

ELECTORAL ENROLMENT — PILBARA

Motion

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the National Party) [4.01 pm]: I move —

That this house —

- (a) notes with concern the anomalies in enrolments in the district of Pilbara in the 2017 state election;
- (b) expresses concern at the unprecedented and significant campaign activities of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia;
- (c) notes the McGowan government's intention to conduct an inquiry into third party fundraising bodies; and
- (d) notes with concern that Parliament has no standing committee specifically tasked with oversight of electoral laws and practices in line with other jurisdictions including New South Wales and Victoria.

This is a serious matter. Although I can hear noises from the backbench at the moment, the crux of the matter is that if untoward behaviour and concerns have been raised, we need somewhere that that can be aired and ventilated. The National Party has undertaken due process and gone to the Electoral Commissioner with some concerns that I and my colleagues will seek to lay out. We have drawn attention to a number of anomalies, and public comments and observations have been made about the campaign that has just been run, all of which raise serious concerns about not only the integrity of the 2017 state election specifically, but also the impact that significant business investment can have on influencing the outcome of elections and how that can be dealt with. We are asking that this house notes the National Party's concerns that there were some anomalies in the enrolment of the district of Pilbara and we seek clarification from the Minister for Electoral Affairs that he is doing everything he can to assure himself that nothing untoward occurred in the unprecedented and significant campaign activities by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia in particular. I will explain why we think those activities were unprecedented, significant and cause for concern.

This motion is about making sure that our democratic system is operating as it is supposed to. We believe that our concerns warrant further investigation to ensure that the public and the voters have confidence in the system. Perhaps if there was only one issue in isolation, our concerns could be easily dismissed. That seems to be the justification for the cursory response of the Minister for Electoral Affairs yesterday that the reason we raise this matter is because there are sour grapes or that we are upset about the loss of the former member for Pilbara. It is not. It is the fact that a number of issues have been raised that emerged during the campaign that warrant further investigation. If the Minister for Electoral Affairs and this house is convinced that there is nothing to be concerned about for future elections, that would be a good outcome from having a discussion in this place, which is where we rightfully should be able to raise these matters.

We do not seek to have those concerns dismissed in the cursory fashion they were yesterday, because the issues we raise are serious. There are a number of anomalies and actions that when put together give rise for concern. It is not something that the Nationals and my colleagues have dreamed up. It is not only us who hold those grave misgivings about the behaviour of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy or other entities in the election and the other anomalies we have observed in the Pilbara electorate. Learned people, respected commentators, those who follow politics and observe it and understand the nuances and complex environment we work in, understand and they all attribute comment and raise concerns about the impact and influence that the Chamber of Minerals and Energy and the mining companies had on this particular election and that caused the loss—substantially, it was very much directed towards a particular sitting member, the member for Pilbara at the time. They have all commented on the scale of the campaign and, notwithstanding the broad feedback we get from the community about the unease people in the community have about the influence of big business on the outcomes of elections, that is why we think this matter is worth pursuing.

I point to comments and concerns raised by Dr Ian Cook from Murdoch University, and by Peter Kennedy, a respected long-serving journalist, who observed and commented on the significant campaign run by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy. I also point to ABC election analyst Antony Green, ABC's Andrew O'Connor and Martin Drum from Notre Dame University. These people have been around in politics a long time and they all commented and contributed to the debate following the election on the serious and significant ongoing campaign run by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy. They used words and phrases such as "endless advertising campaign", "it was hammered week after week", "ferocious", "the sheer amount of money", "turning voters away", "relentless and well-funded", "concerted campaign" and "a lot of money behind it". Good on them. They are allowed to run a campaign. It is a free country. People have the opportunity to campaign on

things that they believe in. However, what makes people uncomfortable about this campaign is the sheer volume of money spent. That is what these very learned people who have been following this industry for a long time have commented about, and we share their concerns. We also reflect the concerns that have been raised with us by our constituents and members in the community. We would not be doing our job if we did not make sure that they are aired and that there is somewhere for those concerns to be put, investigated and examined. However, I am not confident that there is a place for that in this state Parliament or with the Electoral Commissioner at this point in time.

The campaign that the Chamber of Minerals and Energy ran was disingenuous and not based on fact. However, they ran a campaign such that if I was their advertising executive, I would be asking for a bonus, because they hit all the targets and certainly delivered the outcome that they intended to achieve. They hit the TV. Members would be very aware of that because some of them are sitting in their seats because that assisted them to get across the line. They hit TV, radio, screensavers in workplaces, online, conducted polling and leaked it, advertised in major newspapers and on radio, bankrolled reports, produced economic modelling and had corflutes at polling booths. We are very concerned about the corflutes that appeared at polling places on election day that were incorrectly authorised. There was no candidate for the Chamber of Minerals and Energy yet many corflutes with “Jobs not taxes” and “authorised by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy” at the bottom of them mysteriously appeared. We understand that Electoral Commission returns for the expenditure of third parties and candidates are due on Monday, 26 June. I am interested to know where those corflutes came from and who paid for them. Was it a gift to a political party? Who took responsibility for them, because they turned up at polling booths? I have to say that in my electorate the people to whom they had been given refused to put them up because they were so uncomfortable and aghast that there was that much infiltration from the Chamber of Minerals and Energy in the election. Those people put them under a bench and left them there. However, I know they were up in other parts of the state and that in certain polling booths such as Newman they were ruled as not correct, in that they were not authorised correctly. As Mr Acting Speaker would know, for corflutes to be correct, there must be a person’s name and the organisation on the authorisation.

The chamber became a participant in this election. We are very much looking forward to next Monday, when the electoral disclosure returns are due to be published. These companies were bankrolling a significant campaign during the election to withstand the introduction of the key policy taken to the election by the Nationals, which was intended to make sure that ordinary Western Australians—mums and dads—were not asked to foot the bill for repairing the budget over the forward estimates period. They were absolutely against any notion of changing a tax deductible fee that was set in the 1960s. It had never been increased. These companies campaigned. It was the best \$2 million—I suspect it was \$5 million—they ever spent to get themselves out of this. This enormous influence that they brought to bear certainly raises questions about how companies will interact in future elections.

From our perspective, the Liberal Party and the National Party went to the election with a financial plan. We had a plan to make sure that ordinary Western Australians would not have to foot that bill. All these companies assisted by expanding their operations and increasing their profits with the hard-earned taxpayer dollars of ordinary mums and dads. There has been a massive population boom in this state over the last 10 years. This government assisted those companies in reaching those significant profits. We saw the Labor Party, with no plan, cross its fingers and hope for the best, and it is now breaking promises left, right and centre. It was happy to line up next to the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia. It was happy to stand next to the “Jobs not taxes” election slogan, which sounded very similar to its own campaign lines. It was happy to see the chamber using language that aligned closely to its rhetoric.

When we place this type of environment next to some of the anomalies in electoral enrolments in the Pilbara and other things that have emerged, we have concerns. Appropriately, we raised them with the Electoral Commissioner. On 8 May we wrote to Dr David Kerslake, noting that the enrolments in the Pilbara had increased significantly. An increase of 3 199 voters in a three-month period is significantly more in percentage terms compared with other electoral districts. Direct enrolment between the Australian Electoral Commission and the Western Australian Electoral Commission meant that voters were automatically put onto the Western Australian roll. The enrolments were significantly higher. That in itself warrants an investigation from the Electoral Commissioner for Western Australia. More than that, we think it is direct enrolment. It is significant and it cannot be explained. If we were intent on making sure that the integrity of this election was appropriate and that it could not be manipulated going forward, we would do some work to test the veracity of that claim and make sure that no-one was stacking numbers in the Pilbara. The figures do not stack up when we look at the numbers. When we put these enrolment figures against the vacant properties in the Pilbara and the declining population at the time, again, they do not stack up. That is why we started to ask what was going on. It is murky and it is cause for concern.

We will continue to pursue these questions. We asked the Minister for Electoral Affairs about it yesterday. As a registered party, we are entitled to ask the Electoral Commissioner. I understand that today questions were also asked in a public hearing of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, at which the commissioner gave similar answers to those he had provided to the National Party previously, which is that it is direct enrolment, not to worry about it and there is nothing to see here. That is not being proactive. It gives me great cause for concern if our Electoral Commissioner is not investigating these types of anomalies. I was not at the hearing; these are reports from people who were at the public hearing. The word “budget” was mentioned. The Western Australian Electoral Commission feels that perhaps it needs some additional resources. This is the body responsible for the integrity of our elections, managing the legislation and making sure that these behaviours are not perpetrated and people are not taking advantage or manipulating our electoral roll. That is great cause for concern. If the minister is not interested and if the Electoral Commissioner is not motivated or unable to investigate these issues, where will these concerns be raised? Where is the oversight? The New South Wales state Parliament has a Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, as does Victoria and the commonwealth Parliament.

As I said, I understand that the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee is responsible for electoral affairs in this house. It held a public hearing this morning. Although I was not there, we had someone listening in. In the absence of a specific standing committee, I hope the members of this committee are motivated to review the 2017 election in great detail and make sure that questions are asked, and not just about the Pilbara. I have spoken to other members about their experiences during the election campaign. Other things can be canvassed. If a standing committee were responsible for this in a broad sense and people knew they could park those concerns, including concerns about the influence of business, donations and third party campaigners, it would give people greater confidence that there is no scope for manipulation.

Western Australians have every right to demand answers on how and why third parties or vested interest groups can affect the result of a democratic election or a specific seat in our Parliament. *Four Corners* carried out an investigation on the influence of foreign donations. A number of people raised concerns with me through my electorate office. They were aghast that this was possible. Again, similar concerns were raised with me about just how much money was spent by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy on behalf of BHP and Rio Tinto. Again, these companies must have been spending significant amounts. That is why we say that people were extremely uncomfortable that these deep-pocketed mining companies—these giants of Australia—have so much power in modern Australian politics. It leaves an awful taste in people’s mouths. When we raised this question yesterday, members opposite scoffed and said that it is not unprecedented. Indeed, they are right. A significant campaign was run against Kevin Rudd and the Labor Party over the resource super profits tax. This only enhances our argument. Whenever these companies foresee an adverse outcome with a Parliament, or a government moving to make changes to legislation or to the environment in which they operate, they gear up and reach into their very deep pockets. They have some very good campaigners and they are able to influence the outcome. Certainly, the super profits tax—the federal mining tax—cost a Prime Minister his job. Likewise, we saw a similar outcome in this state when a seat in our Parliament, not a Prime Minister’s, was targeted.

What message does that send to the public? Is that appropriate behaviour? Should we be concerned? I absolutely think we should. Under this emerging paradigm, no government can ever disagree with the mining companies because there is that threat that an enormous campaign will be waged against them. In this Parliament, government members have control of the agenda of running the state. They were elected into a seriously responsible position and should be able to make those decisions without fear or favour. The emerging paradigm now is that the moment we start talking about changes to the mining companies’ operating space, they get very nervous and out come the dollars. I do not think anyone in Australia thinks that is appropriate.

We accept that political lobbying is nothing new but there is an increasing concern nationwide about these corporations and the influence that they have. The clear message that is emerging is do not touch the miners, and that is it, even if there is a desire for us to start a conversation with the miners, which is what we have been asking for from the Premier and the Treasurer. We accept that the government is saying it is not going to unilaterally change state agreements; we accept that. We are not in government. However, we have a Treasurer who said he quite liked the idea of the cash out but will not pursue it, and we have to ask why. The government keeps saying that the miners have told it that they do not want to do it, so the government will not be doing it. I do not think that is a good enough reason. The government should be pursuing things in the best interests of Western Australia. I go back to when the negotiation was done on the changes to the fines royalties. The previous Treasurer said that it was something like a six-year negotiation to try to achieve that with the companies. It had to be worked hard at; it had to be pursued and the government was in there doing something.

A member interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Shorter? Much shorter? Okay; I will take that interjection because, obviously, someone in the chamber was a part of it. The government had to work hard at it; it had to put it on the table and pursue it.

I will take that interjection. I was not in the room; I was not part of the negotiations. But a government has to be prepared to have the conversation.

Mr V.A. Catania: You have to start somewhere.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Governments have to start somewhere and be prepared to put it on the table. The Treasurer wants to and the Premier does not, and we have to ask why. What is happening in that space? They have shown that they are prepared to break every other promise they made going into the election, so I am not sure why they are so worried about this one. The finances are in a state that needs repair, and we know that announcements will be made over the next week or so about increased fees and charges. There is a very simple way for the government to start this conversation, yet it has not. The government has just been patted on the head and told to meekly walk away from that. I have concerns and they are not about the electoral enrolments by themselves or the campaign that the Chamber of Minerals and Energy was entitled to run by itself. However, when everything is put together and we look at the outcome, I think some very concerning trends are emerging. It would be irresponsible for us to not investigate that further. We need to have somewhere to park those concerns so they can be dealt with. We should not just leave it to the mercy of maybe a committee that has responsibility for it when there are certainly no standing terms of reference for what it would go back and look at in the running of an election.

From our perspective, we are asking this house to turn its mind to addressing some of the concerns and to share any concerns that may have emerged for members during their own election campaigns. We absolutely need to take note of the fact that this was an unprecedented campaign by big business in Western Australia. The Chamber of Minerals and Energy, acting on behalf of Rio Tinto and BHP, was in every household in every corner of the state, and it got the outcome that it wanted. We cannot see this government making any moves to go down that path, and that raises its own questions in my mind.

I return to the fact that there is a committee. I note that it has shown some interest in looking at these matters, and I hope it pursues them with great vigour. If there is an inquiry, the National Party would certainly be looking to make a submission and to make sure that we contribute all our concerns, because at this point the Minister for Electoral Affairs has not convinced us that he has taken the matter seriously, and certainly the Electoral Commissioner is displaying some reluctance. He is not in this house to defend himself, so I will allow latitude for him to come back to us formally, because we are working through a process. We are not just throwing these things out there willy-nilly; we have tried to seek answers to and clarification of these concerns. As yet, they are unanswered. We have now raised it, appropriately, with the minister, and we expect him to investigate it as well.

I think there has been more than enough public concern from educated observers to require an investigation into why there was such a big difference in the Pilbara electoral enrolment compared with other districts' enrolments when direct enrolment was applied. There has been more than enough concern when the Premier and the Treasurer are unwilling to pursue a policy that the Treasurer, at least, agrees with. We encourage the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee to undertake a comprehensive review, and perhaps even consider a recommendation around having a standing committee somewhat like New South Wales, Victoria or the Australian Parliament has. The public needs to be confident that our Electoral Commission is adequately resourced and that there is appropriate oversight of that independent office. There needs to be a place where these anomalies can be fed into, and we need to ensure that the integrity of our electoral system that delivers the members sitting in this and the other place and in the government to make significant decisions on behalf of all Western Australians is maintained. We need to make sure that the system operates with complete integrity, and any question in that space deserves to have an airing and a more than cursory glance. We feel that that is what it has been given at this time, so we brought this motion to the house to make sure that people are aware of the depth of our concerns.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [4.25 pm]: We are seeing investigations into Russia's involvement in the US election campaign; perhaps we could have had our very own Russian involvement in the Western Australian election in March 2017!

Several members interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Members, it is absolutely no laughing matter. The one thing that the member for Pilbara forgot to do in his inaugural address in this house was to thank Rio Tinto, BHP and the Chamber of Minerals and Energy for the campaign that helped him get elected.

Several members interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Leader of the National Party has moved in the house a motion —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: — that this house should support an oversight committee to look into the Electoral Commission. Given what has happened in the past and given that other states and the federal government have the same oversight, why cannot Western Australia have the same oversight? I think it is important to ensure that our electoral system has the highest integrity. Do members know why? If something like this happened in Africa, we would be saying, “That’s Africa”. With something like this, when there is such a large increase in enrolments in an electorate that is shrinking in size, we have to ask ourselves why we are not jumping up and down and saying, “Hang on a sec; this requires a further investigation.” We have our thoughts—no doubt we have our thoughts—but there was a great spike in the number of people registered in the Pilbara at a very important point in time, when the former Leader of the National Party, the then member for Pilbara, was running a campaign to benefit the state with \$7.2 billion.

Mr K.J.J. Michel: He didn’t doorknock! He didn’t bother to doorknock! If you have to doorknock, you know how many people are there!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Suddenly, when a campaign had been run against him and his political party at a cost of, I reckon, probably close to \$10 million to save \$7.2 billion, and there was suddenly a spike in the number of people who appeared on the electoral roll in the Pilbara, when people were vacating houses in the Pilbara left, right and centre because of the downturn —

Mr K.J.J. Michel: Yes, because of you —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I hope the member for Pilbara gets up and says something here —

Mr K.J.J. Michel: I am saying something —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: because I think he forgot to thank Rio and BHP in his speech. He will get a chance to stand and thank them.

Anyway, let us get to the point because this is very serious. It is a sad state of affairs when politicians and political parties cannot have a good debate around policy.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr R.S. Love): Members, can we just keep the noise down, please. I would like to hear the member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There needs to be a broad debate around policy to ensure that we do our job and benefit the state of Western Australia. It is a sad day. We saw that with the federal government, when Kevin Rudd wanted to introduce his mining tax.

Several members interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Did we oppose it? I think the Attorney General said that we opposed it. Yes, we did, because there would have been no benefit to the state of Western Australia. However, the policy that the National Party took to the 2017 election would have resulted in \$7.2 billion staying in the Western Australian coffers, helping to avoid exactly what is happening now. The Labor government is making cuts and has the razor gangs ready when it comes to the health department. There are concerns about police stations in regional Western Australia. Fees and charges will increase. We knew this was coming and the Labor Party knew this was coming. We had an alternative of \$7.2 billion being raised for the state. It will be interesting to see what comes out next week when disclosures have to be put in to see who got what. Who made a contribution to the Chamber of Minerals and Energy’s campaign, which has had a devastating result on our democracy? It is absolutely critical that members support this motion and have an oversight committee that makes sure that our democracy is held to the highest standards. If this happened in another country, we would say, “This wouldn’t happen in Australia.” Who would have thought there would be Russian involvement in a United States election? But this could be our own little involvement. Every political commentator—the Leader of the Nationals brought those comments up—has said that this is unprecedented. The campaign waged against the member for Pilbara, the National Party and our system is unprecedented. Go back and look at what happened when the federal Labor government tried to introduce the resource rent tax. I do not think members have seen anything as ferocious as the campaign waged against a political party by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy. It was funded by Rio Tinto and BHP to distort the political system because they stood to lose \$7.2 billion. Mr Acting Speaker, can I have permission to show a corflute that was put up on election day? The corflute reads, “Jobs not taxes. Say no to the mining tax.”

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr R.S. Love): The member can display it briefly, but then please put it away.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

It was authorised by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia and printed by blah, blah, blah. It states “Jobs not taxes. Say no to the mining tax.” This was put up at polling booths in my electorate and the member for Pilbara’s electorate. The Labor Party put these corflutes up around my electorate and, come election time, in the polling booths that its members stood at. The former member for Geraldton Shane Hill, who unsuccessfully ran against me, was putting them up in Carnarvon. Obviously, the Labor Party supported the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, Rio and BHP and their funding to try to ensure that voters were scared at a time when jobs were being cut left, right and centre. During that campaign, 2 000 jobs were cut from the resource sector. That week, Rio and BHP announced that 500 jobs were gone, but they kept on prosecuting with advertisements that state —

Who’ll pay Brendon Grylls’ \$3 billion mining tax?

Everyone knows when costs go up, mining companies have to cut costs to stay competitive. That means cutting jobs and spending. And when mining jobs are cut, other jobs are lost too. So why is Brendon Grylls hell bent on making that happen?

At the same time Rio announced 500 jobs being cut. I find that absolutely gobsmacking. Another CME advertisement states —

Who’ll pay the WA Nationals’ \$3 billion mining tax?

It goes on —

2 900 Pilbara jobs lost

Pilbara economy down 4.8%

Jobs have already been cut. A fear campaign was put to the people of Western Australia, particularly the people in the Pilbara. There was one campaign after the other and BHP also put screensavers on its computers. I will read them out to members. One screensaver states —

Increasing WA iron ore royalties by \$5 would make them 7 times higher than our biggest competitor Brazil

What’s at risk if WA mining is made uncompetitive?

That is BHP on the screens of its employees. Look at the campaign that was waged.

Ms M.J. Davies: Bullying.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Bullied? It would be interesting to see what the unions would say about that. Another screensaver that I found states —

As much as \$9 out of every \$10 raised by the proposed tax would go to the eastern states in lost GST revenue

What a load of rubbish! The whole \$7.2 billion would stay in Western Australia; that was our argument. Yes, after a point, it gets taken away, but the \$7.2 billion stays in Western Australia. Our argument should have been that it should be GST free. That is the argument that the government should be putting forward—that it should be GST free to compensate our problem. Our real problem is a GST not working for Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is quite clear when members interject, and when they have put up posters that state “Jobs not taxes” on behalf of Rio, BHP and the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, we know where their loyalties lie—namely, with the companies, not the people of Western Australia, and certainly not the people of the Pilbara. The front page of *The West Australian* of 21 November 2016 states —

RIO JOBS TO GO

Iron ore mining giant prepares to sack up to 500 workers

We were getting this, one after the other, when our policy was not even ramped up. That is what was happening. Suddenly, when more than 2 000 jobs had been lost in the Pilbara, the electorate of Pilbara increased by 3 199 electors. When Rio has got rid of thousands of jobs in the Pilbara, 3 199 people were put on the electoral roll. There were probably vacancies of 2 000 houses. The member for Pilbara would know because I think he was fixing air conditioners at that stage. He would have seen all the empty houses when he drove around.

Mr K. Michel interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, when he doorknocked all those empty houses.

Does it not smell? Members do not think there is a concern that there has been an unprecedented increase. Perhaps it is our Russian moment in Western Australian politics in that there may have been an influence. There may not have been. We are asking for an inquiry to find out exactly where these people have come from to increase the Pilbara electoral roll, based on a pretty important policy debate and an unprecedented campaign waged by mining giants here in Western Australia to influence an outcome in the electoral system of Western Australia. Why? It was to save \$7.2 billion. What is the motive? The motive is the \$7.2 billion that the National Party policy would raise. The Chamber of Minerals and Energy said it started with \$2 million—some say it was \$5 million and some say it was \$8 million; let us say it was \$10 million. That was to try to influence the outcome of an election. Members, \$10 million to save \$7.2 billion is pretty cheap. The main thing being debated here today is that even if people do not agree with the conspiracy theory perhaps put to them about Russian involvement in Western Australian politics, core Labor Party values are about making sure that our electoral system is intact—that it is above reproach. Labor members should stand up for their values and what their political party stands for. I know this side of the house supports this motion to ensure there is an oversight —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The motion states —

That this house —

...

- (d) notes with concern that Parliament has no standing committee tasked with oversight of electoral laws and practices in line with other jurisdictions, including New South Wales and Victoria

We are asking for the same here in Western Australia. I think that is quite fair.

An opposition member: If you had a logical argument for that, then maybe we would listen.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The logical argument is that it is important to have oversight of our electoral system to ensure that it is above reproach, delivering the right outcome, and that when the people of Western Australia go to the ballot box, they know their vote is safe and secure. They need to know that once they put the vote in the box, the process is followed. We all know what has happened in the past. All I am saying is that it is fine if members do not believe in what we are saying, but they have to believe in the integrity of the electoral system. We believe something could have gone wrong, given the fact that so many people were put on the electoral roll in the seat of Pilbara when jobs have been lost left, right and centre, with people sacked from Rio Tinto and there has been a downturn in the economy, which has meant a huge drop in occupied houses. Let us look at it in depth. Let us look at what the reason behind the spike could have been when jobs have been lost and houses have been vacated. I think it is cause for concern. I know there are a lot of people from union backgrounds opposite, and I have a union background. I have been a member of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union—absolutely. It surprises me that the unions backed Rio Tinto and BHP. When Rio Tinto and BHP are sacking their workers, when they are going into automation to ensure no more union members are needed at their mine sites and they are sending workers to offshore trading hubs in Singapore, the union supports them and the path they are taking. That is very concerning. If I were a Labor member, I would be concerned about the union doing that. I urge all members to look deeply into what they believe in, because I know everyone believes in an electoral system that is fair and above reproach. That is what we all stand for here today; that is what we all support.

This year, putting politics aside, we are asking someone just to oversee the electoral system. There are committees that oversee other bodies such as the Corruption and Crime Commission, and this is no different. I implore everyone to support the motion that we have put forward. I hope the Minister for Electoral Affairs has a better response than he did yesterday and will support what the Leader of the National Party has put forward—that he will at least support an oversight committee so the Electoral Commission can be above reproach and there can be a vehicle to look into these concerns we have raised. There is not only the issue of the 3 199 people put on the electoral roll in the seat of Pilbara; there are other issues that people would like delved into, such as whether or not the corflute like the one I am holding was properly authorised. It should have been authorised by the Labor Party. Who paid for these corflutes that the Labor Party put up? Perhaps my opponent got paid per hour for standing at the polling booth, because he put these up. Who knows? That is what we need to find out. We need to find out how we can ensure the electoral system is above reproach. The electoral system has to be accountable. Supporting the motion that the Leader of the National Party put forward is one step in the right direction towards ensuring that our democracy is held to the highest standards in Western Australia and that we do not have the Russian moment that the United States has had.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Electoral Affairs) [4.45 pm]: That is three-quarters of an hour of my life that I will never get back! I cannot believe that this motion comes forward from the National Party. Let me make it clear that there are no allegations of impropriety regarding the 2017 state election. We know that because there is a procedure in the Electoral Act to deal with disputes. I draw the Leader of the National Party's attention to part V of the Electoral Act. If she has any questions regarding the validity of the election or the return, that is the procedure to deal with disputes, so I invite her to comply with the law instead of coming in here and whingeing about the fact that the current member for Pilbara worked hard and defeated the fat and lazy former member, who was not prepared to service his electorate and was instead interested in feathering the nest of donors to the National Party through the granting of contracts to them.

Mr V.A. Catania: How can you stand there and say that?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: That is what happened. The Labor Party preselected a community candidate who, instead of whingeing, got out and worked. And guess what? Bizarrely, as they say, "The harder I work, the luckier I am", and the member for Pilbara is a lucky man. The reason he is lucky is that he worked hard and he was rewarded for it. If there is any question about that election, it is how Brendon Grylls got so many votes, because he did not deserve them. He never represented the actual interests of his electorate or his residents. Some conspiracy theory is being developed by the National Party about the fact that it supported direct enrolment. Let us understand what direct enrolment means. It means that if somebody is already eligible to be enrolled and they are enrolled by the Australian Electoral Commission, their name is also included on the Western Australian electoral roll. There is no conspiracy in this matter, because a person has to be eligible and included on the federal roll before they are directly enrolled on the state roll. Nobody was added to the population of Pilbara by direct enrolment. All that happened was that people who were on the electoral roll for the federal seat were included in the state roll. That was through the operation of the law that was introduced when the Leader of the National Party sat at the cabinet table and supported that decision! As I pointed out to the chamber yesterday, that was a decision of the former government. It was legislation that the Labor Party gratefully supported because we thought it was good law. But let us not misunderstand the fact that that law was introduced by the cabinet that the Leader of the National Party was a member of. If she is now complaining that the effect of that was to make sure that every eligible voter was on the electoral roll, that was the purpose of the amendment; that was the purpose that she voted for in this Parliament and supported in cabinet. I was amused to hear the member for North West Central talking about who the member for Pilbara should thank in his inaugural speech. I will just remind the member of these words—a list of people to be thanked—from another inaugural speech —

... and the unions, particularly the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union and the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association.

Whose speech is that? It is the member for North West Central himself! He went on to say —

Even without royalties for regions, Labor spent a lot in the regions, particularly the north west, and the new government must continue this. Labor policy calls for the fair distribution of the benefits —

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I do not see how this is relevant to the debate, given the fact that we are talking about the electoral system.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr R.S. Love): Thank you. There is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I repeat —

Even without royalties for regions, Labor spent a lot in the regions, particularly the north west, and the new government must continue this. Labor policy calls for the fair distribution of the benefits of economic growth, continuous improvement in the welfare and living standards of the Australian people, and the reallocation of resources to those most in need. We do not need a program labelled "royalties for regions" to adhere to this policy.

What a wonderful inaugural speech the member for North West Central gave! No wonder he drew attention to the member for Pilbara's fine contribution to this house, because the member for Pilbara is a fine member and is providing excellent service to the people of the Pilbara. The reason he won was because he was the best candidate. That is why, at some point in time, the National Party has to give up the ghost of Brendon past! "Oh, my God, Brendon! Brendon! We can't do anything without Brendon!" I know the National Party cannot do anything without him, but get over it. At some point Nationals members are going to have to accept the democratic process of Australia.

Mr V.A. Catania: You're saying there's nothing to see here?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The member should tell me what the illegal conduct was, given that he never made a single allegation.

Mr V.A. Catania: You're the electoral affairs minister. Address our concerns.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: What concerns? That is the thing. I have made this point. As I understand it, the member has had a meeting with the person responsible for the conduct of the election, which is not the Minister for Electoral Affairs, it is the Electoral Commissioner, and thank God for that. The last thing in the world anyone in Western Australia wants is a politician running the election. We do not want politicians interfering in the procedures of elections.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Minister for Electoral Affairs has said that we met with someone that we have not met with.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, carry on.

Debate Resumed

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Thank you.

The National Party, pining for the past, needs to face the future. The future is a democratic election result that we are now implementing here in this chamber.

Mr V.A. Catania: What are you scared about?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for North West Central! Thank you.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: There has not been a single allegation of impropriety by the National Party in respect of the conduct of the 2017 election—not a single complaint. It has raised not one issue regarding the conduct of any person in relation to that election. It has not alleged that there was anybody on the electoral roll improperly. It has not alleged that there was any vote improperly counted. It has not alleged that there has been any vote cast without proper reason. There has not been an allegation of dual voting; there has not been an allegation of anybody having been on the roll twice. It has not even suggested that people were enrolled improperly. There has been no suggestion of any impropriety.

The member for North West Central says that it is conspiracy theory. It is a conspiracy theory without a theory! The member said that there was a conspiracy theory, but he had no theory. What is the theory he is presenting? Is he saying that people were improperly enrolled? He did not say that at any time during his speech. He has not suggested that there was one person enrolled improperly. He has not suggested that somebody was going around polling booths, voting a dozen times, driving from polling booth to polling booth, voting. He has not suggested any of that. He has not done anything other than to say that Brendon Grylls lost his seat. Bloody oath, he did, if I can use that Australian term!

The ACTING SPEAKER: I think you should not!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I make the point that the reason Brendon Grylls lost his seat was because he was a lazy member who did not properly represent the people of his district, and he has been replaced by a community candidate who is not interested in swanning around in a government jet and getting his photo on the front page of a newspaper. Rather, he is servicing the needs of his community. The member for Pilbara is a model for members in this chamber. He is a model for the sort of person whose election we should celebrate. Think of his life story, which he laid out in his inaugural speech. He has gone from a humble beginning in a foreign country through to being a successful small businessman in the Pilbara, and now a celebrated member for Pilbara. What a joy it is for this chamber to have a man of that quality here, instead of the lazy member who occupied the seat before him.

Mr K.M. O'Donnell: He should be on the front bench!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: He probably should, and he probably will, and if he does, I am sure he will make a fabulous contribution because, unlike Brendon Grylls, the member for Pilbara is a man of quality and ability. I would celebrate if he wanted to do that.

That is the problem the National Party faces. It cannot come up with a single allegation in respect of the 2017 election that the Electoral Commissioner or the Court of Disputed Returns or anyone else should investigate. It made some play of the increase in enrolments in the Pilbara. I can let members know that, at the 2013 election, there were 13 261 votes cast in the Pilbara electorate. In the 2017 election, there were 14 821 votes cast. That is an increase of 1 560 votes, or an 11.7 per cent increase. Burns Beach, which replaced the seat of Ocean Reef, had an increase of 11 per cent; the seat of Joondalup had an increase of 14.6 per cent; the

electorate of Carine had an increase of 11.4 per cent; Hillarys, 10.3 per cent; and, indeed, the seat of Kalgoorlie went up by nearly 50 per cent, as the member for Kalgoorlie might know.

I make the point that an 11 per cent increase is just about what one would expect. My seat of Cannington increased by 5.3 per cent, but my boundaries changed, and that is the point. One actually expects a larger than average increase if the boundaries do not change. In the metropolitan area, where there was an additional seat created, one would expect the average to fall. The fact is that there was an 11.7 per cent increase in the Pilbara electorate. Remember, the National Party is not saying that there was a single person enrolled improperly in that seat. It is just exactly what one would expect for a seat the boundaries of which did not change. If there was a conspiracy, there was certainly no theory. There was no conspiracy theory here, because the National Party has not outlined what it is alleging was done wrong.

It also expressed concern at the unprecedented and significant campaign activities of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy. All I can say is, where was it in 2013? I had to stand at a polling booth and watch all the stuff paid for by the Minerals Council of Australia. Apparently, if the Minerals Council runs a campaign against the Labor Party, that is okay; that is democracy in action. That is just the way the world works. But as soon as it holds the National Party to account for its behaviour, it is the end of the civilised world; it is the end of civilisation as we know it.

I draw the Leader of the National Party's attention to *Lange v Australian Broadcasting Commission* 1997, and *Australian Capital Television v Commonwealth* 1992, both High Court decisions. They specified limits to the capacity of governments to restrict spending by third parties on election campaigns. I would have thought that before the Leader of the National Party came along and wasted our time with this sort of drivel—a conspiracy with no theory—she would have known what she was talking about. I, for one, would very much love to be able to restrict spending by third parties. I think it would be great. Sadly, when the Australian Labor Party moved that through the federal Parliament, the High Court said that it was not permitted. Indeed, recently there has been a similar High Court decision about limitations placed on political spending in New South Wales. Before the National Party comes in here spewing its drivel, I would think that it would do a bit of research. I make the same observation that I made the other day about the Liberal Party. Nobody has a laptop in front of them. Its members cannot google anything or do any research unless they have the technical equipment needed to do it.

Mr I.C. Blayney: Laptop here, member!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I know; very good. He is a member of the Liberal Party; he is learning. We are still waiting for the National Party to learn. I make the point that if a member is going to bring a motion into this chamber, we would think that they would have gone and looked at the facts. This is a conspiracy with no theory—a theory with no work. The National Party should do some work. It should go away and look at what it is talking about. If it were constitutionally possible, the Labor Party would be very happy to restrict third party spending because it would be to the advantage of the Labor Party and to the disadvantage of conservative forces in Australia. We all know that. That situation has a long history that goes back for 100 years, and we accept it. But even with those imbalances in the electoral system, the Labor Party can still win massive majorities as we did on this occasion.

A bit further this motion states —

- (d) notes with concern that Parliament has no standing committee specifically tasked with oversight of electoral laws ...

I remind members that it is true that no committee is individually tasked with the oversight of electoral laws, but it is not true that no committee is specifically tasked with the oversight of electoral laws. I draw the chamber's attention to the "Determination in accordance with Standing Order 287 of Portfolio Responsibilities for Standing Committees of the Legislative Assembly of the 40th Parliament", which was signed by the honourable Speaker on Wednesday, 17 May 2017. I draw the National Party's attention to the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. It lists the areas of government activity that the committee is responsible for. Members might know that the first area is Aboriginal affairs. Members might be interested to know that the second area is electoral affairs. A standing committee is specifically tasked with the oversight of electoral laws and practices in Western Australia. That is simply the fact. I really enjoy hearing the conspiracy with no theory that the National Party has come along with. It is interesting that the former Premier and I once had an interchange across the chamber about the idea of having a joint standing committee on electoral affairs. He made the observation that it was probably a good idea and I agree with him. It is probably a good idea. Personally, I would not have a standing committee, but a select committee on electoral affairs is something that Parliament might want to look at at an appropriate time. To come in here and say, as the National Party's motion states, that no standing committee is specifically tasked with that action is wrong. It is not true. It is incorrect. It is not the case.

Mr V.A. Catania: Read the whole motion out.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I will. The motion states —

notes with concern that Parliament has no standing committee specifically —

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: If members of the National Party would stop flapping their gums, I would be very happy to read this out. The motion states —

- (d) notes with concern that Parliament has no standing committee specifically tasked with oversight of electoral laws and practices in line with other jurisdictions including New South Wales and Victoria.

That is what the motion states. My point is that this Parliament does have such a standing committee—the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. Whatever the committee chooses to do is up to it. Let me make it clear that a committee of this Parliament is tasked with this very task. Of course, we can choose to direct it in its conduct. Another way that this could be handled is that we could ask the Public Accounts Committee to investigate funding and disclosure issues. That might be an effective way of having an investigation. It could be done in a whole range of ways, but what this motion states is simply wrong; it is not true. It is true that the Labor government promised an inquiry, and we will proceed with that in due course in accordance with our election commitments. When cabinet makes a decision, we will happily let members know what we are doing about that. We are certainly not walking away from it; I can tell members that.

The idea that there was an unprecedented campaign by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy is clearly wrong, as every member of the Labor Party knows. We remember the 2013 federal election and the 2013 state election. We had not done anything about a resource super profits tax, but plenty of advertising was still taking us up.

Dr A.D. Buti: I am sure that the current federal member for Perth would remember. I am sure that the former candidate for the seat of Canning, Hon Alannah MacTiernan, would remember.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Absolutely! I will remind people that \$2 million was spent by —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr T.J. Healy): Member for Armadale!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Armadale, please be appropriate.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I remind members that there was a two and a half million dollar campaign by the coal industry pushing for clean coal. The mining industry spent \$22 million on the resource super profit tax. Over \$50 million was spent by the Mineral Council of Australia opposing the minerals resource rent tax. In the past, a whole range of attacks on the Labor Party were funded by third party groups. I even remember the debt truck from before the 1996 federal election that drove around the country courtesy of Woolworths. This was not an unprecedented campaign. The only thing that was unprecedented is that the National Party did not like it. The National Party was happy with all the other ones, but it did not like this one. It was not that there was any difference in the extent or activities or any of those other things.

In relation to the election poster that I have never seen before, there is a procedure to deal with materials that are not properly authorised and placed at polling booths. It should be raised with the returning officer on the day. The returning officer has almost unlimited powers to make a decision. I used to be the secretary of the state Parliamentary Labor Party, and before every election I used to get a letter from the WA Electoral Commissioner. That letter made the point that if there was a small technical deficiency in a piece of election material, the commission would not ask for it to be withdrawn. I agree that on the surface—not as a lawyer and not getting a legal opinion—it appears that that poster should have had the person's name on it. Of course, it was clear who authorised it and it was clear where it was printed. Therefore, I am not surprised that an individual officer in charge of an individual polling booth did not require it to be taken down. It is not exactly unusual. There have often been small technical errors in the authorisation of materials by those on all sides of politics. The Electoral Commission has a longstanding practice—back to before I was state secretary—to not prosecute on those small technical breaches if it is clear who specifically authorised it. For example, I have had Liberal Party material up in my own electorate or election ads in newspapers that had no authorisation but because it was clear that it was a Liberal Party ad with the Liberal Party candidate, the Electoral Commission took no action. Quite frankly, nor should it.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The member does not get it. As I keep saying, it is a conspiracy with no theory. What is the member's theory? Did they forget to put Reg Howard-Smith's name on the piece of paper? Is the member

honestly telling me that that is the extent of the conspiracy to breach the Electoral Act? Let us make it clear. This is the National Party's theory. Its members are saying that there was no breach of enrolment by any person; there was no improper conduct by the Electoral Commission in counting or the conduct of the ballot; and there was no illegal multiple voting or any of those sorts of things, but the whole election turns on the fact that the name Reg Howard-Smith did not appear on a piece of corflute. That is the extent of the theory. That is the only thing that the Nationals have demonstrated as improper conduct.

Mr V.A. Catania: Labor Party people put them up.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Oh my God! I am sorry! Now I understand. It is not that it was not properly authorised—members opposite accept that it was only a technical breach—but that a person put it up. I hate to tell them this, but that is not illegal, so long as it is not done within six metres of the polling booth. It is not illegal for people to put up election material. I hate to mention that, but if it was somehow improper for members of the public to put up this material, the member for Central Wheatbelt tells us that she knew who put them up in her electorate. Why does she not go and talk to them, instead of coming in here and whingeing to us? I do not know who put them up in her electorate, but she does. Why am I being asked to investigate a matter that she already knows about? It is just bizarre.

I was also very amused that the Leader of the National Party said that the Liberal Party and the National Party went to the last election with a financial plan. As I remember, they went to the election with two financial plans. There was the Liberal Party's financial plan and the National Party's financial plan. I can remember the Liberal Party rejecting the National Party's financial plan, but that is okay.

I will make another point about the conduct of the election. Some issues need to be investigated. One of those, as the member quite rightly highlights, is that we have promised to carry out an inquiry into third-party fundraising activities. That is a very important issue, and when cabinet makes a decision on that matter, the Leader of the National Party will be amongst the first people we advise that that is happening. But some other things need to be investigated. One is voting in remote locations. At the moment, some communities of more than 100 people—sometimes 300 or 400 people—do not get a permanent polling booth on election day. Those people in remote parts of the state are being denied the rights given to other people. That needs to be looked at, because it is not a proper and democratic outcome. That is something I think needs to be considered.

Unlike the National Party, with its conspiracy and no theory, I am actually making a very important point. There are communities, particularly in the Kimberley but also in the Pilbara, where people miss out on voting. They do not get to vote because they do not get the same opportunities that you and I get, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr T.J. Healy), because they do not have a polling booth opening at 8.00 in the morning and closing at 6.00 at night. They might get three or four hours on a day in the lead-up to election day. They are not being given the same rights that everybody else is expected to receive, and I do not think that is appropriate. Of course, I am a politician, and I cannot issue a directive to the Electoral Commissioner to fix what I think is a significant anomaly. It is certainly something that we have to look at and make sure that we get right, because we currently do not have that situation right. Some people in the Kimberley, because the election takes place during the wet season, are unable to get to the mobile polling booths when they fly through on particular days. I am not sure whether it happened in the last election, but I know that in previous elections mobile polling booths have not been able to be provided at the advertised time because of the wet season making airstrips unusable. This is clearly a very important issue that needs to be dealt with.

I draw the attention of the house to the Beacon Community Resource Centre, where 58 votes were cast; the Meckering Community Resource Centre, where 82 votes were cast; and the Nungarin Primary School, where 73 votes were cast. I do not have a problem with those communities receiving the opportunity to vote over 10 hours, but none of those communities saw 100 votes cast. However, we have communities in the Kimberley in particular, and in the Pilbara to a lesser extent, with hundreds of voters who do not get that 10-hour opportunity on election day to cast their votes. That is a genuine problem, unlike the conspiracy with no theory that the National Party is talking about. It is an issue that we need to confront. The fact that the level of voting in the Kimberley is consistently lower as a percentage of enrolled voters than every other electorate in the state has to be a matter for concern. I urge the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee to give consideration to this, as the standing committee specifically tasked with oversight of electoral laws and practices, in line with other jurisdictions.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: It is not in line with other jurisdictions; they have committees specifically for that purpose.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: No, they do not. The member must listen.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: I have been.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The member should stop manspreading and listen to us. What we are saying is very simple. What is happening here is very simple. A standing committee of the Parliament is tasked with the oversight of electoral affairs. It has an unfettered right to carry out investigations.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: Among other things.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Of course—among other things, but the committee gets to choose. The Parliament could, if it wanted to, direct the committee to carry out an inquiry. As the member would be aware, a directed inquiry takes precedence over a committee-initiated inquiry, but it is up to the committee. As I said before, I have sympathy for the view that a standing committee should have a look at each election after it takes place. I think that would be the way to do it, but it is simply not true that no standing committee is specifically tasked with this oversight. That is simply the fact. There are things that need to be looked at.

I will keep going on the question of electors. I know that we do not have any criticism of the conduct or enrolment of anybody in the Pilbara. In 2012 there was a change to the federal electoral legislation to allow for a simpler process for enrolment. People can only be enrolled once. If they vote on the roll in one location, that by definition means that they are not enrolled in another district. It is not a question of multiple enrolments. If somebody is enrolled in one district, they are not enrolled, by definition, somewhere else. Procedures are conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission to ensure that only real people go on the electoral roll. There was unfortunately a large divergence between the enrolment in Western Australia under the state act and enrolment under the federal act, which got to about 170 000 and was expected to rise to 220 000, had the law not been changed. That variation of 170 000 electors led the former Liberal–National government to bring legislation before the house to overcome that disparity. The decision by the former government arose out of a commitment made by the former Premier, the member for Cottesloe, in the estimates committee, when this matter was drawn to his attention by the Electoral Commissioner. I have previously placed on record my congratulations to the former Premier for introducing that legislation. There is no secret or conspiracy underpinning any question of the size of the enrolment in any seat.

As I have said already, the National Party is not alleging any improper conduct in the enrolment of voters for the election or by the people who cast ballots on election day, it has not suggested any impropriety in the way the Electoral Commissioner counted the ballots after they were cast, and it has not suggested any impropriety in the way that the Electoral Commissioner then made declarations about the poll. All the things that we would ordinarily expect an allegation of malfeasance to be based on are absent. All the National Party is saying is that the people of the Pilbara elected a Labor member. That is its complaint. I must say, as I have said already, that was not a mistake. That is point (a) of the National Party motion.

Point (b) of the motion states —

expresses concern at the unprecedented and significant campaign activities of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia.

As I have tried to explain to the National Party before it brought this motion to the house, it should look at the ability of the state to restrict campaign activities. Unfortunately, I am not aware of any state that is able to legislate to restrict these sorts of third party activities. That is a reason the Labor Party wants an inquiry into these things, because, as I have explained, the Labor Party had been the victim of a very large campaign. I remember a campaign run by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the 1990s that attacked the then Labor opposition for the terms and conditions in the Minimum Conditions of Employment Act. It was bizarre. There were ads in *The West Australian* criticising the Labor Party for the provisions of a bill that the Labor Party had voted against in the Parliament; yet, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry ran ads criticising us. It is not as though the Labor Party is somehow the beneficiary of these things. Members would all remember the campaign by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and others against the carbon tax—the \$22 million campaign by the Minerals Council of Australia to oppose the Labor Party at the time of the 2013 federal election, and campaigns in support of the coal industry against the Labor Party. The only reason the National Party is making this complaint is not because an outside body ran a campaign but because the outside body ran a campaign that it did not like. That is the extent of its criticism.

If I were wrong on this matter, the National Party would have stood with the Labor Party at the time of the 2013 state election, saying that what was happening to us at that election was wrong. Four years ago it was the Labor Party that was suffering, even though at that election it was not a matter within our control; it was a commonwealth government issue yet the campaign was going on against us. Campaign material was coming out criticising the Labor Party at a state level after a federal government decision. That is the Nationals' problem in this matter.

Mr D.T. Redman: Will you take an interjection?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: No. They have no theory to go along with their conspiracy. That is their problem. They have to cop it now that they have lost.

I accept that the National Party is having trouble finding leadership after losing Brendon Grylls. We all heard Brendon Grylls' opinion that the National Party had lost its way and needed to do something new, and, therefore, the member for Warren–Blackwood had to go as the Leader of the National Party. Now that Brendon Grylls has gone, the National Party still does not have any good leadership. That is the National Party's problem. It should not be made into everybody else's problem, because that is not the way to do these things.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: That's all about good old leadership; that's why he chose Stephen Smith rather than Mark McGowan.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The most boring member in the chamber has made an interjection.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Sorry, I did not hear what the member said. Would he please interject again?

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: That's all right.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is all right.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Next week the member for Dawesville is going to learn grammar because then his 700 questions will have a point. Instead of asking about the gender of the agencies I have responsibility for, which is just bizarre because, as we all know, agencies do not have gender, he will learn to use grammar properly and ask questions that are relevant to the people of Western Australia. I look forward to that because I was not able to answer his question.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I think the minister is off track.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr T.J. Healy): The point of order quickly, please.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: He has been talking about leadership and the involvement of Stephen Smith, so perhaps he can go back to explaining that.

The ACTING SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Armadale.

Several members interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Is that not interesting. The member for Warren–Blackwood should thank the member for North West Central because the one thing about being knifed immediately before the election is that when it went bad, it was not his fault. The one thing he can say to Vince is thank you, because it is not his fault. Nobody can blame the member for Warren–Blackwood for that; is that not right?

Mr D.T. Redman: You can take my interjection now.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I was not seeking an interjection; I was just making a point.

The National Party has to come to terms with the election result. The Labor Party is the party of the regions. It is the largest party representing regional Western Australia. It dominates regional Western Australia in both this and the other house. The Liberal Party—the two of them sitting next to each other up the back and my good friend the member for Geraldton —

Mr K.M. O'Donnell: He's not regional.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: National Party members sit there and are not prepared to sit next to Liberal Party members.

Mr R.S. Love: There's not enough room.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes, there is.

Ms M.J. Davies: Do you want us to sit on their laps!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I can see three vacant seats over there. We can all see the vacant seats.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is because we are the party of the regions.

Mr S.K. L'Estrange: We've got Geraldton.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: That is one. The member for North West Central made the point that we do not need a program like royalties for regions to adhere to this policy—that being the policy of support for regional Western Australia—because the Labor Party, born in the regions, continues to represent the regions.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Armadale

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: You'll never be a minister, mate!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Is the member for Dawesville going to be a minister?

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! The Acting Speaker is on his feet. I ask the minister to refer to the motion.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I am very pleased to do so. I understand there is an agreement between the National Party and Liberal Party that the Liberal Party will get time in private members' business from 5.30 pm. I note from the clock that it is nearly that time now. I seek leave to continue my remarks so that I can sit down. I understand that the National Party will adjourn the matter and the Liberal Party will then move its motion. I understand that is the case. Everybody is nodding in agreement, so I seek leave to continue my remarks.

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

Debate thus adjourned.