

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

*Motion*

Resumed from 6 May on the following motion moved by Hon Pierre Yang —

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our most gracious sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

**HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural)** [2.08 pm]: Madam President, as I make my last speech in this place, there is something that comes to mind very clearly; in this Parliament, time goes by extremely fast. Of all the occupations I have had over the years, I think for parliamentarians, with all the things we have to deal with—committee meetings, coming to this place, dealing with constituents—the years go by very quickly, so it hardly feels like I have been here for eight years. Back in 2012, we formed the Western Australian branch of the Shooters and Fishers Party, which had been established in New South Wales in 1995. We were registered with the Electoral Commission very late in 2012—I think it might have been around November. We ran a campaign and, as fortune would have it, I was elected, winning a seat in the Agricultural Region.

When I look around, I see quite a few members are still here from the class of 2013 and plenty of them will continue on. Some will retire and some will go on to do other things in this place. I came in here completely unprepared and inexperienced in any way with anything to do with politics. But fortunately, the fellowship and the assistance of all members of this place, regardless of their political leanings, was invaluable. I found many people were always willing to help, whether it be the clerks or other members of Parliament, to give me a bit of a hand in getting myself organised to operate as the single member of my party. I remember meeting Hon Barry House, the former President, in the corridor after I had been here for about six months. He said, “Rick, when we first heard that a member of the Shooters and Fishers Party had been elected, we were expecting this gun-toting redneck to come in here, but you’re actually quite reasonable!” I did appreciate that he thought I was quite reasonable.

I have had a lot of occupations over the years, which has helped me a lot to relate to people and understand some of the problems in the community. Over the years, I have been a spare parts assistant at a tractor dealership, a motor mechanic, a small business owner, a cleaning chemicals salesman in the hospitality industry, a real estate agent, a TAFE lecturer, an insurance broker, a settlement agent, and a farmer. It might surprise some members that I also spent some time as an armed guard delivering payrolls to the Collie mines. That was a very interesting couple of years. We would get the armoured vehicle from the depot, which, ironically, is now where my former business partner Alex Marra operates his real estate agency from, and drive to this bunker in Bunbury. You would have to see it to believe it! It is all underground and concrete-lined. We would load these containers full of cash into the back of this rickety old truck and then drive down the South Western Highway, up the Coalfields Highway and into Collie to the ANZ bank, where we would unload the cash. While we had a cup of coffee, the bank would distil all the cash into little brown envelopes, which many senior members here might remember being the form of payment before electronic funds transfers. Employees would all line up to get their little brown envelope, showing their name, designation, how many hours they worked and their pay rate on the front of it. We would then drive out along the Mumballup road and onto the long mine access road, and there we would see the line of workers waiting for their pay. We would get out and there would be jeers and sneers as we got the cash to the paymaster, who would then unpack the containers and we would go. We did that on the same day, at the same time, every single week. How we never got robbed is still a mystery to me today! There were obviously no serious crooks out there, or the Collie coalminers had warned everybody off from touching their pay! For some reason, every couple of months we had to go to the local sporting shooters association’s pistol club for some practice. With all respect to my two colleagues at the time, they were well into their retirement years, so when they held out their .38 Special revolver, they were very shaky and they rarely hit the target. I soon learned that if I was going to hit the target with the revolver that was issued to me, I had to aim a metre and a half to the left. I am very pleased that no-one took us to task, because the white flag and the hands would have gone up straightaway, I reckon!

Not long after I was elected to this place, on the advice of my very experienced electorate officer, Anne Fergusson-Stewart, we thought we would have an office opening that would showcase the Shooters and Fishers Party a bit. Many of you attended that office opening. In fact, when we were cleaning out the office, I found the menu for that event. I will read out some of that menu. We had wild harvest pork and venison bratwurst-style sausage and panini with special mayonnaise and green tomato chutney, flash-fried breast of quail on crispbread, and venison skewers. The wines, of course, were Mazza Wines from Dardanup, if anybody wants any of those! We also had wine from Victoria’s game-hunting region—Ladies who Shoot their Lunch, which Hon Sue Ellery found quite amusing at the time, and Are you Game? from Fowles Wines in Strathbogrie. That was quite a good night. Unfortunately, at the time,

Hon Barry House was hosting a delegation of MPs from Canada—I think they might have been from Saskatchewan—and he gave his apologies. He said, “Look, I’m really sorry, Rick. We’ve been invited to Government House, so we’re going there.” I said, “Priorities take their place; no trouble at all!” As the night started to wind down at about 8.30 or nine o’clock, in rolled Big Barry with the whole delegation behind him. He said, “Mate, they heard all about it and they wanted to come, so here they are.” We had all the Canadian MPs there. We put the burners back on and we fired the whole thing up again. I will never forget that a First Nations female MP was there making her way through this big plate of yabbies that a Boyup Brook farmer had provided to us. I do not know what discussions they had in the car, but she looked at me and said, “Rick, if this is being a redneck, then I’m a redneck!” That was a good opening.

During my time here, I was fortunate to get a few inquiries started. One of the first was to get a review of the Firearms Act. Some members may remember that there was a massive fee hike on applications of some 400 per cent, so I moved a disallowance motion. At the time, a couple of government members actually crossed the floor and supported the motion with the opposition, but, unfortunately, the disallowance motion did not succeed. However, what it did do was to instigate an inquiry, I think by the Joint Audit Committee at the time, which outlined some anomalies in its report. The Attorney General at the time then asked the Law Reform Commission to undertake a review over two years. The Law Reform Commission did a forensic review of the Firearms Act; it heard a lot of evidence and travelled to other states. It looked at it dispassionately. A lot of witnesses were interviewed, including members of the Western Australia Police Force. That review resulted in 143 recommendations. Unlike with a lot of these reviews, both the firearms community and WAPOL were comfortable with most of the recommendations, so we looked at implementing them. The former police minister, Hon Michelle Roberts, formed a ministerial working group for firearms reform, and we worked for about 18 months on that. On that group was Ron Bryant from the Western Australian branch of the Sporting Shooters’ Association of Australia, Bevan Steele from the Western Australian Firearm Traders Association, myself and WAPOL. WAPOL had broken the recommendations up into three tranches. Obviously, the easier ones—the low-hanging fruit—were in the first tranche, which we had agreed upon. We put that tranche to the minister, but for some reason it never got to the Parliament. I asked questions about it, but it never got here. I recall that amongst the manifesto of things this government wants to achieve in this term, as outlined in the Governor’s speech, is firearms legislation reform, so I am hopeful that the new minister, Paul Papalia, will reinstate the ministerial working group, look at the Law Reform Commission’s report rather than reinvent the wheel, and put forward some amendments that are consistent with that very good Law Reform Commission report project 105.

The next inquiry I managed to convince this house to set up was an inquiry into a recreational hunting system, which was undertaken by the Standing Committee on Public Administration, to which I was co-opted. Hon Jacqui Boyde and Hon Darren West were also members of that committee. Witnesses ranged from representatives of the Wildflower Society of Western Australia to the Commissioner of Police. It was a really interesting inquiry and it did entail some travel. A few of us travelled to New South Wales to look at the recreational hunting system in that state that had been implemented only 15 years earlier. It was a very sophisticated system, with very good technology. People had to book a forest block online, which limited the number of people who could go there. There were also phone apps. Through GPS mapping, forest blocks could be switched out if other activities were occurring there, such as a mountain bike competition, harvesting of a forest coupe or whatever the case. NSW suspended its recreational hunting system for about 12 or 18 months. It moved from the Game Council of NSW, which had a few issues, into the Game Licensing Unit under the Department of Primary Industries. While we were there, two things of interest were explained to us. One was that the Game Licensing Unit had found that the amount of illegal activity in the forest had reduced because there were more eyes in the bush and more reporting back to it about issues that should not be going on—maybe some cropping there or whatever it was. The other thing was that during the suspension of the system, a lot of complaints came in from country New South Wales, because these towns were getting a lot of revenue from recreational hunting. It was helping their economy by people going there and paying for accommodation, supplies and that type of thing. That really helped those rural communities. Those rural communities were happy when the system was reinstated. It also had a big impact on the amount of expenditure that the state government had to undertake as far as pest animal control was concerned.

We then went down to Victoria where recreational hunting systems have been in place for probably 60 or 70 years. I think Hon Steve Dawson might have been involved in that at one stage or had worked in that department. Victoria has a very good system. Of interest there was that recreational hunters take something like 157 000 feral deer out of the forest system a year. If the deer were left to breed, they would really impact the forest. A study 10 years ago, or thereabouts, found that there was about \$439 million of value to the Victorian economy in recreational hunting. One of the highlights of that trip was when we visited an area called the Heart Morass. I recently watched a TV program about the Heart Morass. It was really something to see. We learnt that a morass is a wetland that is lower than the bordering river’s watertable level. The Heart Morass near Sale in Gippsland had been deteriorating and over-grazed for many, many years, and it was a mess. We saw all the old photos of how bad its condition had been. In 2007, Field and Game Australia in that state bought one parcel of land in the Heart Morass through funds

granted by the Hugh Williamson Foundation and it set about rehabilitating the land. Obviously, it was looking to improve the habitat for the lifestyle of duck hunting that occurred there at certain times of the year.

Later on, the association bought another two parcels, with a total cost of about \$2.4 million, and it now encompasses 3 200 acres. It is really good example of practical conservation in practice. It is not someone tying themselves to a bulldozer; it is actually doing something. The association planted 60 000 trees. It worked with the catchment council in that state. It worked out when to drain areas and where not to drain. A lot of acid sulphates are in the soil there, so people have to be very careful when they drain areas. A lot of grasslands were replanted, and if people were to see it now, they would see it is absolutely pristine. The comment my colleagues made on that trip was that they could not believe there was not one empty beer can or one piece of paper lying about. It was absolutely and totally pristine and had been rehabilitated to a fantastic level.

In that area now, obviously duck-shooting season is only a few weeks a year, so when they are not using it, all members of the Field and Game association pay \$70 for a key that gives them 12-months' access. They can go and use the wetlands for camping, family picnics or whatever they like. School tours go there so kids get to learn all about the environment and what they can do to actually help the environment. The bird observation society goes there to identify birds. It works together with the association. It puts up nesting boxes. Even the local community gets to use it as a walking trail in the off-season. It is a really good example of hunting and conservation together. That was a good inquiry that I enjoyed. Some recommendations in the report have not been implemented, but there have been some alternatives presented, which I think are a good start.

The next inquiry was quite a controversial one. It was the Select Committee into the Operations of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc). I have since found out that that select committee had been, for some reason, the first select committee established in about seven years, yet, in the fortieth Parliament we had select committees established every other week. It was controversial, and, I must admit, at times it got a little bit uncomfortable. There were debates in the other place in which we were accused of being a committee of assassins and that it was a witch-hunt. The RSPCA certainly took umbrage at us looking into its operations. However, I am glad that we undertook that inquiry because quite a few things came out of it. Ironically, other states in Australia were at the same time undertaking similar inquiries. In the UK—the birthplace of the RSPCA—similar inquiries were also being undertaken.

Without going through the full report, one of the things that stood out the most was the fact that the RSPCA, as a private charity, does not have any legislative power at all to investigate or prosecute—zero. A lot of people do not understand how that connection and what an RSPCA officer can do that. How it works is that, under the Animal Welfare Act 2002, the CEO of the Department of Agriculture and Food appoints general inspectors. They also appoint RSPCA employees, which is also required under the Animal Welfare Act; council rangers; Department of Environment Regulation rangers; and, in a couple of cases, people who have operated animal shelters, which I do not think is a very wise move. Part of the problem is that those appointments, which last for five years, have no conditions on them. Unfortunately, there was a lot of tension between the RSPCA and the Department of Agriculture and Food, to the point that they resented each other a lot. What the general inspectors were doing was taking all their direction from the RSPCA, not from the department. Justice Corboy, in one of his findings, said that the general inspectors are an agent of the Department of Agriculture and Food, and it follows for me that an agent should always refer to their principal for direction or reporting. These very same issues were being investigated in the UK. One MP in the UK said that the functions of campaigner, fundraiser, investigator and prosecutor should have oceans of blue water between them instead of Chinese walls. In fact, what should happen is that, like in Scotland and Ireland, they can investigate but then provide a brief to the state, and it should be the state that, in its own impassioned assessment, looks at whether charges or prosecutions should commence. I know that the Minister for Agriculture and Food is looking at a review of the Animal Welfare Act and I think that that is very important.

Then, of course, we have the *Private property rights: The need for disclosure and fair compensation*, which was the thirty-third report of the Public Administration Committee, which I was not co-opted onto, but I did attend some of the hearings as an observer. I think it was a really useful report. I think it was very accurate. I commend the committee members on the level of investigation it did and for being able to capture the issues that affect the community where private property rights are concerned. This affects the community directly. This is not some sort of airy-fairy thing that we might do to improve the community. It actually affects lives with things like environmentally sensitive areas or conditions on titles. Therefore, I think it is very, very important that at some stage the report be referred to. I know we had an inquiry into property rights in 2005—I think Hon Sue Ellery was on that particular committee. That is going back a while, but I think much came out of that. It was a very good report, too. I encourage the government to have a good look at this thirty-third report and make some changes so that people's lives are not so badly affected.

In his contribution last week, Hon Ken Baston spoke about the wild dog bounty that he had implemented while he was Minister for Agriculture and Food. I had many discussions with the minister at that time about this bounty because it is used extensively in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland as a means of reducing numbers of

wild dogs and even foxes. For some reason the department here has a lot of resistance to it. The questions I asked in this place revealed that over 520 dogs had been taken within a very short period of time and it cost the state only about \$52 000, which is really good value for money. But for some reason there seems to be resistance to that. I know that Victoria has bounty systems for foxes and wild dogs and sometimes there is a bit of political pressure and the state backs off but then it reinstates the bounties again because the number of dogs and foxes start to climb. In the overall management of wild dogs and foxes, I know we have exclusion fencing, which is very important, and we also have doggers, which is also very important, but I think we should not underestimate using ground shooting and bounties as a way to also reduce those wild dog numbers. Pastoralists are not the only ones affected by this; members can imagine the devastation on wildlife and the pastoral regions by wild dogs. Some of the pastoralists who I have spoken to said that there used to be lots of goats, kangaroos, marsupials and everything else there but not anymore. They are all gone; the wild dogs have eaten them all. Therefore, I think that this should be revisited and I congratulate Hon Ken Baston for having the courage to actually do something about that at the time but unfortunately it did not continue.

Madam President, I would just like to touch on the fact that you, as the first female President of this place, showed a lot of courage in protecting the conventions, the privileges and the institution of the Legislative Council. Listening to the condolence motion for Hon Clive Griffiths, I heard a common thread from all the speakers: that the protection of the conventions and the privileges of the upper house is paramount. Hon Clive Griffiths served under both Liberal and Labor governments, and he pushed forward that the protection of the Legislative Council is paramount. Madam President, you took your solemn duty seriously and you have protected as best you can the privileges of this Parliament. We will wait to see how things turn out with that. I certainly encourage the new President, whoever that might be, to also look at the fact that this is not about party politics but the institution of the Legislative Council, and that democracy relies on all the pillars of democracy, including privilege. I think to erode that is the start of a slippery slope. Looking back through the centuries, a lot of blood has been spilt and lives lost in the forging of the democratic system.

Depending on electoral reform, I look forward to the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party contesting the next election in 2025. I raise that because I was listening to some talkback radio while on the south coast a few weeks back when the Attorney General flagged that there would be a review of the Legislative Council electoral system, and a lot of talk was about one vote, one value and that a vote in the Mining and Pastoral Region in particular had a weighting of about 6.5 times that of someone in the city. I have great concerns about that. In fact, I heard on the radio Hon Darren West reply to a question on that. The Australian Senate has 12 senators per state. If we had one vote, one value for elections to the Australian Senate, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland would have far more senators than we would. I do not think Western Australia wants to see a reduction in the amount of representation we have in the federal Senate. Western Australia is definitely the powerhouse of the entire country's economy; therefore, we need to have 12 senators to represent us. If we look at the Mining and Pastoral and Agricultural Regions, sure they do not have the population, but they are the powerhouses of the state economy. There are many challenges in those regions that city people do not have when it comes to essential services, and just getting around the place because it is so huge. I think it would be a travesty to reduce representation for those regions. Some reform could be required. But what shape that would take, I do not know—whether we adopt a Senate type–system or New South Wales–type system or whatever. I think that one vote, one value is fraught with a lot of problems, and I would not like to see it in place. The SFFWA will go into caretaker mode for now. Where we go will depend on how that electoral reform works out, but hopefully we will be back to have another go.

As I come to the end of this speech, I would like to thank a few people. First and foremost, would have to be my wife, Brenda, who has been by my side the entire time and has always encouraged me. When I was licking my wounds, she would always give me a pat on the back and a red wine to calm me down. She has always been there supporting me all the way through, and I am very grateful for that. I also thank my family—my parents, my children, my grandchildren and my soon-to-be great-grandchild in November. You have always been very supportive of me right through.

I thank my electorate staff. Anne Fergusson-Stewart has been there from the beginning. She is a very experienced electorate officer; she has worked for ministerial departments, both federal and state. She certainly helped me to get up and running, and I am eternally grateful to her. Lucy Radzikowska has been with us for this term of Parliament. She is a brilliant research officer. She actually reads legislation and *Hansard* for fun! If I ever needed anything, I had it in a hot second. Her intellectual capacity is beyond reproach. I thank Lucy very much for her service. Tim Williams came to work with us at the beginning of the fortieth Parliament as a young journalist. He has been an assistant research officer. He has handled a lot of media for us, prepared a lot of speeches and done a lot of research as well. As a young man, he has grown to be a very, very capable research officer. What weighs heavily on all members of Parliament who were not re-elected is their responsibility to their staff and that they are now unemployed and will have to look elsewhere for employment. That weighs heavily on me, but the quality of those people means that it will not be too long before someone picks them up.

I would also like to thank some of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party executive, in particular Ray Hull and Mark McCall, who have been there from the very beginning and are still on the executive. Ray was chairman for a period of time and Mark McCall has been our treasurer for the party's existence. I thank Stuart Ostle, our current chairman; Stef Colaguri; Clinton Thomas; Ron Lean; Trevor Ruewaldt; Fiona White-Hartig; and Joe Gerek. They are all dedicated people on our state executive.

I would also like to thank all members and the Clerks for their fellowship over the years. I have really appreciated that support across the divide. I wish all re-elected and newly elected members all strength in continuing to keep the other place to account, and in reviewing and improving legislation, as this house has a duty to do. Madam President, lastly, I wish all those members who did not contest or who were unsuccessful at the election all the very best for the future.

[Applause.]

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you, Hon Rick Mazza. We certainly wish you the best for the very exciting next chapter before you.

**HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural)** [2.35 pm]: I am sure that most members struggle with the content of their valedictory address; I know I certainly have over the last few weeks. I have so much to say but, as always, relevance is important in a speech, so here we go.

Madam President, I will commence by saying that I am bitterly disappointed your tenure as President of this house will not continue into the forty-first Parliament. It has been my absolute privilege to be a member of this place with you as the first female President of the Legislative Council in the fortieth Parliament. Madam President, you have presided over a number of controversial and at times adversarial debates in this place, and you have conducted your presidency in a highly professional and nonpartisan manner. You are also President of this house when it is being challenged on what is the most fundamental requirement, whether spoken or written—that is, the basic democratic right of privilege. Privilege for members of Parliament allows them to represent their communities and issues within those communities as they see them, and allows them to do so without fear of legal retribution. Madam President, you have fearlessly represented the current rights of this house and have done your best to maintain over 300 years of tradition to uphold democracy as we know it today. On this matter, I will repeat the Governor's speech when he opened Parliament two weeks ago —

With your election, you constituents have put their faith in you.

That is a solemn responsibility. As we look around the globe, we see that faith in democratic processes is declining.

This is dangerous because the only alternative to it is authoritarian Government. The first step in the process is always an attack on the integrity of the democratic system. In Australia we protect that better than anywhere else.

I fully agree with Governor Beazley's comments; however, he omitted to say in his speech that democracy as we know it today is being challenged in Western Australia. It is my opinion that the barbarians are at the gates on the fundamental right of parliamentary privilege in this place. I fully comprehend the pressure Madam President must have come under on this matter, as I spent some time last year being publicly vilified by the Premier and the Attorney General for doing nothing more than carrying out my responsibilities, as enshrined in legislation, regarding the appointment of the Corruption and Crime Commissioner. These comments were inappropriate. They were lies and they have no foundation in fact and were unworthy of the Premier. I think it is absolutely abhorrent that any member of any committee of this Parliament should be vilified in this manner because a government was unable to get its way. The Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission rejected the Premier's nomination not once, but twice—on two separate occasions. That rejection was carried out as there was neither majority support nor bipartisan support for the nominee. Parliamentary committees and their members carry out important work on behalf of the Western Australian community on a plethora of subjects, and they do so, on the whole, in a bipartisan manner that rises above daily political argy-bargy. This is the fundamental reason why committee deliberations remain within the committee. Once proven, a breach of these confidential discussions by a member of the committee is considered to be a contempt of Parliament, yet here we are. A member of the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission, which I belong to, took it upon himself to breach this convention and had the protection of the government in the other place during a motion that could possibly have put him before the privileges committee. As I understand it, he is to be rewarded as the new chair of the incoming CCCC. I remember an occasion on the farm when one of my young daughters, one of the twins, asked me how to tell the difference between a snake and a worm. My response was that snakes slither, they have scales and are completely untrustworthy. There is no such thing as a good snake, and the best policy is to give them a wide berth. Madam President, I conclude this portion of my address by saying that you have been magnificent as President of this Council. I wish your successor the very best during these turbulent times. I believe that it is worth repeating: the barbarians are truly at the doors of democracy in this great state, and if all else fails, lock the doors!

I will now move on to more pleasant matters. A valedictory address is really a speech on self-reflection. Before I get to some of my achievements as a member of this place, I would like to share with members a couple of humorous moments made by members of this Council that have been in my memory for years and will probably forever remain there. One of the great things about spending time here is listening to members on their feet and participating in their conversations through interjections, when the time permits. The first interjection that I recall is from the late Hon Jock Ferguson. Jock became a member of the thirty-eighth Parliament in September 2008. Sadly, he was not with us for very long before he went off to that great trades hall in the sky. We all enjoyed Jock's company. I know I certainly did, although he had a very annoying habit of first addressing any Liberal member he came across as comrade. The occasion that I am alluding to is when Hon Norman Moore had carriage of a bill and during Norman's second reading speech, Jock interjected with a comment that I recall, to the best of my knowledge, went along the lines of, "This legislation is as useful as a glass eye that has a crack in it." Another interjection that is indelibly etched in my memory was from Hon Sue Ellery who, as the Leader of the Opposition at the time, interjected on a government Liberal member who only on very rare occasions rose to his feet to address the Council. On one of those rare occasions, the member was on his feet giving a five-minute dissertation on what was wrong with the world when Hon Sue Ellery interjected with the pithy comment, and I quote once again from the best of my memory, "What a shame the member's political career peaked in opposition." We have some fun in this place from time to time. If the Leader of the House cannot remember who she said that to, I will remind her later.

I am sure that every member who arrives here does so with the intention of achieving positive outcomes for the electorate that they represent. I know I certainly did. I will now touch on some of the achievements that I successfully accomplished as a member over the last 12 years. When I first arrived as a member, I was a very nervous Nellie. I did not sleep for the first nine months, especially after the house sittings, because my mind was in turmoil trying to catch up on what had happened. I will move forward to what I was going to say. On 29 December 2009, in the early years of the Barnett government, a massive bushfire raced through the town of Toodyay and its surrounds, totally destroying about 28 or 29 homes. Toodyay was closed off. No-one was allowed in and only residents were allowed to remain in Toodyay. The day after the fire, one of the Premier's principal advisers, John Hammond, called me. He said that the Premier was going up to Toodyay and asked whether I would like to come. I said I certainly would but that I was in my shorts and thongs. He said that I needed to get changed and they would pick me up in half an hour. The Premier arrived at my house and off we went to Toodyay in the morning. On the way up there, we were discussing what had happened. I had had a bit of feedback from people up there already and I said to Colin, "You understand that at this stage over 20 homes have been burnt to the ground. Most of those residents are actually left with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They are living in the town on charity from friends and relations or anyone who can help. Wouldn't it be good if we could give them some of their dignity back and give them a cash grant so that they could have some independence over their life going forward until they re-establish themselves? They've lost their bank accounts, their wallets and have no identity at all, other than the people who know them. They could then buy a meal somewhere and repay their hosts in this terrible time." There was silence and then he said that it was a good idea and he asked me how much I would suggest. I thought that was above my pay grade—you're asking me how much! Quite conservatively, I thought about \$2 500 per home would be more than adequate. He thought in silence for a minute and said to make it \$5 000, and that is what happened. We arrived in Toodyay the day after the bushfire and attended a town hall meeting packed with Toodyay townspeople, many of whom were in severe distress. The emergency services and police got up and talked. The town hall meetings occurred on a daily basis for more than a week so that the people were informed of what was happening, what was going to take place and on how the government and the emergency services et cetera were going to come to their aid and help re-establish their lives. The Premier got up and said a few words and then he made the announcement that we would be allocating a \$5 000 grant to anybody whose house had burnt to the ground. He pointed to me and he said, "You're the man. You'll have to come up and do this." I was appointed as the Premier's coordinator to deal with the community issues up there. At the town hall meeting the next day, the town hall was again absolutely packed with people and the emergency services went through the process again. I sat down with the shire clerk at the time, who had the deeds of all the houses. We knew exactly who the residents involved were and I signed \$5 000 cheques for those unfortunate people. That was a Saturday morning, and I had arranged for Bendigo Bank to open its doors so that those people could go across and either cash their money or open an account and put the excess into an account, and that is what happened. After that meeting, I went outside, and had a cigarette, as all members know is my habit, and a lady came up to me. I will not even try to guess her age. She told me that she had been nominated to thank me. I asked her what for. She pointed to a group of people and said that they had all lost their homes and that for the last three days she had nothing with her but the clothes that she was wearing and that she had been living with people whom she did not know. She told me that I had given her and the group their dignity back and that they now had some individual freedom in regard to what they could do. She said they felt like they had been brought back into the community at large. That particular \$5 000 grant was carried out throughout the whole of the Barnett years, especially for homes that were lost in bushfire disasters. I am very happy to see that this government has something similar in place. I know that a \$5 000 grant is now being allocated to those poor, unfortunate people who lost their homes during the recent cyclone Seroja.

There was another occasion that I was highly involved in. A good friend of mine Graham Nixon was the chair of the McCusker Charitable Foundation at the time. He contacted me and asked me if there was any way I could get some money out of the new government to give to the McCusker foundation. I had no idea what the foundation was about. I looked into the McCusker foundation and met Professor Ralph Martins, AO, for the first time. The foundation does a fantastic job with its research into Alzheimer's disease. We are all growing older, we are all living longer and Alzheimer's is becoming more prevalent in our community. If we look at the figures going forward to 2030, 2040 and 2050, the number of people who will succumb to this disease is mind-boggling.

Troy Buswell was the Treasurer at the time. As always with these matters, I tried to be highly professional. I understand that ministers and Premiers are extremely busy. I prepared one page of the relevant points that needed to be discussed and set out why I was pursuing a particular outcome. I badgered Troy on a number of occasions for some money to be donated to the McCusker foundation. I did not get a response. When the budget was brought down in 2011, I think, Troy came to me and said that there was some money for the McCusker foundation in the budget. It turned out to be \$2.2 million. That money was sourced from moneys in the Carpenter government's science and innovation fund. I was very grateful to Troy. I could not find it in the budget. It was not a line item. The McCusker foundation was very grateful for that money. It triggered another substantial donation from the commonwealth. In turn, as Ralph told me on a flight back from Queensland, when I happened to be sitting next to him, it also triggered substantial funds and donations from the United States of America. I wish the foundation all the very best. I know that it will continue doing fantastic work, especially in trying to find a way—it is nearly there, if not already—to make an early diagnosis of this particular disease.

At that time, Terry Redman was the Minister for Agriculture and Food. I had been down to Katanning and met with people from the Shire of Katanning. It had an issue with its saleyards, which were located in the middle of town. The saleyards did not meet animal welfare requirements. Access to the saleyards by modern transport was tight, if not totally inadequate. When over a million sheep are put through a particular saleyard, anyone anywhere in the town would know when it was sale day because they could smell it. It was as simple as that. The shire wanted to move the saleyards to another location and make them more modern. In the meantime, I had been to a briefing in the Liberal party room, which was organised by Terry Redman, the Minister for Agriculture and Food at the time. He also wanted to build new saleyards but he wanted to move them to Arthur River, which was some way from the town site of Katanning. Once they were built, he wanted the new Muchea saleyards and the new Katanning saleyards—a combined value of around \$80 million has been spent on them—to be leased to a superannuation investment company called Palisade Investment Partners, which was leasing and administering saleyards in the eastern states. I did not think that was a great idea, considering that we had only two large saleyards in the state. I was not happy about it, and I walked out of the briefing.

Once again, I went to work and put a briefing paper together. I went to the Premier's office and spoke to one of his advisers. I said that I had been to Katanning and said the shire believed it could build new saleyards, once it found an appropriate place for them, for \$20 million, but it would like \$17 million from the government because it can find the rest. I heard nothing back. If you are persistent and professional and until somebody says, "No, go away", you will not get rid of me. After a few more weeks, I repeated that exercise. I went back to the Premier's office. One of his people sat down with me. They were very respectful. I spent half an hour going through it again. I still heard nothing. One day, probably three or four weeks later, I got a phone call. Timing is important in life and in politics, believe me. This particular person from the Premier's office said, "What are you doing at three o'clock this afternoon, Jim?" I thought that nobody from the Premier's office would ring up and ask that question without a good reason. I asked why. They said, "We'd like you to meet the Premier at three o'clock to discuss your proposal of a grant for the Katanning saleyards." I said that I was happy to meet the Premier. I asked why it was suggested that we meet at three o'clock. They said, "He's meeting Terry Redman at four o'clock and we want him to say yes to you first before he says no to Terry's proposal." That is exactly what happened. A grant of \$17 million came from the Barnett government. Those saleyards are state of the art. It is the largest undercover area for sheep in the southern hemisphere. It cost \$26 million, which is virtually half of what the Muchea saleyards cost. It was built by locals. It is still managed by the Katanning shire. If members are ever down there, I suggest they look at the saleyards. They have done a fantastic job. When the saleyards were opened in May 2014, Hon Ken Baston was the minister. I went down with him and the Premier.

Another matter that I became involved with was the year 7 transition. All members know that that is when the year 7s go off to middle school. The Leader of the House would certainly know that. It was a proposal adopted from the eastern states. It was going to have a pretty negative effect on a number of schools in my electorate. I wrote to every P&C president in my electorate. I was told what was likely to happen and that I was happy to receive feedback on how this matter could be resolved. Members from the Agricultural Region would certainly be aware that a number of small primary schools in WA are quite isolated. To use their year 7s in a cliff face arrangement would take the student numbers in some schools down to critical levels. The Standing Committee on Public Administration looked into the matter. It had hearings, wrote a report and made recommendations. I never read the report because I knew exactly what I was going to do about this matter.

Every year, I conducted a tour of the Agricultural Region with the Premier. These tours would be held over one or two nights. They were timed to the minute. Public meetings were always held in places of interest. They were highly successful. I am pretty sure that Colin enjoyed them. We would start at seven o'clock in the morning and we would not get to bed until 10.30 at night. On this particular occasion, I decided to take our tour from here to Geraldton. I organised a large public meeting in the Shire of Coorow, at which over 100 local people turned up. I knew that the local John Deere agent was a very good orator. When Colin gave his address, the agent said to the Premier, "What's this year 7 transition thing about? Don't you understand that, firstly, if these children suddenly have to go to a high school or boarding school somewhere else, it is at great expense to the parents, and most of them have not saved for that expense? Secondly, you are cutting into my workforce. A lot of these children who go away, if they had stayed in the community, they would become my apprentices." Once children in rural communities leave, they rarely come back. We stopped in Geraldton that night. I think Colin got the message. Over dinner and a bottle of wine, he said, "I know you've been on about this year 7 transition. What's your solution?" I said that it obviously could not be stopped but I suggested we have some sort of gradual process, so that people could get used to it and families could make their own arrangements over a period of time. That is pretty much what happened. It was decided that this transition would be voluntary for certain small primary schools on a parent's application. A number of schools adopted that. I think the transition period finished in 2017. Now year 7 students go to middle school somewhere else. My daughter's child will soon be going from Kalannie to Dalwallinu, which involves an hour and a half bus ride in the morning and an hour and a half bus ride in the evening. That is three hours on a bus, five days a week, for a year 7 student. He will not be the only one. This is replicated throughout the region in a number of small primary schools.

I am, and always have been, a believer in competition. I think competition gives the best service. It will also give the best price and the best product. I refer to Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd in this state. I was involved at a commonwealth level with some great people, including Ian Bradley, who is no longer with us. I went on trips to lobby the Howard federal government to take the monopoly away from the Australian Wheat Board. In the end, it was a Labor government that did that. The outcome is beneficial to Western Australian growers by millions of dollars a year. However, we now have a similar monopoly in CBH. I am not decrying the fact that CBH is the monopoly grain handler in this state. I am not saying that CBH is inefficient, but I know that it can do better. Bunge, the second largest grain acquirer in the world, came to me when it wanted to start exporting grain out of Bunbury port. Once again, Troy was the Minister for Transport and ports. There was not going to be a lot of public moneys involved. It just wanted the licence and the land allocation at Bunbury port to set up a receival point. After some lobbying, that actually happened. Bunge eventually had a receival point at Arthur River and another one further inland. It spent \$90 million building a state-of-the-art receival point at Bunbury port. Its handling charges were less than CBH's by a good number of dollars. One grower in the area said that he would save \$50 000 to \$80 000 a year by going to the competition. I was involved in that at a very high level. The minister made the final decision, but it would not have happened unless Bunge had come to me and I had gone through the process. One of the great things about being in government is actually being able to achieve things.

To cut a long story short, it was an absolute failure for Bunge. CBH met the local marketplace. It lowered its handling fees. That was fine; that is what competition is about. Bunge could not sustain its commercial interest because it had started to lose tonnage. I understand that it is now on the market as a non-operating entity.

I was not a student at Muresk, but as a member for Agricultural Region I certainly believe Muresk has a lot to add from an educational perspective, and it has in the past for agriculture. There was a time when Muresk—I cannot remember what it was combined with locally; it was one of the universities.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** Curtin.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** Curtin University, yes. After a few years, that arrangement went by the bye, and the Muresk Institute virtually closed down. Then it started up again in partnership with the University of Queensland. I went up there and became a little involved and encouraged them. At the time, 22 students had enrolled in a two or three-year course. I asked, "How can I help you?" They said, "We need more students. We need some encouragement. People have lost a bit of faith in Muresk because it has been irregular." I said, "If I can arrange a scholarship program and you guys could advertise that there is a scholarship program, it may encourage other people to become students." They said that was great. I came back to the Liberal party room and put forward a proposal. It was to be a \$5 000 scholarship called the Sir David Brand scholarship program. The Premier said that was fine. I spoke to all members and they approved it. The Premier said the only caveat was, "Things change in politics, Jim. The best thing to do is only make this a four-year or a government-term contract because there may be fewer members after the next election," and there were. That program commenced and that is what happened.

I will not bore members any further with some of my achievements, but the list is long.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** It certainly has not been boring, honourable member.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** It has not been boring at all; it has been quite exciting.



One of the most satisfying aspects of being a member of Parliament is the opportunity to help individuals with difficulties that they are experiencing. Most of the time it is listening to their grievances or helping them to gain access or find the right direction for departmental inquiries and resolutions. It is my experience that most people access a member's office when the wheels have truly fallen off the matter they are struggling with. I am sure we have all had similar experiences. I wish that people would utilise the services our offices provide more often and earlier, when the wheels start to wobble and the problem is easier to overcome, rather than trying to rectify something at its terminal stage.

We have all helped, and we continue to help, individuals from our electorates on a whole range of subjects. I find getting positive outcomes for people most gratifying; I am sure we all do. At times, it takes a great deal of work and more work than the person you are trying to help actually realises. One of the most gratifying incidents my office has dealt with took place in the dying years of the Gillard federal government. One of my girls received a call as I was leaving the office. She said, "Jim, you need to take this call." When my staff say that, I know that they are serious. I took the call from a young lady. I will not mention her name. She is from quite a large country town in my electorate. She said, "Mr Chown, I'm just ringing you because I hope you can help me. I am being deported within two and a half weeks." I asked her how long she had been here. She replied, "I've been here for over five years. I fled the UK. I now have a partner; I've integrated in the community; I've got a job; I love being here; but the problem is, if I'm deported, my life will be in danger." I said, "Why is that?" She said, "I have my daughter with me in this country as well. When I was 21 and my daughter was less than 12 months old, my partner tried to stab me to death." She was attacked and was almost killed. She said, "I recovered from that and left the UK." She had lived on an island off the mainland. She said, "This deportation order will put me in jeopardy because the perpetrator of the crime is due to leave prison at about the same time I will get back home. I only have one place to go, which is back to my mum on this island." I said, "How do you know this?" She said, "He has tracked me down through social media. I have emails and messages from him that are all subtly threatening and I am very concerned." At this time Sue, my wife, was working for Senator Mathias Cormann in his Canberra office. Part of her role was liaising with the department of immigration. In fact, she had such a good rapport with the department that for at least two years after she left Mathias's office she would get calls from people seeking help or thanking her. Some of the calls were from Europeans trying to find out how they could become Australians. She went in to bat for this lady with the department.

In the meantime, we needed to verify that what this girl was saying was correct. We tracked down the perpetrator's court case on the internet and found that everything she had said about the knife attack on her was correct. We had the dates. The immigration department, through Mathias's office, told us that we needed to verify that her life would be in danger if she returned to the United Kingdom, and we were given a two-week time frame in which to get this done. The court case detailed that the first responder to the incident had been the local sergeant, so I found out where he lived on this island and contacted him. He remembered the case. He knew both people involved in it well. He had just retired. I explained the situation to him and asked him to please write a letter giving his opinion on whether this lady's life would be in jeopardy if she returned. That letter came back within 48 hours and backed up everything she had said. In fact, he was explicit: he said that if this young lady returned to that place, he had no doubt that once the perpetrator was released from jail, he would find her and certainly try to finish the job that he had nearly succeeded in doing on a previous occasion, because he knew him very well. That letter went off to the immigration department. The commonwealth minister has the ability to change deportation orders, and that is what happened. This lady was given permanent residency and is now a citizen of this country. She has remarried and has another child. Quite frankly, for me, as a humble member of this place, that was a really great occasion and a very positive outcome.

I am proudly standing here as a supporter of the voluntary assisted dying legislation. The young gentleman beside me, Hon Tjorn Sibma, and I were the only Liberal members to support that bill. I also supported a number of the amendments to the bill that were put forward by Hon Nick Goiran and others in this place. If the McGowan government achieved anything in the last term, that is one achievement that it needs to be proud of. I think the community at large is most grateful that we now have that sort of legislation in place in this state of Western Australia.

I was quoted in the press on more than one occasion as being undecided on the bill. I had a reason for that, I might add, which I might get into. One day I had a phone call from my mum—she is 96 years old—saying, "Jim, what are you doing?" I asked her what she was talking about. She told me that she had just read in the paper that I was undecided about the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill. I said, "Yes, that's right, mum." She then said, "Don't you realise I may use it or need it at some time?" I explained to her that she was in great health and that I doubted very much she would need it, but I thanked her for the phone call! I was undecided, and I put forward a motion in this place about palliative care. Hon Nick Goiran and others have done a great deal of work on that subject. My motion was supported. I was undecided because I believed that if this government wanted to go forward with the VAD bill, it needed to put more money into palliative care. I made public the deplorable state of palliative care in this state, and certainly in regional Western Australia. Of course, the government has now spent nearly \$40 million over and above its normal expenditure on palliative care and there are programs in place. I am very happy to have been part of that process. I still do not believe that palliative care is at the level it should be in Western Australia, so I encourage government members to remind the Minister for Health the next time they see him, regardless of whether

we are in a crisis, that there should be programs in place for palliative care and certainly increased funding going forward, as we have an ageing population.

I will now move on to a series of thank-yous. I would like to thank two of my longstanding staff in my electorate office, Marion Lehman and Kylie Watkinson. They are two highly professional ladies. I would like to thank them sincerely for keeping both of my feet on the ground. I thank them for the many robust discussions we have had on all sorts of matters. I certainly do not thank them for all the occasions they ganged up on me and won when I decided to put these discussions to a vote—two to one does not work!

I will tell just a couple of little anecdotes about these ladies. When Mike Nahan was Leader of the Opposition, we went on a charter flight to Esperance. Mike had a staff member with him, Senator Brockman had a staff member with him, and Kylie was with me. We had a great day in Esperance. Kylie had organised where they went, helped them with their baggage and gave them directions et cetera. I was talking to the pilot when the others got off the plane and I noticed that she had grabbed their bags and then had stood at the end of the wing. Everyone lined up in a queue and, as they walked past Kylie, they took their bags, shook her hand and had a bit of a laugh and giggle before they moved on. That had never happened before; it was very strange. On the way back in the car, I asked her what it was about. She said, “They were thanking me for the assistance during the day, and they were also wondering how I put up with you!”

Here is another anecdote. Marion is a great person. She is great at her job and great with people, but she is very, very shy. During debate on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill, Andrew Denton came to our offices. I was in my office and I think Kylie was momentarily away at a medical appointment when Denton came and knocked on the door. Marion went to open the door but was overcome with shyness, so she ran off to the kitchen, leaving poor Andrew standing there looking through the glass and wondering whether he had just grown another head! I was sitting there wondering when she was going to open the door and bring him in, so I got up and went out. Andrew was still standing there, so I let him in. She did not come out of the kitchen until he had left! I had a great discussion with him on VAD et cetera.

I thank both of you sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, for being such great people.

I would also like to thank Peter Collier. For the past eight years, Peter has been Leader of the Liberal Party in this house. As a leader, he has been completely inclusive, generous in his remarks and generous with his support to all of us, including me. He has shown great leadership skills. In opposition, those leadership skills, along with those of Hon Michael Mischin, came to the fore as he harnessed the sentiment of the crossbenchers in this place. To my colleagues here, I think you are a bunch of wonderful people. We do have some good times together. I cannot remember what bill I was talking about, but one of the Greens members came into the house as I was saying that during a discussion over our dinner break, we had decided that a particular course of action was the best to undertake. She asked, “Do you really discuss things at dinner?” It was you, Hon Alison Xamon. I said, “Yes, we do, and we have a lot of fun as well!” That is what real teamwork is about: it is about trust in each other; it is about giving each other a leg-up; and it is about supporting each other when the occasion arises. I thank you for all of that.

I would like to thank my wonderful family: Sue; my twin daughters, Aleca and Rebecca; and my youngest, Tiffany, who has been in London for a couple of years now doing fantastic things over there; their spouses, Doug and Edward; and the five grandchildren. I thank you for your support. I will not say too much because I will get too emotional! I will now have more time on my hands and I am prepared to undertake any task that you may push my way, but I will draw the line, Edward and Aleca, at walking Oscar. He is too long, his legs are too short, he is too old, he is too grumpy and it is just embarrassing when his tummy gets caught on the kerb as he is crossing the road. You will see more of me, for better or for worse. I am very proud of you. I am proud of what you have achieved as young people. You are great citizens of this great state in this magnificent country. Just before COVID, we were very lucky because, as a whole family, we went to the United Kingdom and had Christmas with Tiff over there. We travelled around Europe; there were 14 of us. When we got back, three weeks later, COVID broke out. I hope we can do it again at some stage in the near future.

To the staff of this Parliament, from the Clerk to the chef, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your professionalism, how you make people feel welcome and how you discharge your duties is quite outstanding. As a new member when I first came here, I thought: the staff know my name! How can that happen? They knew the names of all the new members. They knew everybody’s names. I thought that they either went to a special school to rehearse or they had fantastic memories. A number of years later, I happened to be in the kitchen just after the 2013 election. There, on the kitchen wall, were photos of all the new members and their names. I thought: there is the secret. They will eventually remember who is who! I think this place would be nothing but a hollow shell if it were not for the staff. Once again, thank you. Keep up the good work. I am sure you will be adequately rewarded by the members voicing their gratitude on occasions such as this.

I wish all members of this place the absolute best into the future. I thank them for their tolerance in having me as a serving member in this place.

[Applause.]

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Martin Aldridge):** Well done, Hon Jim Chown. Best of luck wherever your future takes you.

**HON LAURIE GRAHAM (Agricultural)** [3.23 pm]: It is my pleasure to stand here today to make a short contribution on my exit from this house. Being here has been a fantastic opportunity for me. I would like to particularly acknowledge the Deputy President and Madam President herself. They have been very fair and the way they have dealt with us all has been fantastic. I think it is a very hard task to undertake. I initially tried that chair and I found that the ejection seat was the best thing for me. I must acknowledge that Hon Adele Farina, who took over from me, did a much better job than I was ever likely to do. So I found my rightful place back on the back bench. I will start with the staff here. They have been fantastic. I would hate to pick out individual members of staff, but as was commented on earlier, they all welcome you. It is great to see the way they interact with us. Anthony, down at the members' bar, has my mark with the coffee. These days I do not even have to suggest what I want; he is making it before I arrive. There is a bit of humour in that, I think. I am terrible at names and he thinks I have forgotten it every time, so I have to look at his badge to make sure I have Anthony right.

I need to thank a number of people but, before doing that, I want to touch on a couple of matters. I will tend to be fairly brief as I go through my contribution. I believe I was really fortunate to be a member of the house during the passing of the landmark voluntary assisted dying legislation, which had strong community support. Obviously, as a Catholic, it gave me some heartburn to look at the issue, but as I talked to all the constituents, it was very clear that a vast majority supported the legislation. I think people are elected to the house to represent people. We are also elected to bring our own views, but I believe we should, wherever possible, support the views of our electorates. I was very pleased to be party to voting for that legislation. The interesting thing is, in recent times, as that legislation is about to get underway, some people who were not supportive of VAD whom I talked to at the time are now wondering whether there should be more liberal conditions. They have obviously looked at the recent situation with COVID, including what has happened in nursing homes. Lots of people do not want to go to a nursing home. I am certainly one of them and I would like to think that I could sign a bit of paper in advance to say "I'm outta here!" But that is obviously up to a Parliament in the future.

My four years went in a flash, but when COVID arrived, that seemed to bring it to an end much quicker. Everything stopped for the better part of six months. I am in the over-70s group. The first time the COVID legislation came to the house, I got the phone call from my friend here to tell me that it was the best idea for me to be paired for the day. I found it difficult to accept at the time. However, on reflection and looking at what has happened elsewhere, it was certainly the right decision for those of us in the more elderly group not to be here. We did not need to be here; everyone was going to vote for the legislation. It was a crisis that the state was trying to stop happening, as we could see it happening in other countries. Acting on health advice, the Premier made some tough calls on COVID in the early days. I remember people lobbying all sorts of ways, particularly business interests, asking whether I would advocate for them. Like most people, I was very "wait and see". It became apparent that this was the right call. I should acknowledge the Premier in the President's gallery; thanks very much for coming down, Mark. It was well done by the Premier and his team. Most people I talk to believe that there will be ongoing issues until vaccination is complete. Although I have not received the jab myself, it is only because the doctor who I thought was going to do it is not now having a clinic. At the first opportunity, I will ask to be vaccinated.

I would like to talk about committees for a while. It is a shame that Hon Michael Misichin is not here because, along with Hon Pierre Yang and Hon Robin Scott, we were on the driest committee that one could be involved with: the Standing Committee on Uniform Legislation and Statutes Review. I think the committee probably needs to be made up of four solicitors, but I think they would have a hard time coming to any agreement. It was great. The members made what was a dull committee very enjoyable. Regarding the Select Committee into Local Government, although I voted against that legislation—I was one of a number of people—I was told I would be the deputy chair of the committee! I am pretty passionate about local government and I was very pleased to be given that opportunity. I was extremely disappointed that, again, COVID intervened with reporting on that legislation. We did not end up holding country hearings or doing the task in a way that it should have been undertaken, but no doubt that will happen in the future. Despite cutting it short, I believe there are a number of good recommendations around the current legislation and whether it is appropriate for all local governments. I like to think we will come up with a tiered system for local government at some time in the future. I am not suggesting we have an A, B and C-type arrangement, but with very small local governments that have large tracts of gravel roads and not much else relying on grants funding, there is not much point them doing rates returns, filling in squares and carrying on; it would be much better if they went back to the old system that was in place many years ago.

My hope for reform in local government is that local governments themselves will jump up and determine the best way to address the matter in the interests of their ratepayers. I am sure that some of them will have problems, but every time we get close to the fence, they run away. It has proved unsuccessful to date, but I am still optimistic they will do it in the future.

I would briefly like to talk about council amalgamations because I have been involved in them, particularly at the Shire of Greenough when it amalgamated for the first time as Geraldton–Greenough. That amalgamation was successful. Unfortunately, at that time, the rural ratepayers wanted to be part of the city. I believe the recent amalgamation with Mullewa has made that council doubtful as far as the community of interest is concerned and perhaps at some stage, when we have reform, we will have more logical local governments, like coastal local governments, where there is community of interest on coastal strips and also with rural and city people, who all have different views about how life should be. They are all worried about cross-subsidising the rates.

I also take the opportunity to highlight the Geraldton election commitments. In the run-up to the 2017 election, commitments were made for \$45 million for the Geraldton Health Campus upgrade, which was subsequently increased to \$90 million when it was found that it was a much bigger job and the emergency department needed more beds. I am very grateful to the government for committing to that and for the support that upgrade has received generally from within this house.

The step up, step down facility is another project that was not on the radar when I was elected and it is great to see that that facility is now up and running. That is another issue that was identified quickly and was addressed.

Commitments to community and sporting facilities were well received in Geraldton. People in Geraldton are sports mad. When I was younger, there were a couple of thousand people playing basketball. Today we have the same number playing basketball, but I have no doubt that as facilities improve, we will see even greater numbers participating.

In 2021, the government's commitments included \$2 million to basketball. I am pleased to see that the association has planning approval in place through the City of Greater Geraldton for four new basketball courts, which will keep the costs down a bit more than if it had received that approval later. The current courts have been unable to cope and, obviously, with climate change and other things, parents are not prepared, like we were when my children were younger, to put them on the outdoor courts and allow them to fall over and scratch their knees. I would say some children are a bit precious these days! However, it is a different standard and they are paying fairly big money to participate, and it is great to see that commitment by the government.

Early in 2000, when I was on the Shire of Greenough, we identified the need for boat ramps, north and south. I was pleased to see that this year, after our continued lobbying in this area, the government committed \$3 million for coastal protection and the boat launching facility at Drummond Cove. I believe the community will very much appreciate that. Hopefully, the city can secure the additional funding it is now seeking through other sources and build a bigger and better facility and locate it so that it has minimal impact on residents in the area.

Cycleways was another item that was unexpectedly approved this year. I know there is great drive for that. In 2017 a report identified the need, but I did not think the government would fund it so quickly but it has committed \$4.3 million.

I would like to touch on a couple of items. My colleague Hon Darren West covered the other three electorates in the Agricultural Region, so I will touch only on Geraldton and some of Labor's very good commitments at the 2017 election. I will not go through them all, as the list is extensive. One was providing food at Foodbank. There was the commitment to the Mid West Sports Federation for the expansion of the current cycling network—that was a big allocation. Ngala community services was funded to run the youth program. I know my colleague Hon Darren West was a driving force and put money into that, in addition to our commitments from the election campaign, to see that delivered in the best possible way. The Geraldton Police and Community Youth Centre was funded for young people to upgrade their midget vehicles that have been lying dormant for many years. That was a great contribution.

I will move on to the 2021 commitments and will run through the list for the record. Commitments were made to the Geraldton Yacht Club to replace one of its rescue boats; to Marine Rescue Geraldton to provide some outdoor facilities for its generator that was rusting away in the wind; and to the Geraldton Bowling Club. It was great, in particular, to commit to this. It was a \$30 000 project that looked to harvest water and put it back into its sump. The beauty of that investment is that the club spent probably \$50 000 or \$60 000 doing all the preliminary work and it asked for funding to reseal the area. The Geraldton Community Toy Library was allocated a \$40 000 grant to expand its services, and the Wandina Playgroup outdoor facility was allocated \$50 000. Centacare Men's Health and Wellbeing was allocated funding for transportation services. The government funded a bus there. I was there recently. It was interesting to turn up to that facility and find that Centacare, to its credit, funded a coordinator for the first 12 months, and that commitment will enable it to take him on for another 12 months. Centacare will obviously continue to seek money for a coordinator, but it is great to get infrastructure to allow it to pick up the clients who are most disadvantaged in the community and bring them to those sorts of facilities. Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community Aboriginal Corporation is another group that benefited from Lara's election commitments. The Quarry Street youth facility refurbishment was way overdue, so that \$200 000 commitment was great.

There are a number of other commitments that I will not touch on, but I mention the Geraldton Hockey Association. It was great that we could make a contribution of \$220 000 to the hockey association. I was at Busselton the other day watching the hockey. The existing turf is very tired and upkeep is obviously very difficult for sporting bodies.

Perhaps it could be said that they mismanaged this or that they were a bit unlucky in that the cockatoos turned up and ate their field! It is great to see new fields and new facilities provided to them.

It has been my pleasure being a member of the house, especially with the cordial manner that all members in this chamber have treated me. I came here with some reservations, expecting it to be cliquey, with members on this side or that side and no one would talk to you, but it has been great to see that people are very cordial.

I need to acknowledge some members in person. I acknowledge the esteemed Leader of the House, Hon Sue Ellery, for putting up with us and continuing to carry on. We certainly test her! I do not know how she does her job. To the Leader of the Opposition in the fortieth Parliament, Hon Peter Collier, you always went out of your way to acknowledge me and have a chat in the corridor—as did all members on the other side—and that was very much appreciated. I need to comment on my friend here, Hon Pierre Yang. He was the Whip and I was the deputy for that short period of time. I would describe Pierre as the extraordinaire control freak. He knows exactly what is going on and what everyone should be doing. I was doing a job and I received a message that said, “You’re down to 12; do something”! It was great, Pierre. It was my pleasure to do that task for the balance of the term.

To the Premier, Mark McGowan, your leadership of the party during my term has been outstanding, and no-one disputes the way you have handled the COVID crisis. I do not know how you sleep at night and carry on and get up in the morning. I know that you enjoyed the roadworks this morning as you arrived, and I should comment on that, I suppose. Like all people in regional WA, I now have to add 15 minutes to every trip because there will be roadworks somewhere in the state. It will be wonderful and great when we see the majority of the big road projects completed. Certainly, Geraldton is 20 minutes closer to Perth as a result of the freeway extension, and after other extensions it will be 30 minutes closer to Perth.

I will conclude my remarks by acknowledging those who I have worked closest to during the election campaigns, both in 2017 and 2021. First, I would like to thank the members and supporters of the Roe, Central Wheatbelt, Moore and Geraldton campaigns whose hard work was the contributing factor in the Labor Party winning the second upper house position in 2017 and, this year, seeing us win three upper house positions. Although I expected us to have an increased vote in the seat of Geraldton, I did not expect it to be by that percentage, nor did I expect to see that the other electorates would improve by so much. Congratulations to Lara Dalton, who was elected, and also Shelley Payne and Sandra Carr, who worked very hard during the election campaign. I am sure the result was a reflection of the level of work they put into it.

I have to move on to my friend Hon Darren West. He has given me a hard time, and members would have heard him give me a hard time again the other day! It is my opinion that the success of Labor in winning the seat of Geraldton would not have been possible without the establishment of the Labor office back in Geraldton after it had ceased. Kim Chance was there for many years and then we had a gap and then Darren went back. In 2017, Darren put his all into the Geraldton campaign as well as the other three campaigns. He had the unfortunate position of running four campaigns during the 2017 election and to get a swing in not only the Geraldton seat, but also the Moore seat was fantastic. His willingness to share his offices and staff during the past four years made my job much easier. It helped us to better cover the four electorates. Lesley, I know that you are here today, and thanks very much for those beds in the middle of the night when we turned up at all sorts of hours as we were driving past and Darren invited us in for a bed. I think that sometimes your son was sent out for the night to find another bed elsewhere because we had taken them all!

I would like to move on to the staff. I employed Mark Cairn as a temporary electorate officer at the Geraldton office while I was waiting on an office in Northam. Mark had worked in the Geraldton office for some period doing relief work and taught me where we were going in life.

During my term, Jodi Ingram and Geoff Cannon worked as my permanent electorate staff. I was indeed fortunate to recruit you, Geoff, from the ABC news as my research officer in Geraldton. I thank Darren for hosting that position for the four years. You quickly learnt the ropes and became a very valuable member of our team. With my decision to not seek nomination, I was concerned about what the future held, but with your appointment to Lara’s staff, that is now secure.

To Jodi, who is here today as well, I was very pleased when I received your application and I was able to appoint you to the electorate officer position in the Northam office. With your deep involvement in the community to facilitate the establishment of the first Labor office in Northam for many years, your work ethic is second to none, and Darren’s decision to recruit you to continue to work in that office has been a great outcome.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Barni Norton, who provided relief in the Northam office from time to time, and Adam Dusty, who has worked for me in the Geraldton electorate office since the election, when I transferred back to Geraldton.

Donna is here today, and although Donna Plumber and Judy Riggs both worked for Darren West, they provided support and backup not only to myself in Geraldton and Perth, but also to Geoff and Jodi. I have to say that there

were a number of occasions, Donna, when I said that I was going to do something and you said, “No, you’re not!” I did appreciate that very strict advice! Donna, you are the most experienced and capable political staffer I have ever had the pleasure to work with. Your help in Perth, at country shows and with running election campaigns was fantastic. Thanks, Donna.

Judy Riggs assisted me greatly in my role, especially in the Geraldton area, where she looked after all my commitments. Judy’s compassion for helping constituents, especially those most disadvantaged, is amazing. I have never struck an electorate officer who can have someone at the counter going ape and sits there and patiently talks to them. Judy talks them down, finds out what the problem is and endeavours to solve it. She is an amazing lady, and, Lara, you are very lucky to have her on your staff.

I have left Lara till last in the staff acknowledgements, but I have to thank Lara. In 2017, Lara achieved a remarkable swing, but she fell short by a small margin. I was very lucky that that big swing, together with the increased vote in Moore, saw me elected and, as I said, get Labor two positions in the Agricultural Region for the first time. Lara gave it her all again in the campaign, and the massive swing this year was largely due to her own efforts. I am sure Lara will continue to be a great advocate for the people of Geraldton and the broader midwest community and be able to hold the seat for an extended period of time.

Last and by no means least, I would like to acknowledge and thank my family for embracing my decision to seek endorsement in 2017 and acknowledge the impact that it has had on them. I was in retirement mode and things all changed. After I ran for the seat of Geraldton in 1996—an election that Labor had little chance of winning—I made a commitment in 1997 that I would not stand as a political candidate again. However, I negotiated approval with my wife, “the boss”, to be on the ag ticket in 2017. In doing so, I gave her the assurance that although I may assist Lara in winning the seat of Geraldton by being on the ticket, the chances of me being elected were very remote. History says otherwise. I know that Darren and other members such as Ian Blayney saw it coming, but I certainly did not.

While I am speaking about my family, I would like to give a special thanks to my daughter Stacey, who I have stayed with for the last four years and have disrupted her family life. I am sure that she will not miss my impact on the family as I came and went at all hours of the day and night, and she accommodated my ever-changing arrangements and always produced a meal on the table whenever I arrived unexpectedly.

I am sure my wife, Heather, will wish that I was back here again after I am under her feet for an extended period of time! I think the new dog, Rain, will appreciate having me home, however, and maybe the veggie garden will flourish again.

Members, I have no definite plans for future work or community involvement. But I will continue to remain involved in organisations like Joblink Midwest as long as they want me and several parties have expressed an interest in me taking some active part to assist them in their projects. Mr Acting President, it has been a fantastic four years. Thank you, one and all.

[Applause.]

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Martin Aldridge):** Thank you for your service, Hon Laurie Graham. All the best for the future.

**Hon LAURIE GRAHAM:** Thank you very much, Mr Acting President.

**HON MARTIN PRITCHARD (North Metropolitan) [3.50 pm]:** I understand that no-one else is seeking the call at this time, so it will be my pleasure to continue my remarks as a sort of filler. Now is a good time for urgent parliamentary business if anybody needs it!

Looking at the Governor’s speech, I noted the financial situation and the McGowan government’s plans for this term of Parliament and answered some of the questions posed, probably rhetorically, by the Leader of the Opposition. I placed events along a time line, because it is good to look back and recognise the past. There is the old saying, “If you do not take note of the past, you are doomed to repeat it.” In some instances, that is a good thing; in some instances, it is a bad thing. To recap very briefly, I referred to a number of articles and media statements. I want to read one of those to give members very quickly an idea of where I was up to. In 2008, coming into an election, the then Treasurer put out a statement that basically reflected the view of Moody’s Investors Service. The first paragraph reads —

Western Australia’s sound economic base and responsible fiscal management have again been lauded by credit ratings giant Moody’s which has reaffirmed the State’s Triple A credit rating.

In its latest analysis, Moody’s again highlights the State’s ‘stellar financial performance’ and ‘prudent fiscal management’.

That is where we were in 2008. Again, in attempting to answer the question posed by the Leader of the Opposition, at that time there were two great things about our economy: debt was at \$3.6 billion, which was very low, and, better still, inflation in the current spend was at a very low level. Things were all good at that time. We lost the 2008 election and handed over the reins to the Liberal and National Parties. Moving on apace, because I have made a number of comments about the period from 2008 to the 2017 election, I would like to read a piece that paints a picture of the financial situation going into the 2017 election. The ABC online article reads —

The West Australian Government —

That is the Barnett government —

has been hit with another credit rating downgrade from rating's agency Moody's.

The agency has downgraded WA from AA1 to AA2.

WA lost its AAA credit rating with the agency in August 2014.

A few years later, in 2008, after lauding how well our finances were, in 2014, we had moved to a AA2 credit rating after a number of downgrades. In my view, the real problem was that the expansion in the government's recurrent spend was out of control. That was the opinion of not only Moody's and, may I say, Standard and Poor's—I will not go into that because at slightly different times it basically mirrored Moody's rating—but also the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, which is another organisation that would normally say the Liberal and National Parties were better economic managers. The ABC article continues —

WA Chamber of Commerce chief executive Deidre Willmott said the State Government needed to do more to contain spending.

“What Moody's have made clear today is that this is a spending issue,” she said.

“And it is about policy setting to reduce spending, and particularly to reduce spending growth.”

I concur. The real problem was not the spending on infrastructure, because that is often good spending. If governments have to borrow to do that sort of spending, it often has a payback later on down the track. The problem is with recurrent spending. As I said, I associate that with a family making decisions based on receiving regular overtime payments as part of the main income coming into the household. Families cannot make those decisions for the household's recurrent spend and I do not believe that the state should make decisions based on things outside its control. The only way to look after the state's finances is to have checks and balances to make sure that the recurrent spend does not get out of hand.

On my time line we are leading up to the 2017 election. The 2016 budget papers showed that the Barnett government's recurrent spend was growing at just under six per cent. Everybody understood that that was not sustainable, so they decided all of a sudden that they would forecast growth of 2.7 per cent. That is a massive reduction in the growth of recurrent spending and it is very, very hard to do. It is like trying to turn a ship on a dime. It is very, very difficult to do. I am getting closer to answering the Leader of the Opposition's question. The 2016 budget papers acknowledge that the state had about \$33 billion of debt. That is roughly where we were at. Even if one can believe that the Barnett government could bring recurrent spending growth down to 2.7 per cent, people were still predicting that debt would reach above \$40 billion by 2020. As I said, that was expected.

Of course, the biggest problem with the forecasts by organisations like Moody's was that there had been no evidence that the Barnett government could rein in its spending. I briefly mentioned concern about the GST at the time. There was a rumour at the time, going back a number of years before 2016, that the Barnett government's approach to the GST was to keep spending and put the federal government in a position whereby it would have to put a floor under the GST if it wanted to support the state government. I think the biggest problem was that the federal government was also of the view that the Barnett government could not contain its growth in spending. The federal government—again, a rumour—seemed very loath to engage with the calls by the Barnett government to change the GST so that the Western Australian finances would not fall off a cliff. It seemed obvious to everybody that the GST would be pulled back because of the income the state was getting from royalties in the early stages of the Barnett government.

As I said, the GST is an equalisation payment. It is accepted that the states can raise their own money through royalties, for instance, and that the federal government can take the GST and redistribute it. The amount that gets redistributed will decrease when there is an opportunity to raise a lot of money at a state level. There is a lot of unfairness in the GST system. I mentioned that the eastern states rely a lot on gambling revenue, but that is not taken into account when looking at the GST redistribution. Another cliff we faced was that if we did not rein in spending, we would see a downturn in royalty revenues at the same time as there would be a downturn in the redistribution of GST funds to the state, after a bit of lag. It was predicted to go as low as 30 per cent. The Barnett government hoped that it would be able to convince the federal government to change the way it calculated the GST and avert

falling off the cliff that we were heading towards. That is how we went into the 2017 election. Before I talk about the 2017 election itself, the answer is that at that time we had about \$33 billion in debt. That includes all the loans that had been made during the Barnett government years and the initial \$3.6 billion plus in interest. As an aside, one of the problems with having a lower Moody's rating is that the interest payment on the borrowed money is higher. It is a self-perpetuating problem.

Before I talk about the election, I want to pay a compliment to Colin Barnett because, as I indicated, I admired him in some ways, although in many others I did not. One thing he did while in power was introduce fixed-term Parliaments. I think that is tremendous. He was very courageous because it is obviously a benefit to a Premier, or a Prime Minister for that matter, as we lead up to a federal election, to call an election at the time of one's choosing. Colin Barnett gave that up on a matter of principle. He believes in fixed-term Parliaments, and I admire him for doing that. It should be the same at the federal level as well, in my view. It seems inappropriate for either a state or a national constituency to hold its breath waiting for an election to be called while trying to make decisions based on when the election will come about. I compliment him on introducing fixed-term elections.

With regard to elections in this state—this is very much a personal point of view—I understand that pre-polling is very popular, and I think there is probably a place for pre-polling leading up to an election. Again, it makes it very difficult for the parties, but so what? That is part of being in government and in opposition. However, I would say one thing about pre-polling: if we are to have pre-polling, I would have organised the election date to be in the first week of the school holidays, because that would have given us an opportunity to use the schools—a fairly standard place for elections—as the pre-polling places in which to vote. Because the Electoral Commission has to lease a place for only two or three weeks, it is very much at the mercy of what is available. That means there may not be a good spread of where they are located, and there are all sorts of inconveniences, particularly when the pre-polling places are located in shopfronts. The only comment I would make is that if it were done during the two weeks of the school holidays, we could use the schools, which would provide revenue for the schools, and pre-polling could be conducted in a reasonable way.

I think the Labor Party ran an outstanding election campaign going into the 2017 election. I have been involved in elections for probably the last 40 years. I must say that during most of that time I was not very keen on phoning constituents in the evening or on doorknocking. I did it—everybody who helps a political party does—but I was not overly keen on it. During that campaign, the leadership of Patrick Gorman and Lenda Oshalem in the lay party, as they were at the time, reinvigorated how the Labor Party conducted its elections. After getting training and seeing things a little differently, I understood that people like to see their member of Parliament. The problem, of course, is that people often see their member of Parliament in the last month or so just before the election, whereas if we start campaigning six or eight months out, they are surprised to see their local member, but they believe that they can have some input. That approach involves people in the decisions, and they appreciate it. We had a very good doorknocking and telephone program. We engaged with our constituency.

I was mainly involved with two elections. One was the Balcatta campaign with my good friend, the now member for Balcatta, David Michael. I was involved with him getting elected for the first time. That was a very positive campaign, and a lot of volunteers and laypeople came to help. I really enjoyed that campaign. The second campaign I was involved in, to a lesser extent, was for the member for Kingsley, Jessica Stojkovski. Both of them are wonderful local members and I am proud that I was involved in their campaigns. They engaged with their constituents, which they did so before the election and certainly after the election. I was also involved a little bit with the Scarborough and Churchlands campaigns. However, they were not seen as key seats. As 2021 taught us, in the past, we may have given up on some of those campaigns before we had even started. When I get to the 2021 campaign—if I get time—I will talk about how amazing it was to go into those areas that we thought would never be held by Labor, such as Churchlands, Nedlands, Scarborough and Carine. I often think that maybe we had given up too early on those campaigns and that if we had run a more vigorous and resourced campaign, we may certainly have held some of those seats more often.

I think that the Labor Party ran a fantastic campaign in 2017. I was very, very pleased with the ones that I was involved with. However, on the reverse side, and coming back to the financial aspect, it was no surprise to anybody that the electorate viewed the Barnett government as having mismanaged the state's finances. It was also seen to have done that in a fairly arrogant way. I keep stressing that I have no problems with the spending of the Barnett government, but it did let everything get out of hand, including the recurrent spending. Another thing that happened during that campaign that I am very, very pleased with is that the Premier, Mark McGowan, insisted that if the Labor Party made an election promise, there would need to be a very, very good reason why it would not follow through with that election commitment. It is a promise to the electorate. The things that really went against the Barnett government were the decisions, the counter decisions and the change of mind about the Morley–Ellenbrook rail line. It was almost comical to see that debate going backwards and forwards. I am pleased that that was one of the things that the Premier committed to, and it is going to happen. When we make a commitment, we need a very good reason not to follow through with that commitment.



I return to the Leader of the Opposition's question. In the 2017 election, the state owed \$33 billion.

I wish to talk a little about the 2021 election. I do not think the Labor Party did too badly in the first three years of the fortieth Parliament. We were going very strongly. A lot of the decisions that the McGowan government made were coming to fruition. It honoured all the commitments that it made. Irrespective of whether it was criticised for honouring those commitments, it honoured all the commitments that it made. It built a very professional relationship with the federal Liberal government. It continually astonishes me how much this federal Liberal–National government supports the McGowan government of this state. It supported a change to the GST, which was nothing short of remarkable. To be able to negotiate that change and implement it during the last Parliament greatly assisted the finances of this state. The other thing that continues to amaze me—it does not amaze me that we make good arguments for infrastructure in this state—is that the federal government is a willing partner of ours to support building infrastructure in this state. I put that down to the good arguments put by the state government and the good relationship that we have with the Morrison government. That is in stark contrast to the relationship that the previous government had with the previous federal government. It was not just obvious to the Labor Party, Moody's Investors Service and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, but also obvious to everybody that the Barnett government had lost its way financially. Any sound organisation is not going to put good money after bad. I think the federal government saw that if it put more money into the state under the Barnett government, it would just be spent and there would be no reversal of the path that it had laid.

During that time—between 2017 and 2021—we also had an extremely good Treasurer. I pay homage to Hon Ben Wyatt for the work he has done with our finances. I will read a bit of a statement he made because it draws a contrast between where we were in 2008 under the then Treasurer, Eric Ripper, during the Barnett government years and where we are after just four short years of the McGowan government. Ben Wyatt made a statement on Thursday, 29 October. I will read parts of it, so I do not lose too much time. He stated —

Ratings agency Moody's has today affirmed the McGowan Government's strong Budget management and economic response to COVID-19, with Western Australia retaining its strong credit rating—Aa1 with a 'stable' outlook.

The 'Aa1' credit rating from Moody's is the second highest rating available and is one notch below 'Aaa' —

I hope we get back to that Aaa rating at some point —

and follows the assessment of the 2020–21 State Budget released on October 8, 2020.

Western Australia's credit rating was upgraded in June 2019 to Aa1, following multiple downgrades under the previous ... government.

Moody's rating assessment is based on the view that Western Australia's 'large economy will remain resilient to coronavirus related disruptions and underpin its capacity to service the State's growing debt burden over the next three to four years'.

Moody's has credited WA's 'rapid' economic recovery with the early easing of restrictions in the State, due to the hard border, and a strong mining sector.

Moody's expect that the 'State's economy will continue to outperform its Australian peers over the next two to three years ...

In essence, without reading the whole statement, the former Treasurer managed to achieve what the Barnett government had predicted was needed—that is, to bring the recurrent spend down to roughly 2.7 per cent, so that it could bring down that recurrent spend into the future and, in that way, start capping the burgeoning debt and start on the path of getting some surpluses.

During the last part of this election cycle—just leading into the election—we had a COVID pandemic. I can do nothing but commend the Premier for his handling of the state at that time. He managed to stand up to the federal government whilst also continuing to have a good relationship with the federal government. It is a very professional relationship. It has served the state very well. That is all to the good of our constituents. In the last Parliament, the fortieth Parliament, the Treasurer managed to contain the growth of spending and have surpluses, and he has managed to put some money towards expenditure that was required to keep our economy going. All the boxes have been ticked. We are very lucky to be in this state. That is what we were going into the 2021 election with—great work in the first three years and then fantastic handling of the economy, even with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Going into the 2021 election, I was involved in a number of campaigns, again with the honourable member for Balcatta, my good friend Mr David Michael, MLA. He is a great local member. I was so honoured to be part of his campaign. I was also involved with Paul Lilburne, MLA, the new member for Carine. That was a big surprise. He managed to run that campaign without resources. It was a real grassroots campaign but he still managed to win his seat. I was involved with Stuart Aubrey, MLA, the new member for Scarborough. More resources were available for that campaign. That member put in some very hard work. I was also involved in the campaign of the new member

for Churchlands, Christine Tonkin, MLA. Again, that was a wonderful win based on hard work and dealing directly with her constituency. The two other members, which were fantastic wins for the Labor Party, were Katrina Stratton, MLA, the member for Nedlands, and Caitlin Collins, MLA, the member for Hillarys, who put in a lot of hard work and received due credit from their communities. Thank you very much, Madam Acting President.

**HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural)** [4.19 pm]: It is a pleasure to rise to address the motion moved by the chief government Whip, Hon Pierre Yang, with respect to the Governor's speech delivered in this chamber on 29 April this year. It was interesting listening to the Governor's speech. I think it was Governor Beazley's first opening speech to the Parliament because it was Governor Sanderson who gave the speech on the previous occasion. The personal remarks made by the Governor added to the ordinary convention; that is, reading the speech prepared by the government. A lot of members have remarked during their Address-in-Reply debate on some of those personal messages for not just retiring members but those members continuing to serve in this forty-first Parliament.

I would like to start by congratulating the Australian Labor Party on its re-election. There is an old saying that the voters never get it wrong. I would not dare to question for one minute the judgement of the voters at the election. My speech will address a number of issues related to the election, but I would like to start by congratulating the ALP on its re-election and formation of government.

It was always going to be an extraordinary election. I remember speaking to a number of journalists in the lead-up, and even in the days and hours before the polls closed. I certainly did not predict, or certainly did not believe the predictions, that the swing at the election would be so significant. The notion that the National Party would be thrust into official opposition status and the Liberal Party diminished to a few remaining members was something that I did not think was possible; it was fanciful. I am not sure whether many members could stand in this place, hand on heart, and say, "I knew all along that was going to happen; it certainly transpired the way that I thought." That certainly was not the case for me. Elections are always full of triumphs and tragedies; this one perhaps more so than usual in terms of those two things. If there were ever a presidential election in Western Australia, which I think are becoming more and more presidential over time, this election was certainly that.

We talk about the influence of COVID-19 on the election. That fact is undisputed. One thing I learnt quite early on in response to COVID-19, and was surprised by—I was not surprised about people's fear of the unknown—was people's appetite for restrictions. Obviously, the odd constituent would say, "How dare you encumber my life with roadblocks and checkpoints and wearing a mask," but I think they were a rare breed and a rare exception. The thing that surprised me, and perhaps I had not appreciated pre-COVID, was the extent to which people had an appetite for, or felt safer by, restrictions and lockdowns.

I remember some early COVID discussions about whether we should wear face masks. The health advice was that there was no significant health benefit in wearing face masks. We had the whole debate about schools. In the early days, certain people were calling for regional borders, and for international travel to be stopped, but they were dismissed. How quickly things change. As the fear built and people's expectations built, governments—I am not talking specifically about Western Australia—across the world responded to a significant extent to the concern that played out in the community.

Hon Martin Pritchard talked about pre-polling. If I had my way, early voting would not exist; or, if it existed, it would exist in a very minor way. Pre-polling over the best part of three weeks is just ridiculous. The sooner a standing committee gets the Electoral Commissioner before it and questions him on the operations of the last election and the ability of the Western Australian Electoral Commission to do its job throughout the early voting period, the better, and we can debate what is an appropriate form of early voting. Keep in mind that at this election we regressed in the fact that we no longer had electronic voting available in the form of iVote. I remember Hon Peter Collier, as the Minister for Electoral Affairs in my first term, passing legislation to allow for technology-assisted voting. It was quite contentious at the time. I was arguing as a government backbencher that we should be going further, or at least have statutory provisions to allow the government to go further. We did not have any technology-assisted voting at the 2021 election, apart from a phone-based system. No internet-based system was available for people to utilise. The explanation was that we relied on a New South Wales system, which was no longer available to us, and the cost of developing a system was too onerous on the state and there was insufficient time to achieve it.

I hope that we can have a proper debate about these types of issues. That may get lost in the next four years in the context of electoral reform more generally, but it is important to have a proper debate about those types of issues in the conduct of the election. The other place often tasks one of its standing committees on community justice and other things to report on the most recent election. Obviously, the Western Australian Electoral Commission produces its own election report. The number one recommendation in its report into the 2017 state election was a complete overhaul of the Electoral Act. That did not transpire. In the dying days of the fortieth Parliament, the Legislative Council received a bill that was attempting to achieve a number of election commitments that the Labor Party took to the previous election but did not achieve—namely, recommendation 1 of the commission's report into the 2017 state election.

Another observation I would like to make about the election and COVID was that it was smack bang during the election campaign that this state faced its first COVID-19 lockdown. I remember getting a tip-off by a journalist that something was going down and that a press conference was imminent; a lockdown was coming. If it was not certain already, it was definitely certain at that point that the election would be won in favour of the incumbent government. As we came out of that lockdown—I think it was the second lockdown we were coming out of—there was one active case of COVID. Sorry, one active case caused the first lockdown. Remember the fellow who did his best to spread the virus, but actually did not spread it to anybody, which was quite extraordinary. He went everywhere and saw everybody. He went from east to west and north to south. Queensland was going through some issues at the same time. I remember it was the lead-up to Easter. I think I am getting my dates confused here, but it was the lead-up to a long weekend. The lockdown in Queensland was not going to lift until 5.00 pm. There was concern about people rushing to leave for the long weekend. The Queensland Premier said, “We’ve only had one confirmed case of community spread today, so I’m going to release everybody from lockdown. Please leave early and safely on your long weekend and look after each other.” It was interesting.

Obviously, in the early days of the COVID pandemic, 12 months or more ago, there was no playbook and international experience was still developing. It was interesting to compare the experience in Queensland and Western Australia. In the space of a few days, we were going into lockdown with one case of community transmission and it was coming out of lockdown because it had only one case of community transmission. Some of these things are hard to reconcile and are part of the reason that we in the Nationals WA have been pursuing, for some time, a form of independent public inquiry into the COVID-19 response. It is not to hold people accountable for their decisions but to actually make sure we, as a state, are better prepared to respond to what the future holds. There is no better case in point than what has been developing in hotel quarantine in recent weeks and months. A person is more likely to get COVID in quarantine than they are outside quarantine.

[Leave granted for the member’s speech to be continued at a later stage of the sitting.]

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 373.]