferential market access in these countries, precisely because of its non-GM status.

**Hon Ed Dermer:** Is that a total of 79 per cent?

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** I will read the figures again for Hon Ed Dermer.

Australia's most important export markets for canola are Japan and Europe, accounting for 41% and 38% of exports in 2006.

**Hon Ed Dermer:** That is an enormous proportion.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** It is a significant proportion. The rest of it is, I believe, more than likely taken up by domestic Australian consumption.

To continue —

Canada lost its entire canola seed exports to Europe as the result of introducing GM canola.

In 2007 —

...a delegation of Japanese consumer groups visited Australia and delivered a petition signed by 151 consumer organisations, representing 2.9 million Japanese consumers, urging the State Governments to extend their GM food crop moratoria.

The domestic market accounts for approximately 20-30% of total canola seed production (depending on the year), making it the third largest market for Australian canola. The two largest buyers are Goodman Fielder and Unilever, both of which have a policy to avoid the use of GM derived canola oil. Peter Margin, the CEO of Goodman Fielder, recently wrote to State Premiers —

Remembering this is a 2007 publication —

urging them to extend their moratoria on GM food crops. Coles also spoke out against GM food at a recent Parliamentary forum on the topic.

It continues —

Although canola is a relatively minor crop, the introduction of GM canola has the potential to impact negatively on all farming industries. GM canola seed can easily contaminate other grains and there is market sensitivity to GM canola in other grains, such as barley and wheat, and in stock feed. Eckard Huebl the Managing Director of the Tatiara Meat Company, Australia's largest lamb exporter, recently wrote to State Premiers urging them to extend their GM canola moratoria. He stated that the Australian prime lamb market would suffer if it lost its 'GM-free' marketing edge.

Serious questions remain surrounding the safety of GM foods. It is therefore hardly surprising that recent poll results show that the majority of Australian farmers do not want to grow GM crops and the majority of consumers do not want to eat them.

Initial attempts to segregate non-GM canola in Canada failed and it is now nearly impossible to grow non-GM canola in most of the country. Based on the North American experience, it is virtually guaranteed that a GM/non-GM segregation system will fail because the seed supply is already contaminated. Canadian researchers tested 33 samples of certified non-GM canola seed and found that 32 samples were contaminated with GM varieties.

The push to lift the moratoria in all States is predominantly coming from those with a commercial interest in the uptake of the GM technology. They are well funded and encouraged by both State and Federal Governments, who wish to withdraw public funding for research and development and encourage commercial investment.

Key agronomic, market and coexistence issues remain to be resolved before the State moratoria on GM food crops can be lifted. To allow time for these issues to be resolved the current moratoria should be extended until fair risk management is introduced.

In summary, these represent compelling reasons to have a much closer look at the proposed trials. I realise that I am running out of time but one of the issues that I have is that the current designated zone is still largely unknown. From what I am informed, neighbours of farmers in those particular areas do not know whether their next-door neighbour will be farming GM canola. I believe they will know, but one would have thought that would have been determined even at this early stage.

**Hon Ed Dermer:** I would imagine them not knowing will interfere with investments decisions from day one.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** Absolutely.

The Network of Concerned Farmers also makes a number of observations about the proponents of GM crops and their vested interests. I will quote some of them, but I am afraid I will have to leave further comments to a later date. It is my contention that those vested interests spell disaster and big problems for our agricultural industries. One point that I will mention concerns research. Again, it is from the Network of Concerned Farmers, which states —

The research sector is the key driver for promotion of GM crops and much of the reason is the reduction or removal of government funding. Researchers are therefore increasingly reliant on funding from the biotechnology industry.

Monsanto holds many plant breeding patents used in both GM and non-GM plant breeding (eg. enzymes and biotechnology techniques). Institutes such as CSIRO are permitted to use these techniques free of charge in exchange for alliance contracts. The conditions of these contracts and deals are kept confidential.

It is imperative that Western Australia retains its GM-free status, but I am not confident that will happen. GM foods, as far as I and many others are concerned, raise unprecedented ethical and social concerns and impose serious threats to the environment, human health, animal welfare and agriculture.

I put to members that consumers should drive the production of GM or non-GM canola and other sorts of crops. When I studied economics, albeit aeons ago, we were always told in Economics 1-0, or 101 or whatever it was back in those days, that the consumer was sovereign. If the consumer is sovereign, it is high time that governments took notice of that. Once the trials start, we will have GM-contaminated seed forever; I do not think there will be any going back. I believe that the moratorium should be imposed or continued.

**Hon Ed Dermer:** It sounds like the Japanese and European consumers understand that.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** That is very much the case, Hon Ed Dermer.

I can say much more about GM crops and canola, but I will have to leave those comments for another day. I simply finish by saying the crux of the issue is that people no doubt have contacted members' offices like they have contacted my office to express their concerns about the introduction of GM crops. As members in this place with the responsibility of ensuring the long-term sustainable agricultural environment and economic future of Western Australia, we need to ensure that farmers who want to remain GM-free can do so without fear of litigation, which is one of the big concerns that we all have, and at the same time believe that GM-free means simply that—no contamination whatsoever. However, I do not like my chances.

The ball is well and truly in the government's court, and the facts about GM crops, particularly GM canola, simply do not stack up. Environmentally, economically and physiologically, GM crops represent bad outcomes for all but shareholders in GM companies. Any legislation must protect growers and make GM companies liable for the damage their products cause, rather than have farmers prove that it was not their idea to grow GM crops or canola. It is fair to say that if the government cannot manage the risks involved, GM crops, especially canola, may well represent the biggest threat to agriculture Western Australia has ever faced. Cane toads, starlings, skeleton weed, DDT and the like were all at one stage considered to be pretty useful to have around the place. When I think back to my days, that was certainly the case with DDT. If GM canola and GM crops are in the same boat, then I fear for the future.

**HON RAY HALLIGAN (North Metropolitan)** [3.14 pm]: I also support the motion moved by Hon Helen Morton, and again thank the Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency Dr Ken Michael, for his speech at the opening of this new Parliament. I think Western Australia has been lucky to have had the Governors that we have had over the past decade. I have been extremely fortunate to have attended a number of functions with each of those Governors. His Excellency Dr Ken Michael and his wife, Julie, are lovely people who not only represent



this state, but also continue to be patrons of some 150 different organisations. They do not take that commitment lightly; they go to as many functions as they possibly can and I think they are to be applauded for it.

The current government has been in place for only a short period, yet there is an expectation that much more should have been done. I am not sure that that is a reasonable assumption, even though different political parties at different times leading up to elections will make statements and promises that certain things will be done. Often they try to put a time line on when things will be done and, of course, are caught up in situations similar to the one we currently face with the world economic crisis, which affects everything that is done in Western Australia from the point of view of not only the supply of goods, but also money.

I start by responding to some of the things that Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm mentioned. He is not the only member to mention jobs and the workforce; other speakers from his side of the chamber went down this path as well. I think this is one of the very big differences between the Labor and Liberal Parties. I have always believed that the conservative parties have been far more balanced in their thinking. They realise that jobs simply do not create themselves; employers are needed before people can have jobs. That does not seem to be recognised by members on the other side. To find a balanced position to try to support and increase the number of viable jobs available, we must have viable businesses; therefore, a balance must be found, which the conservative parties, particularly the Liberal Party, have done over many decades. There is that realisation that we need land, labour and capital to be able to create any viable business. Of course, labour is involved in that and it is a matter of doing the right thing by that labour—paying workers correctly and having the right support mechanisms in place. However, the argument from the other side of the chamber appears to be that labour alone is all that is important, but it cannot operate on its own but there does not appear to be that recognition.

I have said in this place on a number of occasions in opposition that the previous Labor government created nothing. We continually hear that the coffers are full, as though the Labor government went out there and created the work and created the goods and services that were sold domestically and overseas and put that money into Treasury. That is just not true. It was done by private enterprise. Yet the government continually wanted to take the credit for the way the economy was going whilst it sat on its hands and did nothing. That is true of a great number of governments; I am not just suggesting that it was the previous Labor government. All governments were in that position. A little later I will talk about how governments can assist in creating a better economy. It is not by taking credit for what is in Treasury. I have said repeatedly that the previous Labor government will be judged on how it spent the money. It did not create the money but it certainly will be judged on how it spent it. That is where it had authority, and that is where it went wrong on numerous occasions. We are now seeing how money is being spent incorrectly at a federal level. The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, has already spent \$11 billion and he now intends to spend a further \$42 billion. He expects that money to create jobs and turn the economy around. We will end up in exactly the same situation that we ended up in Western Australia at a state level. When we went to the people of Western Australia after the wonderful boom that we had in this state over the past seven and a half years, what did we have to show for it? We had \$1.7 billion sitting in a bank account for the Fiona Stanley Hospital. We had a railway line down to Mandurah that will cost the people of this state millions of dollars each and every year for its operating losses.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** Do you think the people in the southern suburbs don't appreciate the southern railway?

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** That has nothing to do with it; I am talking about economic sustainability. The member is talking about social issues, which is something the Labor Party always talks about. The Labor Party is taking the credit for the way the economy went for seven and a half years.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** We'll take the credit for the southern railway line.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** The Labor Party will stick to that, and that is all it provided. What else was provided? What benefit has been derived by people north of the Swan River?

**Hon Kim Chance:** They got a railway line, too. You built not one centimetre of rail.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** We were going to.

**Hon Kim Chance:** In the last three terms of Liberal government, not one centimetre.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** We could go down that particular path as well. There is an argument that there should not be rail. Hon Sue Ellery can shake her head. Other countries in the world have gone down a completely different path.

**Hon Ed Dermer:** People from the north benefit from having their railway extended to the south. It enhances the quality of the north railway line and the southern railway line. It is quite natural when you think about it.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** It is not natural at all; it may be natural to the member. Where is the practicality of all that? The member is talking about aesthetics—"Doesn't it look good to see the railway line go north to south either side of the Swan River?"

**Hon Kim Chance:** What about the hundreds of thousands of people who travel on it every day?

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** The member can bring me the figures later. There are other circumstances that create that type of thing. It will still cost money and it will still make losses.

**Hon Kim Chance:** So will the new freeways you'd have to build if you didn't have the railway. You have to move people somehow.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** They can often move themselves.

**Hon Kim Chance:** Do you have any idea what it will cost to duplicate the southern freeway system?

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** We can go down that path a little later. Transport is the subject of an argument for another day. Many things still need to be done; many things that the previous Labor government did not do in the areas of law and order and education. We have heard about the 60 schools. They will be built anyway. The state is growing. Because of the economy we had, more and more people arrived in WA, which meant more taxes and more goods and services tax. Therefore, we had to have more schools, but the money was there to pay for it.

One thing that the Labor government did not do that we will have to do is look after public housing. That was a complete omission by the previous government. Nothing was done to assist the 16 000 people who were on the waiting list, which is now up to 20 000.

**Hon Kim Chance:** It's grown by 4 000 in your term of government?

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** I said it was 16 000; I did not say it was 16 000 at the end of the Labor Party's term in government. It could have been at the beginning, but it certainly was not right at the end. Hon Kim Chance is making assumptions and twisting figures, again to suit himself. We should look at things realistically. We are prepared to admit that 20 000 people require public housing and that something needs to be done. Where is all the money that the Labor Party controlled over those seven and a half years? How has it moved equitably around the state to assist everyone? All we hear from the previous Premier, Alan Carpenter, is that this government is not continuing with all the things that he would have liked to have seen done, including the outdoor stadium. That will not help the 20 000 people who do not have homes. We have a stadium already but the former government wanted to spend \$1 billion of taxpayers' money on a stadium where people could watch football for a few hours one day a week while 20 000 people are looking for a roof over their heads. These people need public housing but the opposition was prepared to provide a football stadium. I think the previous government's opportunities were totally amiss. It had the money, it was able to provide for the disadvantaged, the people that members of the Labor Party suggest they are there for, but they ignored them because they wanted all these other things.

What have we inherited in the area of education? Something I have complained about for ages is the fact that children are still not literate, which is most unfortunate. I could go back quite a few years to when I left school and when my four children went through school. I have six grandchildren at the moment and I see the problems they are having. The lecturers at university are saying that people are coming out of tertiary education without the qualities required to go through a university course. Why is that? It has to be addressed. Obviously, it was not addressed in the seven and a half years of the Labor government. It is something that definitely needs to be addressed now.

We continually hear the word "sustainability". It is used in a dozen different ways, usually to suit the speaker at the time in the circumstances that he or she is trying to push across to other people. A lot of it is more like the emperor's new clothes—"there is no substance to what I am saying but I want you to believe me". That is the type of thing that was just mentioned about the water supply—that the Labor government fixed it up. I would certainly like to know how. Not many people in Western Australia currently believe the previous government has fixed the water supply, but as long as the Labor Party believes it has, it will continue to tell people that is the case; hence the emperor's new clothes.

**Hon Kim Chance:** How many desal plants does your government intend to build?

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** Any what?

**Hon Kim Chance:** Desalination plants, which is the only way you can fix the issue.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** No, I do not believe that is the only way we can fix it.

**Hon Kim Chance:** You are going to build a canal perhaps.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** We could pipe some down.

**Hon Kim Chance:** That was a good idea.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** It was a good idea.

**Hon Kim Chance:** I think you ought to talk about that.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** Ernie Bridge, one of Hon Kim Chance's own, advocated that many years ago.

**Hon Kim Chance:** He did indeed.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** He did indeed. It was a good idea then and it is a good idea now. It all comes down to money. If someone had not decided to go into debt to build the Snowy River scheme, where would we be?

**Hon Kim Chance:** Yes, but it might have made economic sense at the time.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** At the time; okay!

**Hon Bruce Donaldson:** Don't forget we have the Yarragadee to tap into one day.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** Yes, we could always bring it up from the Yarragadee. Can we tap into that?

**Hon Kim Chance:** You are free to run that point of view.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** The point is that no government has sorted out the water problem, so the Labor government cannot take credit for it.

**Hon Kim Chance:** I think we went a long way with the desal plant.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** No, I do not think so.

**Hon Kim Chance:** I think we showed you the way to go.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** Not at all.

**Hon Kim Chance:** People in Western Australia can have as much water as they like at \$28 a tonne. I think that is a pretty good deal.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** No; there will be problems associated with that. Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm talked about genetically modified crops. The people around Kwinana are worried about a number of things associated with that desal plant.

**Hon Kim Chance:** You could have a non-GM desal plant.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** We shall see.

I admit that it takes courage to go down some of these paths and to be prepared to take the bad with the good. There is not one system that is absolutely perfect, but something must be done to open up other areas north of Perth; bringing water from the north would do exactly that.

There are many other areas of concern, at least to me. One is the proposed development of the foreshore in Perth. I am firmly of the belief that some development there needs to be and can be done. Perth has a very long shoreline. However, it does not need a development of the type that we saw in a picture in *The West Australian* some months ago.

**Hon Kim Chance:** Hear, hear!

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** However, something could be done. I was disappointed that Hon Alannah MacTiernan did not sink part of Riverside Drive when boring took place near the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre for the train line so that the people of Perth could walk to that part of the foreshore. That would have been most helpful. The current development there and, I imagine, even the belltower—I will talk about that in a minute—and the ferris wheel would have difficulty attracting people purely because it is so very difficult to cross the road. Had that part of the road been sunk, if it was at all possible—one expects it may well have been, seeing that a tunnel was burrowed for the railway line—it would have been most helpful as a starting point. A lot of money could have been spent bringing Northbridge closer to Perth by also sinking that railway line. A lot of people have spoken about it, and the previous Labor government was considering it. If the money had been available, given how much it would have cost when it was first mooted, it could have been done, and with money left over. Now, of course, costs are escalating, money is being used for other purposes and it will be much more difficult as far as time is concerned to complete it. Again, there are more and more problems for this current government at a time of economic stringency.

There are many other measures that could be taken to improve the quality of life of people in Western Australia. One is a continuation of the underground power program; another is the infill sewerage program. A previous

Liberal government established those programs, one of which I recall was a 10-year program. When the Labor government came into power, it decided that the moneys set aside in the forward estimates for those programs would be used for other purposes. From an environmental point of view there is a need to revisit those programs. It is a matter, again, of finding the moneys if they are available. It always comes back to the old economic equation of limited means and unlimited wants. We can all suggest programs and say, "This is what everyone must have." In particular we talk like that about law and order, education and health issues, but it is a matter of having the funds available to provide those services, along with everything else that people want.

There has been some talk in the past couple of days about the Small Business Development Corporation, an organisation for which I worked for a short while some years ago. There is no doubt that that corporation assists small businesses. It does a very good job in that area, helping people who are not in a position to help themselves. Larger companies, of course, can pay to employ their expertise, but smaller businesses feel constrained by a lack of knowledge in certain areas and are able to go to the Small Business Development Corporation and get information that allows them to move forward. There has been talk also of entities that I know of as enterprise centres, particularly those in regional areas. Again, they were started up quite some time ago, about 24 to 25 years ago—by a previous Labor government by the way. The centres were enhancements of those that had been previously established on a much smaller scale by a previous Liberal government.

**Hon Kim Chance:** Enterprise centres.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** Yes, I used to call them enterprise centres. There was one at Fremantle Prison and the like. I do not know how many there are now. I know that Hendy Cowan embraced them when he was Deputy Premier.

**Hon Kim Chance:** He did.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** He ensured that they continued to have funding and he also tried to expand their numbers. Those enterprise centres do quite a good job. Again, they need to be checked periodically. I am a great believer in all services such as those being revisited and audited at least every five years to make sure that they are doing what everyone expects of them. They can be amended, if need be, but if everything is going all right, we should let them continue. I know that a program that is funded by the commonwealth, but originated in South Australia, still exists. It was brought to Western Australia, again under a previous Labor government, to assist the unemployment numbers as they were then—they were high. At that time, it was called the new enterprise scheme. It was only when the scheme, which came from South Australia, was introduced in Western Australia that the commonwealth government came on board and created the program that is called the New Enterprise Incentive scheme. The federal government provided those people starting a new business with an incentive in the form of unemployment benefits, as it was then called, for 12 months.

**Hon Kim Chance:** Did that include the incubator centres or did they come later?

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** No, the incubator centres came later. They were separate. I used to run an incubator centre in Rabaul in 1973. The first incubator centre started in Osborne Park in 1984. The incubator centre provided a place for small business people who did not want to operate from home or did not have the funds to rent or lease commercial premises.

**Hon Kim Chance:** They could have their bookwork done at the centre, couldn't they?

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** Yes, it was possible. It was a particularly good scheme for people starting out in small business.

I recall that a number of people—I am going back a long way—who went through that program did particularly well. In the end they were able to stand on their own two feet and some of them employed other people. By the government spending money in that area, willing taxpayers were created; otherwise, those people had no option other than to sit back and accept money from the then commonwealth Department of Social Security. As I said, it created willing taxpayers, who in some cases ended up employing a number of people.

**Hon Kim Chance:** I would not stress the "willing" too much.

**Hon RAY HALLIGAN:** I can assure the member that they were willing. A lot of them needed the incentive to be prepared to put in the hours. They could have sat back and received money for doing nothing, apart from submitting a form on which they stated they had been looking for work. They were prepared to go through the program, which, I can assure members, was arduous. It caused them to develop a business plan around their ideas. The business plan was judged by people outside the public service. In those days the Premier was Brian Burke, who was also the Treasurer, and he provided the people whose business plans received the imprimatur of the committee with an interest-free loan of \$1 000. It was a reasonable figure 25 years ago. It gave them the incentive to do something for themselves. The other part of that program provided mentors at no cost to the

potential small business people. Usually the mentors were retired business people who had been in business and had the time and were prepared to assist. They did not run the business for these people, but they were a sounding board for them while they were getting their business up and running. It worked particularly well. If unemployment rises, as some suggest it might, I encourage this government to again look at a program such as the New Enterprise Incentive scheme to assist unemployed people to try to turn their lives around.

The problems that this state is experiencing with health will not be easily overcome. No government of any persuasion has been able to find the answer to the health system. There is no panacea. It will always require more and more money. Members need only approach the administrators and doctors and they will tell them how much they require. They want the best and latest equipment, and more of it, as well as beds, irrespective of whether they are required. In very good times that might be able to be provided, but in difficult times it becomes a balancing act. Political parties need to work together to find a solution.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 1725.]

*Sitting suspended from 3.45 to 4.00 pm*