

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON NIGEL HALLETT (South West) [5.34 pm]: I return to what I was saying earlier about the projects that were being planned, such as the foreshore redevelopment and the hospitals. I also referred to the unnecessary layers of bureaucracy. I think many members will agree that it takes far too long to get a project through some of these bureaucracies. Western Australia is regarded as one of the worst places in which to invest, particularly in the mining industry, because of the time frames encountered. Schools, police stations, roads and other vital infrastructure in regional areas continue to be neglected. Some have crumbled or been closed.

Hon Kim Chance: Not all these things are the new government's fault, you know!

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: The new government's fault? No, we are talking about the previous government! I am expanding on some of the Governor's comments. I will soon come to what the new government plans to do.

Hon Kate Doust: They haven't been very public about their plans, have they? They haven't got any.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I think the government has been very open in its first 50 days about what it hopes to achieve within its first 100 days. That is well documented.

Hon Kate Doust: Well, not much to date, Hon Nigel Hallett.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: The member might be surprised if she had a look.

Hon Kate Doust: I have been looking; we've all been looking, but we haven't found much.

THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Barry House): Order! I ask the member on his feet to direct his comments through the Chair. I notice that a couple of members who have interjected have not yet spoken to this motion. They will have their chance at some later stage.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I can tell members that from a regional perspective, the things that the people out there are asking for are not dreams; they ask to be on an equal footing with their city counterparts. Some people have to travel incredible distances if they fall ill. Hon Ken Baston spoke earlier about the importance of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. These are essential services in regional Western Australia. I will speak in more detail about the RFDS at a later stage.

I will be the first to admit that a lot of spending occurred in Geraldton, Bunbury, Albany and Port Hedland. However, there was certainly some political awareness about where that money was spent. The small towns of regional Western Australia were certainly neglected. A lot of people in regional Western Australia thought that this was purely blatant vote-buying. The provision of key infrastructure and essential services has generally fallen to an all-time low in many of the smaller regional towns. The election of the Barnett Liberal government will redress the funding imbalance between metropolitan and regional Western Australia through the royalties for regions program, which will put in place the significant investment necessary to rebuild rural and regional Western Australia and ensure its future sustainability. I concede that the previous Liberal government neglected regional Western Australia. The Labor government had the opportunity to dedicate a slice of the \$2 billion-odd budget surplus to the regions, but its poor support and lack of investment in essential services for the regions meant that it did not take that opportunity. As Hon Ken Travers said, the previous government paid the price; it was the ultimate price—it lost government. There is so much that could have been done over the past seven years for the infrastructure of regional Western Australia. When one considers the massive royalties that came out of some of these areas, it is obvious that those people got a pretty shoddy deal.

Hon Kim Chance: Do you think the royalties should be spent where they're raised?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Definitely not. It should be across the state, but there has to be a balance. If we want people to live in regional areas, we have to provide services. We will not attract young families without medical and educational infrastructure. We will not attract young teachers to some of these towns where the Government Employees Housing Authority housing is in total neglect. Some initiatives could have been taken. The member knows the wheatbelt as well as I do. We have to start looking at getting shire councils to work together to provide these services, such as arrange for a doctor to be in one town so that a sporting event can be organised, and the other two doctors can have the weekend off. These are initiatives that have to be addressed in a bipartisan way. I will mention the agricultural industry and the large part it plays in the continual sustainability of rural and regional Western Australia. In doing so, I recognise and respect the work of the previous Minister for Agriculture and Food. He is well respected throughout regional Western Australia, and, to the best of my knowledge, he managed that portfolio from the day he came into Parliament.

Hon Kim Chance: More or less.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: He might not manage that portfolio now, but it was a long-term position, he has a great knowledge of the agricultural industry, and I think his heart was certainly in it. The sad thing was that he could not get a lot of initiatives approved by cabinet because his city colleagues had a city-centric attitude.

Hon Kim Chance: The regional infrastructure fund delivered \$85 million a year, which we learnt during question time today will now be absorbed into the royalties for regions program.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Yes, well that is up to —

Hon Kim Chance: In other words, no net gain.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: This is up to the relevant ministers to sort out.

The agricultural industry is worth many billions of dollars to this state, and is the second largest export earner, after mining. Approximately 11 per cent of the state's workforce is employed in the agricultural industry, and in regional areas it generates the most employment opportunities. It is integral to the survival and sustainability of rural and regional towns.

Recently the issue of rising costs of food in Australia and global food shortages have featured predominantly in the media. More agricultural production is definitely required, and this of course means more land dedicated to agriculture. Western Australia has a rich agricultural history. It has a world-class product; its methods of food production are clean and green, and it is poised to take a role as a major player in assisting to address the issue of the global food shortage, whilst ensuring that Australia's food security is rock solid. To do this, the industry will need some assistance from the government. History has shown that such assistance has not been forthcoming in the levels required. The president of the WA Farmers Federation, Mike Norton, said of the previous government —

The Department of Agricultural and Food has the will to address the required agricultural changes, but lacks the funding as it has been invested in city-centric projects ...

That comment is along the lines that the previous minister and I were just discussing. The media release continues —

“Substantial investment is required in agriculture and food research and development to facilitate the provision of immediate and long term food supplies.

I am confident that the required investment will be forthcoming under the Barnett government. The higher cost of food is here to stay because of the huge increases in world demand. A joint report by the United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development earlier this year predicted that food prices will stay at record highs for some years to come. Their forecast for the increase in wheat prices from 2006-07 to 2008-09 is 59 per cent; rice prices will increase by 49 per cent; cheese prices by 79 per cent, and butter by 86 per cent. An illustration of the seriousness of the problem is the recent establishment of a global equity agribusiness fund by the Deutsche Bank, which offers investors the opportunity to participate in the business of feeding the world. According to the bank, there are 80 million new mouths to feed every year, and the demand for agricultural products will increase by 60 per cent by 2030. Australia's food security will become even more vital. Governments have a role to play in ensuring that this security is unquestionable, as well as meeting the challenge of expanding production through a commitment to innovation and research and development to ensure that Western Australian farmers are at the forefront of technology and can continue to build on their status as some of the world's leading agricultural producers. The state Liberal government's commitment to a trial of genetically modified crops is a step in the right direction. It is a contentious issue that will be treated with caution, but it is at least a step in the right direction.

The agriculture industry is facing a huge amount of challenges in solving world food shortages; namely, climate change, increased biosecurity risks and the massive increases in the cost of fuel and fertilisers. Changes to the wheat marketing legislation and adequate funding for this sector are absolutely critical. Opportunities to expand agricultural production depend, of course, on one of our most precious resources—water. Western Australia is blessed with the significant resource of the Ord River region, which, until now, has largely remained untapped as a source of food, not just for this country but also for export. I am glad that the Liberal government has made a real commitment to get this project up and running after years of neglect and inaction by the previous Labor government. Before the election, I—as were, I am sure, many other people—was seriously questioning whether this project was ever going to happen. I think for some 25 years it has been around. I will ask the previous minister to clarify whether the project has been sitting there waiting to be expanded on —

Hon Kim Chance: No, that is not quite correct. We opened up the green allocation just last year, which was some 1 400 hectares, I think.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I thank Hon Kim Chance.

The project went back and forth, and it was disappointing to see in the 2008-09 budget that of \$26 billion worth of capital works expenditure, only \$15 million was allocated in 2009-10 for the construction of necessary road infrastructure for the development of the Ord River west bank.

I believe that food security was just not on the previous government's radar, because if it had been, we would have seen a far more serious commitment to the Ord River project and far more capital allocated to get it off to the start that is needed. We have seen a distinct lack of will from both state and federal governments to get this project going, and I find the prevailing attitude absolutely mystifying given the current national and global realities of food shortages. Australia has a huge capacity for agricultural production, and it is imperative that we act and accept the challenge to grow more food to nourish the world. To do anything less is morally reprehensible.

The desire and the initiative of Australian producers is most certainly not lacking in this respect. We have a fantastic group of younger farmers today that want to take this challenge and have the opportunity to get on and get their industry up and running properly. We now have a commitment from the federal Labor government to join with the state government and contribute some funding from the Infrastructure Australia fund to really assist in getting the Ord stage 2 project up and running.

I have also been very encouraged to see the plans for the expansion of the Carnarvon horticultural industry in the Gascoyne region. That region certainly will rival the Ord as the major food bowl for this state. There is an intensive irrigation plot of some 1 020 hectares already producing \$85 million worth of fruit and vegetables every year. Production is set to grow, with plans by the Department of Agriculture and Food to expand this area by more than a third. The cost of the planned expansion is some \$15 million. It will be provided by the developer and then recouped on the sale of land. This is a great example of what can be achieved with commitment, direction and innovation from government and our agricultural producers. I am sure that the project's positive outcomes will be far-reaching for both the region and state. There certainly needs to be many more of these initiatives, and I hope this is just the start.

I also wish to see extra funding for the Merredin and Lake Grace research stations. The previous government leased these farms out; however, they are essential for conducting research and development on a larger scale than the trials done on single farms. The farmers experiment with these ideas to create new practices.

I was pleased with the Liberal government's commitment to re-instating the highly specialised rural crime squad, commonly known as the stock squad, that was axed by the previous Labor government. The disbanding of the stock squad is another example of the continued withdrawal of services from rural and regional Western Australia. Recently we debated the closure of six country police stations and the downgrading of facilities in the regions. The theft of livestock, machinery, fuel and other agricultural supplies has the potential to impact significantly on production; therefore, on farmers' livelihoods. I refer to the vulnerability felt by women, particularly those with young children, when their closest neighbour is kilometres away and their mobile phone coverage is very ordinary. To whom do farmers who are victims of theft turn? Sometimes they have to wait for days to be heard. From my experience it is not uncommon to go to a town and find the police station unattended with a notice attached to the door outlining the operating hours, which amount to a few hours each day. The stock squad specialised in rural and agricultural crime as well as working with and providing support to rural and regional police statewide.

While talking of positives, last week the Premier announced that construction will commence on the Muchea saleyards to which he committed funding of \$54.5 million. I will be looking to see on what the funds from the sale of the Midland facility will be spent. I am interested in whether the funds will go to upgrading regional complexes throughout the state, a subject I have previously raised in this place. It is a once in a lifetime opportunity to upgrade the saleyard facilities throughout the state for future generations. I make the point that in 2003 the Muchea facility would have cost \$11 million and the cost today is approximately \$50 million. The delay has been costly to the producers of this state.

Hon Kim Chance: Not at all because the value of the land increased from \$9 million to over \$100 million.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: To my knowledge the government recouped \$80 million.

Hon Kim Chance: That money is held by the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority. The value of the land went up from \$9 million to \$100 million. There has been a profit made on that land.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: It is a great outcome and it is an opportunity to upgrade the regional saleyards, including Katanning and Mount Barker. A state-of-the-art complex could be provided in the south west.

Hon Kim Chance: They did a superb job of marketing that land.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Yes. The state of the police country radio network is an absolute disgrace. We have heard about the vulnerability of the state's police many times through the media. It is another example of the downgrading of essential services to rural and regional areas and officers have been disadvantaged at a time of unprecedented economic prosperity in this state. While referring to a time of unprecedented economic prosperity, one of the awards at the Western Australian Regional Small Business Awards went to the Geraldton Foodbank. I was absolutely amazed to learn that 32 000 meals each month are provided by the Geraldton Foodbank. Geraldton, a major regional city on the edge of the mid-west mining boom, is providing over 1 200 each day, and it is an absolute disgrace.

The communication technology that is available today leaves no excuse for the country network to be working insufficiently. It is in a state of disrepair and now there is a push for a new network at a cost of \$100 million over five years. I am sure that the Minister for Police is giving this issue his immediate attention. The network is a lifeline to many people in rural and regional areas. Many places along the Brand Highway do not have access to mobile communication. Approximately 70 major breakdowns have occurred on that highway in the past 12 months; that is, more than one a week. There is no excuse for such poor infrastructure. The police do a fantastic job with their limited resources and are certainly entitled to far more resources. I am sure the Barnett government will work hard to address these areas.

One of the Labor Party's key election promises in 2005 was to fix the health system. Since then the health system has deteriorated and the disparity between Perth and rural and regional Western Australia has continued to widen. I acknowledge that the number of people on waiting lists has reduced recently, but in May 2008, 3 078 people were on the waiting lists for operations in country hospitals, the highest number in 18 months. Very few specialist services are available in rural and regional Western Australia and people in Perth would be horrified at the thought of travelling hundreds or even thousands of kilometres to see a specialist in view of the cost involved, particularly the high cost of fuel that people have endured in recent months. People in rural and regional Western Australia showed their contempt for the previous health minister's comments when he referred to the Royal Flying Doctor Service as an interest group rather than the professional medical body that it is. His comments were an absolute disgrace and showed his contempt and arrogance for regional Western Australia.

The difficulties in recruiting staff to the health industry, particularly to regional areas, is well documented. Those difficulties continue to increase for all industries, given the current labour shortages throughout the state. Significant incentives are required to attract health professionals, teachers and police to rural and regional Western Australia and to keep them there. An important factor is the provision of a decent and affordable level of housing as well as community infrastructure, such as recreational facilities, libraries, roads, etc. The provision of housing for government employees is primarily the responsibility of government. However, in recent years that responsibility has fallen on local government. I have heard many stories of local councils having to put their hands in their pockets to provide suitable living arrangements, particularly for doctors and health staff. Members know what it costs to build housing and associated infrastructure in regional areas. This standard of housing has fallen greatly, and time and again I hear many stories of people refusing to live in the accommodation that has been provided, because it is substandard. The result is that these positions have not been taken up. It is a mess that has been created and one that has to be cleaned up and given priority.

Hon Helen Morton has raised the issue of mental health services in this place on many occasions. Over 50 per cent of suicides in Australia occur in rural and regional areas. Recently six young men committed suicide within five months of each other in Narrogin. Once again that illustrates the gross inadequacy of mental health services in regional Western Australia.

Education has also been neglected in regional areas. Few schools have been built or refurbished. Many have been downgraded or closed. Now we have a problem with school buses in regional areas. It is an issue that I will talk about another time. Hon Brian Ellis made a suggestion in this house to the previous government that it provide state scholarships to assist rural students to study teaching, allied health and medicine. Research shows that graduates from rural and regional areas are four times more likely to work in these areas. It is a suggestion that could go a long way to overcoming staffing problems while contributing to the sustainability of our regional areas. However, his suggestion went unheeded by the previous government.

Hon Kim Chance: It is a very good idea and WACRRM did very well with that.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I trust that Hon Brian Ellis will take that up with the minister concerned. It is another example of the long list of examples of the contempt that people in rural and regional Western Australia have had to endure in past years.

Hon Kim Chance: No, that is why we set up universities in places like Albany and Geraldton. The Geraldton Universities Centre did not exist when we came to government.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: That was a responsibility that the Labor Party had in government.

Hon Kim Chance: No, it was so country kids could at least begin their university studies in careers such as nursing in the country.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I have not much more to say and we have with us a new member who is to make her maiden speech tonight. However, I would like to close by mentioning a few matters that the previous government missed. As members will have noticed, an article in today's *The West Australian* refers to the failed rail network in regional Western Australia and the coming harvest. The previous government prided itself on its rail system, but it certainly very much neglected the regional rail system. Some 2 300 kilometres of railway line have been closed.

Hon Kim Chance: Your lot flogged it all off.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I will not take interjections because the new member must make her maiden speech. However, I will quickly touch on the infill sewerage program, expenditure on which was cut from \$96 million to approximately \$20 million. Places such as Lake Grace, Hyden, Kukerin and Boyup Brook are still facing sewage problems, particularly during very wet periods of weather when sewage can be found on ovals in those towns. In this day and age, for sewage to be entering the Blackwood River is just not on. No government should allow it.

History will show that this has been a period of great wealth, but it has also been a period of lost opportunity. The journalist Paul Murray wrote a very good article on 30 October in which he referred to the bushfire front, members of which included the former director general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Bruce Beggs, and former public service commissioner Frank Campbell. They believed that the government should reintroduce the prescribed burning of water catchments, which is something I have talked about many times in this place. At present some 130 000-odd hectares are burnt, but the recommendation was in the vicinity of 300 000 hectares, which need to be nearer 400 000 hectares every five years. That has stretched out to a 10 to 15-year program. People say that there is no water run-off in catchments, but it is obvious why there is no run-off. Increasing the burning and thinning would reintroduce some 70 gegalitres of water into the dams. This has been spoken about many times. The \$1 billion to be spent on the Binningup desalination plant can be compared with approximately \$1 million, which would be the cost of prescribed burning in the catchments. There is a lot of difference. Paul Murray stated in his article that because of changes to the prescribed burning program, almost 90 per cent of the forest area had not been burnt for a decade or more. We all know that it has resulted in a build up of fuel. Reference was also made to the trial by the Water Corporation on the Wungong Dam catchment, which has shown that thinning and prescribed burning every five to six years has resulted in an extra 47 gegalitres of annual inflow into the dam. These facts have been borne out over a long period of time by people who know their game. I believe that these methods should be put into place. It may mean that unfortunately on occasions smoke may be over the city because of the easterlies in September, but this would be a small price to pay for the long-term gain.

The Barnett government has clearly stated its commitment to giving rural and regional Western Australia the investment and infrastructure that has been lacking for so long. It has committed to giving strong representation to and consideration of the needs of the people of rural and regional Western Australia who contribute so much to the economic success of this state. I am confident that the Barnett government will deliver better services, outcomes and social infrastructure in this time of unprecedented economic prosperity but also economic uncertainty. Investment in rural and regional communities is needed to ensure that they have a sustainable future.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Ray Halligan): We are dealing with the Address-in-Reply. I give the call to Hon Shelley Eaton, and in doing so remind members that this is Hon Shelley Eaton's maiden speech and I would hope that she will be afforded all the courtesies other members were afforded.

HON SHELLEY EATON (Mining and Pastoral) [7.37 pm]: Thank you, Mr Deputy President. I would like to commence this evening by acknowledging the Aboriginal traditional owners of the land on which we stand today, the Nyoongah people. I stand proudly before you as a member of the Australian Labor Party representing the Mining and Pastoral Region of this great state. I have accepted this seat somewhat unexpectedly, vacated by Hon Vincent Catania when he stood successfully for election to the other place as the member for North West.

As a new member of this house until May next year, I thank the members on all sides for their welcome.

I guess a difficulty for me is knowing that while I come to the Parliament with grand ideas for my electorate, I will not have the time to see all of those ideas develop into firm policies or strategies before my brief time in the house is up. I do hope, however, that the time I have in this place will allow me to share my ideas, strategies, hopes and aspirations for the people of the vast electorate of the Mining and Pastoral Region, especially with the members of the Labor caucus and with members of this place, and at least plant the seed that will produce successful programs, particularly for the north.

I am proud to be here representing a party that has overseen and helped secure a period of great posterity and growth, which has left the new government with a well-managed, AAA-rated economy and a strong budget surplus. I am also proud of the work undertaken by the recent Gallop and Carpenter Labor governments in the north west which set the foundations for effective negotiations that would provide all people with the opportunity to participate in the benefits of a strong economy. But more of this later.

Firstly, some thanks and recognition. To my husband, Graham, and son, Travis, who travelled down from Broome to be with me tonight, thank you so much for your love, endless tolerance and understanding. I could not be doing what I am today without your support. To my family, who are here in the gallery tonight, my parents, Pat and Ron Chamberlain, sisters Jodie and Renee, brother, Guy, their partners Joe, Keith and Justine, my nieces Olivia and Priya, and nephews Joseph, Scott, Blake and Rowan, thank you all for your support. I know you are all proud of me, but some of you think I am just a little mad to have given so much of my life in the service of the Labor Party.

To my mother-in-law, Margaret, who is no longer with us, I know you are watching over me and guiding me always.

To my father-in-law, Peter; John and Hiromi and family, Richard, Stephanie, Ben and Dylan; and my dear friends Liz, Steph and David, I thank you all for your encouragement and support. To all the parliamentary services staff, many of whom have been friends of mine for the past 13 years or so, and those I have met since I have been elected, I thank you for your encouragement and support. To my electorate officer Stephanie Burrows and friend Paula Hickey who have assisted me since being elected, I sincerely thank you also.

I follow in the footsteps in the number of committed and hard-working Labor members before me. Thanks and recognition must go firstly to Hon Tom Stephens. In 1995 I commenced work for the state Parliamentary Labor Party when Hon Tom Stephens was then Labor caucus secretary. I must admit that at the time I knew very little about the Mining and Pastoral Region, nor had I had very much to do with Indigenous people and their culture. That has now long since changed. I was privileged to have the opportunity to relocate to Broome in 2000 to work in the electorate office of Hon Tom Stephens. It was then that I was truly captivated by the region I now call home and gained an understanding of the importance of diversity in regional Western Australia. I pay tribute to the passion and commitment of Hon Tom Stephens, who has always represented the people of his electorate with great energy. He continues to raise with his colleagues and bring to the attention of members on all sides the issues facing the people of his electorate. I hope that I, too, can represent the Mining and Pastoral Region, even for this short time, with an equal level of energy and commitment.

I acknowledge Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, whom I was fortunate to work with when she was first elected to Parliament. I am enjoying working with her again in this place. I also acknowledge Hon Shelley Archer who, as the member for the upper house with an office located in Broome, works tirelessly for the people of the north west. Shelley Archer has been recognised in the Kimberley as a member devoted to representing her electorate and, in particular, the Kimberley region where she grew up and where some of her family remain today. I thank Shelley and Kevin for the generosity and support shown to me and my family over the past few years.

I would also like to mention Hon Ernie Bridge, the first Indigenous member elected to state Parliament. Ernie Bridge represented the Kimberley electorate in the lower house for over 20 years, from 1980 to 2001, and held a number of ministerial positions throughout that period, including Indigenous affairs, north west, agriculture, water resources and small business. He was succeeded in 2001 by Carol Martin, who is the first Indigenous woman to represent the seat of Kimberley and who represents that electorate today. Against the backdrop of recent events in the United States of America, perhaps the Kimberley might one day produce another first, the first Indigenous Premier of Western Australia or Prime Minister of Australia.

My family has had a long affiliation with the Labor Party and the Parliament. My mother worked as a secretary and later as an electorate officer for a long line of great Labor members of Parliament. As a child I can remember when she worked for Hon Lyla Elliott in her office in Parliament House. In fact, in those days members of this house were not entitled to offices in their electorates. They had only a parliamentary office, with staff working from there. She then worked for Hon Roy Cloughton and former Speaker Hon John Harman. It was during her employment with Lyla Elliott that I got to know the corridors of Parliament, not as corridors of power but as my childhood playground. I can remember as a child being brought in here during school holidays, probably so that I would not fight with my sisters, and folding letters, putting stamps on envelopes and being given other little jobs to keep me busy for the day. I always remember my mum telling me that if I came to work with her, I could have a Devonshire tea for morning tea. I guess I did not know what a Devonshire tea was because I recall being disappointed when presented with a scone in the staff canteen—not that the scones were not good. Mum's office in Parliament House was on the ground floor. In fact, it was in the office that today is assigned to the State Parliamentary Labor Party. It was somewhat ironic that when I came to work at Parliament House some 20 years later, I worked from the exact same office my mum had worked in all those years before. In fact, I was sure I still

had her original desk, chairs and curtains. Some of the office equipment had been upgraded in between. The old mechanical typewriter had recently been replaced by a computer keyboard and screen. Thank goodness most of the furnishings and equipment have now been further upgraded. When John Harman retired from politics, mum moved into the federal political scene, working for John Dawkins during his years as federal Treasurer and then with Carmen Lawrence. Before she finally retired, she worked for Hon Jim McGinty.

The family connection to the Labor Party goes further than just mum. Her sister Dalveen Timms also spent many years working for the Labor Party at party office. She was secretary to Hon John Cowdell when he was the state secretary of the Labor Party and worked at party office until she retired in the late 1990s. My brother Guy also worked as an electorate officer for a number of Labor members. As members can see, service to the community through the Parliament and the ALP continues to be a large part of our family's life and work.

I would now like to focus on the electorate. The diversity of Western Australia and its many small regional communities presents challenges to all governments. It is this aspect of diversity that I would like to spend some time highlighting this evening, particularly in the region in which I live, the northernmost part of WA, the Kimberley region. Acknowledging and accepting this diversity presents challenges to policymakers and governments alike because one size does not fit all. The Kimberley region of 35 000 people covers over 400 000 square kilometres. This is twice the size of Victoria. It is recognised internationally and nationally as one of the last great wildernesses of the world. The region includes the six towns of Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Wyndham and Kununurra, and more than 200 Indigenous communities with populations of between five and 1 000 people, with communities such as Bidyadanga, Warmun and others larger in both population and land area than some of the gazetted townships. This region boasts strong cultural connections to the land. Almost half, 47 per cent, of the total Kimberley population is of Aboriginal descent, representing approximately one-quarter of the state's total Aboriginal population. This makes the Kimberley region truly unique in Australia. Between 1997 and 2007 the Kimberley region's population increased at an average rate of 2.5 per cent per annum, making it the second fastest growing region in the state. The population is expected to more than double by 2031. The community is relatively young. The median age for people in the region is 30, compared with a WA state median of 36. Significantly, the median age of the Indigenous population is 22 years of age.

Despite the economic circumstances being faced by the international and national markets, the Kimberley continues to exhibit economic growth and social development. Opportunities for further development exist within a range of industries, including offshore oil and gas, onshore resource development, pastoral industry, Indigenous arts, agriculture, tourism, construction and manufacturing. Of these industries, the mining industry is already the biggest contributor to the Kimberley's economy, most notably through Argyle Diamonds. The economic potential of the Kimberley remains poised for growth. This brings with it a need for leadership, sophisticated management and a willingness on the part of government and industry to undertake full negotiations in the region.

I hope to see Kimberley people grow in prosperity in parallel with the emerging growth in mining and agricultural prosperity. I want to see a government that shows leadership, a government that is competent to accept and work with the diversity of all stakeholders in the community. I was therefore very disappointed—I speak for the many local Kimberley people who are also increasingly concerned—by the Premier's ongoing public utterances on the location of the Kimberley gas hub. Whilst I accept the new Premier's right to express his preferred option—after all, it was the previous government's process, not his—he has unleashed a set of consequences by disregarding the significance of the involvement of Indigenous people and their representatives in the gas precinct outcome. Firstly, the Premier has effectively eroded the confidence of local people in the state government. The relationship is damaged and there are now questions as to whether the government's word can be trusted. Secondly, the public statement by the Premier to ignore the right of veto by traditional owners on this project sent an immediate message to some industry leaders. It said that, during Premier Colin Barnett's term as Liberal Premier, the views of Indigenous people can be disregarded. He has effectively reduced the status of Indigenous leaders as legitimate stakeholders in negotiations. Sadly, the coverage of hub talks by *The West Australian* newspaper on Saturday, 8 November confirms this. The damage has been done.

Native title holders are not just any other interest group. They have legal rights and interests that leave governments with obligations to deal with those rights and interests with respect and in accordance with the requirement of law, let alone the Australian ethical imperative to give them a fair go. The new Liberal-National leadership must demonstrate high ethical standards for negotiation. The new government must make it clear that the Indigenous leaders will sit at the negotiation table with industry and government as legitimate and respected stakeholders. After all, the east Kimberley's Rio Tinto experience has shown that mining and development opportunities are made possible and enhanced when they are coupled with respect for negotiation processes. The previous Labor government respected these principles. I am confident that cooperative agreement is achievable if all parties are invited to sit equally at the negotiation table. There must be goodwill, there must be trust and there

must be respectful, ethical leadership by this new government. Ultimately, I am confident in saying that this is the only way forward.

This leads me to a very important issue in the Kimberley: local leadership. The issue of leadership is foremost in our minds. As we know, the first black American was recently elected to the presidency of the United States. A couple of weeks ago the Sydney Peace Prize was conferred on the Kimberley's Patrick Dodson. I congratulate Patrick. This award is a clear recognition of his national leadership role and the principles for which he stands: justice and equality. The people of the Kimberley are most fortunate to have this leader in their community. In his acceptance speech he said —

... Australia, now has the chance to construct a new society built on equality and justice and in harmony with the land and its people. It is not an impossible task provided that we have the love and enthusiasm to begin the journey—the rest will follow.

Sadly, this government's recent actions to silence local voices will make this opportunity a more difficult road. Development has already begun in the Kimberley and there is growth emerging in various parts of the region. Local leadership and local participation must underpin any way forward, and this participation will be crucial to success.

I want to sidetrack for a minute to talk about the Kimberley Institute, which highlights this very issue of local leadership and local participation. Since the demise of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Indigenous leaders from across the Kimberley region have been meeting to discuss how best Indigenous people in the region might engage effectively with all spheres of government, industry, the corporate sector and the broader Kimberley communities. Views held by many Indigenous leaders conclude that there has been a loss of formal Indigenous representation at local and regional levels, the degree and form of local and regional participation and representation from Indigenous people have changed, Indigenous-specific programs under ATSIC have been mainstreamed into other government agencies, and there is increased focus on coordination across departments and tiers of government. The Indigenous leadership in the Kimberley recognised that there was a need to establish regional mechanisms and processes that could fulfil this need. Unlike many other parts of Western Australia, the Kimberley region has had a long history of regional cooperation and partnership between Indigenous organisations and communities. This collaboration has resulted in the establishment of regional organisations that draw their mandate from Indigenous peoples across the Kimberley. As a result of those post-ATSIC meetings, the Kimberley working group was established. This small group of key leaders based in Broome included Stephen Baamba Albert, Patrick Dodson, Kevin Fong, June Oscar, Ethel McLennon, Paul Lane and Tony Lee. The group met regularly to undertake strategic consultations and meetings with key Indigenous leaders and organisations in the east and west Kimberley, state and commonwealth agencies, parliamentarians and state ministers, with all providing support for the establishment of an Indigenous independent think tank in the Kimberley. The establishment of the Kimberley Institute—the think tank—provides an opportunity to bring strategic focus that builds on the oral cultural traditions of Kimberley Indigenous peoples, and maximises the potential of these new arrangements to bring about positive change. For example, it can provide research consultancy services to governments and industry that improve regional responsiveness, provide information on the impact of the new administrative and policy arrangements and bring focus to regional partnership and shared responsibility agreements. It can articulate clear policy positions that support the spiritual, cultural, social and economic wellbeing of Kimberley Indigenous peoples through focused research. It can support and enhance broader engagement to maximise the benefit of government policy to Indigenous peoples. It can provide a forum for dialogue within Indigenous oral cultural traditions. It can support the development of cultural match across Kimberley Indigenous organisations and emerging representative structures—cultural match is about getting things done in ways that fit with Indigenous understandings and beliefs about how it should be done—and it can take part in promoting Indigenous interests at state and national levels. In reality the Kimberley Institute is still in its infancy, but it highlights the depth of local Indigenous leadership. This group recognises what needs to be done and simply sets about finding solutions.

Western Australia is frequently lauded for its great economic success, and the latest statistics boast a statewide unemployment rate of 2.2 per cent. This is a fantastic result, yet behind this statistical success is the hidden level of unemployment that often goes unrecognised and is relevant to the Kimberley and Pilbara regions. Sadly, Indigenous peoples are grossly over-represented amongst the unemployed. However, against this fact progress is being made.

I would like to recognise the work undertaken by a number of the major resource companies, including Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Fortescue Metals, which are among those that have made significant and genuine commitments to increase the participation rate of Indigenous people in their operations. In the east Kimberley, for example, Argyle Diamond Mines, as a major employer, entered into a renewed relationship with the Indigenous traditional owners, and a formal agreement known as the Argyle Diamond Mine Participation

Agreement was struck, which has seen a number of benefits, including growth in the rate of Aboriginal participation in the workforce. In Argyle's own words, the solution to Aboriginal disadvantage lies fundamentally in interacting with Aboriginal people as equals and respecting land and culture. Contrary to the fears of some, this respect has resulted in an embracing of Argyle's right to mine on traditional lands and a genuine pride in ownership of the diamond mine by traditional owners.

The natural beauty of the Kimberley region is something that we need to protect for our children and our children's children. Although I appreciate the wealth and opportunities that exist in the region, with the oil and gas industries in Browse Basin being the current example, we must be vigilant in ensuring that the coastline of the Kimberley is protected. It is about getting the balance right and, like the example set in the east Kimberley, it is about undertaking genuine and full negotiations. I am very keen to ensure that the final site chosen for processing onshore will be not only environmentally sound, but also fully engaging and sensitive to the Kimberley's Indigenous community.

I know only too well the Third World conditions experienced by too many people living in the north—so many homeless people and so many overcrowded homes. It certainly says something about the commitment of family when we see already large Indigenous families taking in their extended family when they have nowhere else to go, without any regard for the pressures this will place on them. On a daily basis I see families camped in the mangroves around Broome and I know that this is not unique to my home town. I see this homelessness all across the Kimberley and Pilbara. Unfortunately, the cost of accommodation, both temporary and permanent, is now too high for many to afford. Waitlists for public housing are long, land releases are not affordable by many and building costs are high. What we need as a matter of urgency is affordable short-term accommodation for visitors who travel throughout the regions. Every year, particularly during the wet season, there is a major influx of visitors to the towns in the Kimberley and Pilbara, many travelling from their home communities to visit family, for medical reasons or cultural ceremonies, or simply to avoid the isolation in remote communities associated with the wet. Well-managed, clean, affordable, short-term accommodation is desperately needed, and I encourage the state government to rapidly advance such projects across the north west.

I am also very concerned about the health and wellbeing of all residents in the region. Under the Gallop-Carpenter Labor government we were fortunate to see major capital improvements in health infrastructure across all towns in the Kimberley, and the construction of the new Hedland health campus in the Pilbara is now also well under way. This has provided greatly improved working conditions for the health professionals and a far more pleasant environment for patients; however, so much more needs to be done. There are visiting specialists in the region, but we need more. There are still too many residents who are forced to travel to Perth for ongoing treatment, requiring them to leave their families and support networks for extended periods of time. I believe many of these patients could and should be treated in their home towns. In particular I refer to the treatment of cancer patients. Diagnosed cancer patients are not able to receive their chemotherapy or radiotherapy in the regions. Some are required to spend several weeks at a time in Perth receiving treatment, maybe once or twice a week, away from their families and friends, and I think this is unacceptable. I understand that there are still several renal dialysis patients residing in Perth who are from the north west and who are unable to return home indefinitely, as there are not enough dialysis beds available for their ongoing treatment in the north. If more dialysis beds were established in the satellite dialysis unit in Broome—which has been suggested and is something I support—there would still be sufficient accommodation available for them to live in while having their treatment.

As I said, there are considerable shortfalls in the delivery of adequate housing and effective education and health, yet there are ongoing efforts across government, and more remains to be done. The negative spiral that occurs due to the relationship between health, housing, education and the capacity for participation in regional economic development has been well documented. Health and education strategies such as the "closing the gap" strategy are being worked through between the commonwealth and state governments. That policy framework is well intentioned, but unless the local community is included in its development and delivery, the potential for success will be negated.

In October 2007 I was successfully elected to the Shire of Broome for a four-year term as a councillor. At the time I felt that the council had become too focused on development for its own sake and was forgetting about its social obligations to the town. I was concerned that there was not enough for kids to do; we were not catering for the large number of visitors to our town with basic facilities such as shade, water and public toilets; and that land releases were simply out of reach of so many locals wishing to purchase a home. Not only at the Shire of Broome but also across the electorate of the Mining and Pastoral Region we must promote strategies for affordable and adaptable housing, support youth programs that enhance the lives of young people and encourage the provision of safe places to socialise. We must also support local small businesses, and encourage environmentally sound planning and sustainable development. To my fellow councillors Graeme Campbell, Nik Wevers, Rob Lander, Chris Mitchell, Chris Maher, Mick Albert, Peter Matsumoto and Elsta Foy, chief executive

officer, Kenn Donohoe, and the great team of directors and staff at the Shire of Broome, I thank them all for their understanding and support during my time on council and in Parliament. I look forward to continuing to represent the people of Broome both through my work in the Parliament and with all the people at the Shire of Broome,

One community organisation that I am extremely proud to be a member of is the Scout Association of Australia. I live in a scouting house. My husband is the Broome scout leader, and my son is a patrol leader. Even the dog's name is Scout. Not to be left out, I became the group manager for the Broome Scout Group. Two years ago, the commonwealth government provided money to the Scout Association of Australia for the establishment of the National Indigenous Scouts Program in northern Western Australia. The intention of this program is to introduce and establish scouting groups in the Kimberley. Last year, the National Indigenous Scouts Program branch commissioner, Ian Darwen, and the National Indigenous Scouts Program development officer, Ric Walne, travelled to Fitzroy Crossing to talk up scouting with the local community members. What was evident from these meetings was that while there was interest from both the kids and the parents about participating in scouting, the locals really had no idea what scouts do. It was then that a decision was made to take experienced scouts from Perth to the Kimberley to participate in a week long cultural exchange program called Kimberley Connexion. Twenty-five scouts and 10 adult leaders from Perth, seven scouts and three Broome leaders all participated in an amazing week of scouting activities in Fitzroy Crossing. The Perth scouts introduced the local Fitzroy kids to scout law and promise, orienteering, including having to find their breakfast in the bush by compass, abseiling, and craft work. In turn the Fitzroy group introduced the Perth scouts to Indigenous painting, stories of their law and culture, and traditional foods. By the end of the week, over 50 Fitzroy kids were involved in the program. The week culminated with an overnight vigil of the Australian flag, before participating in an Anzac Day dawn service at Fitzroy Crossing, where the scouts then put on breakfast for the townsfolk.

One thing about scouting is the fellowship that is developed through these types of events. I know that several of the Perth scouts are still in contact with children from Fitzroy Crossing, and they identify the Kimberley Connexion camp as one of the most inspirational experiences they have had during their years in the scouting movement. As a result of this camp and the continuing visits and networking by Ric Walne and Ian Darwen, a scout group now exists in Fitzroy Crossing. The Broome scouts have held a similar camp on the Dampier Peninsula at the Djarindjin community, where the Broome scouts were taught how to make traditional spears, and our kids taught the Djarindjin group how to build a bridge with ropes and poles. We are now only weeks away from the official launch of the Djarindjin Scout Group.

The government needs to welcome such initiatives into remote communities in this state. The young people in these communities need to be involved in activities that build self-respect, teach respect for others, and provide them with life skills. I hope that if approached for support, the state government will recognise the benefits that such programs are delivering into the remote communities of Western Australia and will provide them with the support necessary to ensure their continuation. I acknowledge and congratulate the outgoing Chief Commissioner of Scouts, Sue Mitchell, who has overseen this Indigenous scout program in Western Australia and has committed so much of her life to the scout movement. I also congratulate Ian Darwen and Ric Walne for the work they continue to do on this program.

The safety of children in isolated and remote communities has been well publicised. Any member who has knowledge of the issues surrounding the protection of children—I note the honourable minister opposite—will realise that isolation is a factor that features in cases of child abuse, regardless of cultural background. For this reason, the work that is undertaken to resolve these issues must reduce the isolation faced by these children and their parents. The establishment by the previous government of remote policing posts has gone some way towards protecting children and families. However, this is only one piece of the jigsaw that will ensure that children are not subject to abuse in the future.

At the risk of repeating myself, I must say that fundamental to any success is the engagement of local people. There are already well-established local organisations and effective local leaders willing to find solutions and work with governments to keep children and families safe. At this point I think it is appropriate to acknowledge and congratulate the women of Fitzroy Crossing who found the strength to stand up to government and some of the local community in seeking the ban on takeaway sales of full-strength beer in the town. To June Oscar and Emily Carter I say congratulations and well done. This was done with the support of Maureen Carter, the team at Nindilingarri Cultural Health, and many others in the town. The ban has had amazing positive results in the town. The old people are now feeling safe, and the children are being fed and are sleeping much better, which is providing dramatically improved learning opportunities for them at school. The hospital is reporting far fewer incidents of domestic violence and alcohol-related injuries, and the police are reporting far fewer alcohol-related crimes, violence and damage. My ongoing concern is that the complete range of support services is yet to be made available in Fitzroy Crossing, and other communities across the Kimberley, to help deal with the underlying issues associated with alcoholism.

I would like to return to the issue of isolation. Isolation is not just about living in a remote place. It is about feeling remote—not being a participant in the everyday workings of society, not having choices economically, being dependent, and lacking the basic skills and necessities for the future. This feeling of isolation in its broadest sense is still the experience of many local Kimberley people. In this context we will be facing some real and ongoing challenges to achieve justice and equality in the Kimberley, particularly if the current government and the Ministers for Regional Development and Indigenous Affairs advance with new strategies for regional governance in areas like the Kimberley and the Pilbara and in the other remote regions of Western Australia.

I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Regional Development, whose royalties for regions campaign responded to the ambitions of so many regional and country people. I sincerely hope that the Minister for Regional Development manages to achieve real benefits for the regions, and he has my support for this. I remain, however, unclear as to how the new government will decide which regional infrastructure projects will get the tick. Having had experience with regional projects, and with the previous government's very effective regional infrastructure funding program, I am well aware of the huge challenges ahead for the honourable minister. What will be the funding criteria for determining successful infrastructure projects? How will the fund be administered? Will there be a requirement for matching funds from the applicant? Will the fund even be contestable? What will be the role, if any, of the Regional Development Commissions? Will there be a role for the Regional Development Council? Does the minister have any plans to amend the Regional Development Commissions Act? How will local governments fit into the process? Will they have a role? I note that during the last sitting week, the Minister for Local Government was unable to explain—despite the media release that had been issued by the minister—how a particular program would operate and what the role of local governments would be. How will those regions “most in need or disadvantaged” get access to the fund? Will it be those communities that shout the loudest, or that can exert political pressure on the minister's Liberal partners, that will be most successful? In light of the Treasurer's call for across-the-board agency cuts, can the minister ensure that government agencies will maintain their core responsibilities in regional areas and not make their cuts there? I fear that government agencies may view royalties for regions as a way of sourcing the funds that they otherwise should be finding from within their own departmental budgets. There remain many unanswered questions about the royalties for regions program. I believe the Minister for Regional Development will need to provide clarity to the house and to the people of regional Western Australia about this program.

In concluding, there is little doubt that despite the current lack of significant infrastructure, and despite the global economic challenges, the Kimberley region is poised, ready for growth. The environment in the Kimberley is nothing short of uniquely spectacular. The recently released movie *Australia*, set in the East Kimberley, will continue to shine the spotlight upon us. Our challenge is to develop a future that can be shared by the majority, not the minority. We must break the nexus of isolation in its broadest sense. Underpinning this ideal is ongoing effort and continuing investment in education, health and housing that will encourage independence and a diverse economy for all to share. These policies will only have greater success with the inclusion of local people and their full participation. This will require governments to lead by example. Governments should be required to accept, recognise and respect the diversity of the Kimberley. The future will require an educated and talented pool of locally based people to meet future economic and employment challenges. We must maintain healthy and safe communities. Can we provide adequate infrastructure in this remote region that will provide children with a broader set of life choices and possibilities? I am hopeful that in my lifetime I will see the inevitable shift from an economy that has a strong welfare domination to one that is diverse and enables Kimberley people to make real choices for their future. When this happens, the possibilities will be endless. Pat Dodson, in his acceptance speech for the Sydney Peace Prize, said —

Freedom, Peace and Justice are values that are universally yearned for by all peoples.

...

Today the challenge is not to get the market edge for ourselves alone but to ensure that other nations are not forced over the edge and into the abyss of further poverty, despair and disintegration.

For the Kimberley to succeed, ideology shall be put aside, leadership and respect shall be pursued, and we can expect that sitting at the negotiation table will be the full gamut of stakeholders. Perhaps the Kimberley will produce another first: we can show others that embracing diversity and encouraging broad participation will result in success.

[Applause.]

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