

APPROPRIATION (RECURRENT 2022–23) BILL 2022
APPROPRIATION (CAPITAL 2022–23) BILL 2022

Second Reading — Cognate Debate

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MR H.T. JONES (Darling Range) [2.58 pm]: Before the break, I was talking about the decision by Activ Foundation to close seven of its large industrial workshops, one of which my son works at. Around that is what I assess as a callous decision to give as little as two months' notice to some of the least easily employable people in the state, I would say, yet the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Senator Reynolds, has failed to manage this issue, leaving people very distressed.

I received text messages last night from people I know who work at Activ. They said that people were coming into work crying. They do not understand why they are losing their jobs. They do not work for the money. They are not like Linda Evangelista, who famously said she does not get out of bed for less than \$10 000 a day. These workers are on \$20 a day. In my son's case, he catches a bus to work, which costs \$30.90, so he is down 10 bucks. Luckily, NDIS covers it. They go to work for companionship.

That is all right. It happens to me all the time when I talk about my son. Their work gives them structure, they are occupied, they are satisfied and they experience feelings of independence—true independence in some cases. It offers respite for families. It is a selfish thing, but having a child with some disabilities is like having a child forever. We have to manage that. I have tissues and water and everything—I think I will be all right now.

This decision has also impacted other employees—people who work at Activ—who have lost their jobs. It has affected the bus companies and the drivers who drive the workers to work, along with taxi and Uber drivers who drive them to work. The Tate Street Lunch Bar in Bentley in the seat of Victoria Park provides all the lunches for the workers. It will lose some business.

I call on those opposite to speak with their federal colleagues and express their concern. The member for Vasse should also talk to her federal colleagues because the Bunbury–Busselton facility is also closing down. Andrew Hastie is my member. I get on quite well with him. I work with him. But he probably has little to do with disability. Like me, he was in Defence, where most people are white, male and have no disability, so it is hard to relate. I did not relate until my son was diagnosed. I know that Senator Linda Reynolds does not get it. After discussing it with Activ, if the end result is two months' notice, it is not good enough. I know that Scott Morrison does not get it because he is blessed with healthy kids, and he is more likely to cause disability by falling on kids playing soccer! The Labor candidate for Canning gets it. She has worked in community services for 20 or 30 years. The member for Dawesville gets it. The member for Victoria Park gets it. Everyone here gets it. Everyone in the Labor Party gets it. Even the member for North West Central, with a black shrivelled heart, which used to be a red pumping Labor heart, gets it. Mr Punch gets it; the Premier gets it; Bill Shorten, the architect of NDIS, gets it; and Anthony Albanese gets it. I am proud to care and I am proud to be Labor.

I commend the bill to the house.

[Applause.]

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.03 pm]: I rise to respond to the cognate debate on the Appropriation (Recurrent 2022–23) Bill 2022 and the Appropriation (Capital 2022–23) Bill 2022 and the budget that we were presented with last week. As we know, that budget has a large surplus amounting to billions of dollars, and many billions of dollars coming into the coffers of the government that previous governments have not had the pleasure of being able to deal with. That leads to some opportunities for the government to make expenditures and to become involved in activities that are perhaps beyond the dreams of many governments across Australia at the moment.

I want to commence by noting the report of the ambulance inquiry that was presented in the Legislative Council. I wish to put on record my tribute to the volunteers, especially in the many small sub-centres right across my electorate and across the state of Western Australia who provide the only cover for many people, including the arduous nature of making frequent inter-hospital transfers with limited numbers of volunteers in order to garner enough money to keep the substation going and to pay the bills. That takes a toll on many of the volunteers. Places such as Jurien Bay, for instance, have no adequate health facility or hospital beds, despite having had a program that would have been funded under the previous government. We see ambulance drivers spending many hours driving to Joondalup, in particular, to transfer patients. Hundreds of transfers are made from that place every year.

I also want to put on record my concern for those people who were affected by cyclone Seroja last year, which cut a swathe right across the midwest, starting in the Kalbarri community. Until a few weeks before the arrival of the cyclone, I was Kalbarri's local member and then there was the electoral boundary change. The communities in the rest of the midwest area that I represent, through Northampton, Chapman Valley, the City of Greater Geraldton, Mingenew, Morawa, Perenjori, Three Springs and Dalwallinu, have all had a really difficult time over the last year.

I see that the budget notes that there has been a considerable underspend on some of the grants that have been available. When talking to residents in Northampton about their experience accessing the grants, they say it has been difficult because they have had to expend all the money on rebuilding a building and then in some circumstances try to get the money back. That means that they have the capacity to finance that building themselves. If they have that capacity, that is good, but many people do not have that capacity, and we need to pre-fund some of the work that has been done. I note from the budget papers that there has been discussion around that. I will be interested to ask some questions about that during the estimates hearings.

Mr R.R. Whitby interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The federal minister visited the area, and we had that discussion. As we know, the federal government is in a caretaker period now, so we cannot do much at the moment.

An issue relating to Western Power is another matter of great concern in my electorate. Recently, Hon Martin Aldridge and I created a petition that was presented to the Legislative Council—the first e-petition—calling for a review of Western Power looking at various aspects of the operations of Western Power in that area. There has been a catastrophic level of failure in much of my electorate. Some of the towns that I represent, such as Port Gregory, Horrocks and Northampton, have been badly affected by not just cyclone Seroja, but also a longstanding issue often to do with structural problems in that area; that is, poles and wires being exposed to salt and dust and then episodes of low levels of moisture settling on them, making the tops of the poles conductive and causing fires and many outages. We know there has been an issue with Western Power being able to put the power back on during total fire bans, which are quite frequent nowadays—much more frequent than they used to be. Perhaps that is for two reasons: first, climate change; and, second, DFES is much more involved in those areas than it used to be. Work was largely carried out by local government in the past. Now, areas have fire bans imposed on them for days and days, which leads to lengthy outages for many people.

I understand that a program has been set up to roll out standalone units to many isolated farms et cetera. During a briefing I had with Western Power, which was arranged by the Minister for Energy a little while ago, I learnt that about 900 of those units were expected to be put into my electorate, which is a huge amount. In fact, in most of the area roughly between Latham and Perenjori, across to Carnamah and Coorow, many farms will be going off the grid for good. They will have these standalone units. It is interesting that the standalone units will have costs attached. If people in that area want one with a new connection, it will cost \$170 000 up-front, which is very significant. That shows the difference between Western Power and a private provider doing some of that provision, because when Western Power is asked by a person who might want the option of doing their own power rather than accessing the standalone unit, Western Power will pay that person \$50 000 to go off the grid, if you like. Apparently the view is that it can be done privately, adequately, for about \$50 000, whereas \$170 000 is the cost to Western Power, or to the customer, if they use the Western Power unit. There is also the issue of what to do with a town like Latham if the rest of the network around it has been taken down because all the farming area has been put onto standalone units. Is there some sort of a local solution for the town? Standalone units are not big enough for a town that size. The wheat bin there would take a lot of power. There are still a number of residences and there is considerable demand for a standalone system. I put the suggestion to the representatives there that perhaps they could look at enabling some small community-based power supplies to go in there, and I was told that it would be considered to be privatisation by stealth. Apparently there is a bit of politics involved there and it was felt that that might be in some way privatising Western Power. I think it is actually about looking for the most efficient way to provide power in areas of little interest to Western Power. I would imagine it would be very expensive for Western Power to make some of those solutions work.

I turn to some other matters across the electorate. I start with the Mullewa Health Centre. I am glad the Premier is here because I raised the issue of the Mullewa Health Centre with the Premier some time ago in this place. It might have been around budget time in 2021 or 2020. Anyway, at the Premier's invitation I wrote a letter to him about Mullewa in May 2021, and he was kind enough send a reply to me, dated, I think, 23 June 2021, so now nearly a year ago. He said —

... in relation to the Mullewa Health Centre redevelopment project. I acknowledge that the redevelopment of the Mullewa facility to deliver infrastructure that supports contemporary health care provision has been a protracted situation for the community ...

It goes on to say that after a review, additional scope was now included in the proposed build to enable the provision of 24-hour care for respite, palliative care and community renal services. The letter then goes on to talk about some of the process that might follow from there. I am grateful that those issues are being examined, but when I look at the budget, I still see that the only reference to Mullewa that has ever been in the budget is under a program called “primary health care demonstrated site initiative”, and that has not had any additional funding attached to it that I can see. It stands at \$7.7 million this year and \$500 000 next year. That program has stayed at around that level for about six years and still includes a little bit of money, I think, for the Dongara centre, which was originally part of a \$12 million to \$13 million build between the two when first announced in about 2016. I would like to see

some action on that and some more money attached to the development at Mullewa because it has been a long time. The old hospital there has been allowed to fall into a state of neglect and it is very debilitating for the community. It is disheartening and morale sapping for the community for that not to be addressed. I would love to see that addressed as soon as possible.

I turn to other matters of note in the midwest that I would like to raise, the next being the Geraldton port. There has been an announcement. The Minister for Transport; Ports has announced a very large commitment of well over \$300 million towards development of the Geraldton port. This is in part due to increased activity in the midwest. I will talk a little bit later about mining activity, but there is also a very strong situation with Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd deliveries of grain into that port. My concern, though, is that that \$300 million-plus investment is a bit of an Oakajee port killer, if you like, in that we will never see Oakajee develop because the Geraldton port is increasing its capacity by so much that it will not necessarily lead to the development at Oakajee. The problem with that is that even if there is a bit of extra depth in Geraldton, it will still be capacity-constrained in terms of the size of the vessels that can go in there because it is relatively shallow. That was the whole idea of Oakajee: the bigger vessels would come in there and that would drive down the cost of transport for people in the midwest.

Another matter of note regarding the Minister for Transport is the situation at Jurien Bay marina. It is rather disappointing to see that there is no funding for the situation at Jurien Bay, a longstanding matter I have raised here in petitions, grievances and discussions with the minister. I received a letter from the minister explaining the situation. I am pretty annoyed about that letter, to be honest, because she said in that letter that she acknowledged that there was a longstanding problem and that she had advocated for the marina in the midyear review and again in the budget, but that she was looking for a federal contribution. I have not heard of the need for a federal contribution; it is a state asset. There is over \$5.5 billion of surplus. I would have thought that the state was well placed to solve the problems with Jurien Bay marina. She went on to say, according to my notes —

I note the current Federal Minister for Transport is a member of the National Party. I'm sure your community would be interested to know in what attempts you've undertaken to secure a support for this project from your federal National Party colleagues.

I am happy to say that the National Party candidate in the electorate of Durack, former member for Geraldton Ian Blayney, will be only too happy to take up the matter of Jurien Bay marina with the National Party federally should he be elected on Saturday, so there will be interaction in that regard. I also point out that I would have gladly taken up the issue of Jurien Bay marina with the federal government if the minister had included me in the discussions. I did not know, and I still do not know, exactly what the business case looks like. It is pretty hard to advocate for something when I have not been told the time line for the project and when the state government may be looking for the money. The last thing I heard from the minister was that she was waiting for environmental approvals, not for finance. If I had known that she needed money from the federal government, I would have gladly advocated on behalf of the Jurien Bay community to try to get that money, just as the member for Central Wheatbelt and I advocated, along with 49 shires, to get funding under the wheatbelt secondary freight network some time ago. I think Michael McCormack was the minister when that announcement was made. That project is still bringing benefits to wheatbelt areas, and I am glad to see that now funding has been announced by Canberra to enable the development of the midwest secondary freight network. I have been working with the country shires of the midwest region to get that project up and running and I am very, very pleased to see it happen. I can tell the minister that I am in touch with the National Party ministers in Canberra, and when there is an opportunity, we do advocate. When Warren Truss was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, he was instrumental in making sure that money was put towards Great Northern Highway. I think he pushed in excess of \$300 million into Great Northern Highway. He also insisted on the development of the New Norcia bypass against the direction that the state wanted to go. In fact, he told me that he said to the relevant state minister at one point that the state would not get any funding unless he saw a project for New Norcia on his table. That is the level of interaction we can have if we are actually included in the discussion.

I would also be keen to see funding for the Northampton bypass, and I have raised this many, many times. It is part of a wider transport network in the midwest to go from Dongara. Pell Bridge in Dongara is a limiting factor in getting larger vehicles up the highway, and the constraints of driving through downtown Geraldton, basically, in road trains are well known.

We then have the issue with the town of Northampton that will get very nasty in the near future because Strandline Resources is developing a mine at Coburn station just north of Northampton in the Shire of Shark Bay. That is progressing quite well. I have a son working on the project. He tells me the haul route is pretty well built, and a lot of the construction work is done. Very soon we will see hundreds of thousands of tonnes of mineral sand coming through Northampton, adding to the very heavy road traffic there already. The member for Central Wheatbelt knows this only too well, because we tried to do a press conference on the footpath outside the pub and, my goodness, it was very hard to do with those trucks running through all the time.

I am also disappointed the budget papers did not mention a passive rail crossing program, or none beyond the normal situation.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr R.S. LOVE: The member for Central Wheatbelt has advocated in this place to the Minister for Transport the need to take up the issue of improving rail safety at what are known as passive rail crossings, which are crossings that are not controlled by flashing lights, boom gates et cetera. There are many in the midwest and central wheatbelt. They are dangerous. We have been working with families of people whose loved ones have been killed at these crossings, and it is a heartbreaking thing. The Deputy Prime Minister put up \$180 million to assist with that program. He listened to the concerns of families and saw the need, but I am afraid we are not seeing any matching contribution from the state. This program is 80 per cent funded by the federal government and 20 per cent by the state government. We need this state government to put some money up—it will attract \$4 for every \$1 it spends—to fix the passive rail crossings, which are an issue right across our electorates. That is a small amount of money compared with some of the projects of this government.

I will talk about one in particular that is quite concerning in terms of its delivery—the Bunbury Outer Ring Road. Initially, this was \$850-odd million; now we know it has blown out to \$1.25 billion. Not only that, the scope of the project has retracted. Four of the proposed overpasses will now be roundabouts. The whole idea of ring-roads is that that they will be like a freeway. We will now have a freeway with four roundabouts on it. That is not a freeway; that is a suburban road. The government will spend \$1.25 billion to build an overgrown suburban road, and the southern section through Gelorup, to my knowledge, still has not had environmental approval. The government is building three-quarters of a road! It could well be that the Environmental Protection Authority says it cannot knock down these trees. What has happened is that the corridor was preserved from development; it is the only bushland left in that area that is of great value. The government now proposes to knock down bushland that is far more valuable than the wetland it protected on Roe 8 and 9. The government is proposing to knock it down for a project that has already blown out from \$850 million to \$1.25 billion, and it has gone back in scope. It is a worry.

In response to a question from Hon Dr Steve Thomas about how this project is going and what would happen if there were further cost issues, what is really worrying is that the government said it could seek further money. The government has been living in la-la land, where the Morrison government has been pouring money into the piggybank. It will not be the same after the next election if Anthony Albanese is elected. I do not think he will prop up every state government project that runs into trouble. An extra \$400 million has been put into that project on the flick of a pen. That will not happen again. I do not think Albanese likes this expression, but it is true that life will not be easy under Albanese. He will not be quite so willing to try to keep in the good books of the Premier and spend such huge amounts of money on projects without looking deeply at what they are achieving.

Funnily enough, there was a program announced a little while ago, last year I think, saying the government would “smooth” projects, which meant they were delayed. We had a white-hot development environment and construction costs were blowing up, so the state government smoothed those projects. One of those projects was the Yanchep rail extension; in fact, it did not have to smooth it because it was already stalled. It had been underspent by \$100 million in a year. The government could not spend \$100 million to deliver that project, and then it claimed it was smoothing it. That was another sleight of hand.

Another project that was smoothed was the Bindoon bypass. That project has some vital elements to it. It picks up on the investment in NorthLink WA and the \$300 million or \$400 million that Warren Truss enabled on the Great Northern Highway. It would make Muchea the centre of an efficient freight network from the northwest all the way to Perth. Muchea would be the place where triple road trains would break up, instead of what happens now where they have to go up to Wubin.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: Acting Speaker, I cannot hear the speaker here because of the conversation going on on the other side of the chamber.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): Member for Moore, you can continue.

Debate Resumed

Mr R.S. LOVE: I was saying that instead of going to Wubin, which has a significant facility now and does benefit from it—I feel a bit for Wubin because it is also in my electorate—that will come down to Muchea. There is an industrial park there. A structure plan was announced recently by the Minister for Planning, who is also the Minister for Transport who smoothed out the road project. Without that ability to bring triple road trains down through Bindoon, the Muchea industrial park will remain stalled. I also point out that in order to get the industrial park really firing, there needs to be investment in gas, electricity, water, sewerage et cetera. I heard from the locals that the entirety of that expenditure to get that industrial park up would be around \$42 million. These are the costs for

going into the region at the end of Tonkin Highway. It is regional, but it is the end of Tonkin Highway. Can members imagine how much more difficult it is in Dalwallinu, which also has considerable restraints on industrial and residential land? They do some pretty innovative things up there.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Mines and Petroleum, I have tolerated one conversation but I think an extra three might be too much.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I will try to remember where I was.

There was a proposal where they needed some land, and, quite innovatively, they turned an old disused golf course into a place for industry. They work hard but they are constrained by the heavy headwork costs and difficulty to get the government to be the developer of these types of things. I am very pleased that the member for Central Wheatbelt, the Leader of the Nationals WA and Leader of the Opposition, announced on Tuesday that she would, in government, provide a regional headworks program with a billion dollars attached to it over 10 years to provide communities with the ability to get their industrial and residential land up and ensure that their communities can grow and benefit. It is important in these towns to be able to take advantage of investments that are happening.

I turn quickly to some issues within the electorate of Moore. Many people think it is all farming, with Moora, Northampton, Dowerin, Goomalling and lots of farming communities, but driving around the electorate now, it is evident that most investment and employment comes from gas. I know the Premier is well aware of this. He has been up in Dongara opening gas plants et cetera. There is also a lot of mining activity. Up through Cataby, we see Tronox; down at Gingin, we see Iluka Resources; at Arrowsmith, hopefully we will see silica being developed; and in Port Gregory, in that neck of the woods, we see garnet. Karara Mining is on the eastern side with what I would say is a successful magnetite development. It is much more successful than the one that Clive Palmer seemed to be building. Along the western edge of the Darling scarp, which is the western edge of the Yilgarn Craton, some very interesting mineralisation has been found, including by Chalice Mining at Julimar. That is not without its controversies. Local people are concerned about the associated transport and its effect on the environment. At the same time, the area has a very exciting mineral deposit that would yield an enormous amount of revenue for the state if it could be developed in harmony with the environment. Further north up through Walebing, companies like Lione Resources et cetera are finding gold in the hills around Moora. It is quite amazing that in those traditional wheatbelt areas they are now finding significant mining deposits.

In fact, in recent times we have had great support from the federal government in some of those areas. Back in April, Keith Pitt was over here. It was good to catch up with him and spend some time there. We know that the federal government put \$49 million into the Australian Vanadium plant. It is building a plant in Tenindewa, which is between Mullewa and Geraldton in my electorate, where the vanadium from Meekatharra will be processed. Similarly, Keith Pitt made the announcement that Iluka would be receiving a loan facility at \$1.25 billion to build the rare-earth facility at Eneabba. Ironically, the weekend before that announcement, I was having a coffee in a little real estate agent-coffee shop in Jurien where they do a bit of both. I was looking at the “for sale” signs for Eneabba and Leeman. When I went there the following week, there were none. When I went back a week or so later, the ones that I had remembered being around \$60 000 were now priced at \$160 000 or \$260 000. That announcement has already brought a lot of interest to Eneabba and also Leeman, which used to be the base for many of the miners at Eneabba. When I talked to some of the people who work at Iluka Resources, they are thinking that their long-term future will be based in that area and they are thinking of moving there. That is a tremendous effort by our federal government in Canberra. Keith Pitt showed great support for Western Australia in doing that.

We can contrast that with the support shown by recent federal Labor governments. Do members remember Kevin Rudd and the 40 per cent mining tax he wanted to bring in? Then Julia Gillard actually brought in the 30 per cent mineral resource rent tax and the carbon tax, and I have seen articles that report Julia Gillard as saying that she might be gone but that tax will be back. It may as well be back if Albanese is elected. We know that his candidate in Swan, Zaneta Mascarenhas, has said she supports the carbon tax.

A government member interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is in the newspaper. I will happily show the member the article, but I have not got much time left so she will have to take it that I have the article right here with the candidate’s quotes in it.

A government member interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have the article with her quotes in it. The Australian Labor Party has a candidate in the seat of Swan who supports a carbon tax and bringing in a tax in that will cripple industry in Western Australia.

A government member interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am happy to show the member the article.

MS J.J. SHAW (Swan Hills — Parliamentary Secretary) [3.33 pm]: Perhaps the member for Moore can draw a breath and calm himself down. It is late on a Thursday. I appreciate that that can be a bit challenging. I am very pleased

to rise today to speak on the Appropriation (Capital 2022–23) Bill 2022 and the Appropriation (Recurrent 2022–23) Bill 2022. Over the course of this week, many others have spoken about the outstanding financial management and the state of the finances. I am not going to dwell for too long on that. I would like to speak to the implications that the announcements in the budget have for my electorate and then some of those announcements that are very pertinent to a project in my electorate. There has been quite a bit of discussion around the project. I would like to put on the record and give a complete picture of my view of the project just so that it cannot be misunderstood, because it is a very important project for not just Swan Hills, but the entire state and, I would argue, the nation. It is very important that people who are looking to understand what my perspective is are fully informed of it, and that selective quotes are not made. I want to go through that so bear with me, members.

Some outstanding commitments have been made in this budget for Swan Hills. Most importantly, a \$400 electricity credit for every household will address a lot of the cost-of-living pressures that my constituents are experiencing. Education funding is really important in Swan Hills, which has an extremely young population. This government is increasing education funding right across the state. Across Western Australian schools, \$6 billion in total will be delivered and \$595 million for new and upgraded school facilities. This includes a \$19.1 million expansion and upgrade at Anne Hamersley Primary School. I was there for the opening of that school, and, my goodness, has it grown at an exponential rate—like Malvern Springs Primary School. Two years ago we made a funding commitment to that school and I was actually at Malvern Springs Primary School yesterday and saw those new classrooms that we delivered in action.

In terms of other assistance for young people in the electorate, our Target 120 program is being expanded by \$11.1 million. That program will now be delivered into Ellenbrook, where, as I say, we have a high number of young people. It is no secret that we, as a lower socio-economic area, do have our fair share of difficulty with young people. The Target 120 program is targeted at young people between 10 and 14 years of age who are already having some unfortunate encounters with the justice system. It is intended to provide those young people and their families with wraparound services to try to divert them away from increased criminal activities and incarceration. That is on top of \$3.86 million that this state government has delivered for the Ellenbrook youth centre. I was very pleased to turn the sod on that project. That was a long time in the works and it was absolutely fantastic. This is not just about educating our children well; we also have to ensure that those who are perhaps not having the best in terms of life outcomes are receiving appropriate supports, and then the kids across the community also need places to go to and things to do. From a very holistic perspective, we are seeking to address the needs of young people in Ellenbrook.

In terms of community safety, an incredibly significant announcement was made of \$11 million for a bushfire-fighting large air tanker that will be stationed in Western Australia during the fire season. When we consider that we have just gone through the Wooroloo fires, that is of great comfort to my community. Bushfires are becoming a lived outcome, a real-world impact, of the changing climate for us in the hills. It was very pleasing to see that the budget also makes significant investments in climate action, with a range of funding initiatives to protect the environment and respond to climate change, including a \$500 million boost to the climate action fund taking the total now to \$1.25 billion.

The government has provided \$22.6 million for new charging infrastructure to expand WA's electric vehicle recharging network and \$36.5 million to provide 10 000 rebates of \$3 500 to Western Australians who buy a new electric or hydrogen fuel cell vehicle up to the value of \$70 000. In fact, electrification of transport is something I will go on to talk about.

Infrastructure is a significant investment area in my electorate, which hosts both the Ellenbrook railway station and the major arterials from Great Northern Highway, Toodyay Road and Great Eastern Highway, which is a major point in and out of my electorate. What we do to upgrade infrastructure is very material to my electorate. A record \$6 billion will be allocated over the next four years, with a couple of those projects in my electorate being very important. The first is the \$100 million for the Tonkin Highway corridor upgrades that will become the North Ellenbrook interchange. The interchange will be located between Maralla and Warbrook Roads and will make access to the NorthLink for people in North Ellenbrook much easier. NorthLink is a game changing piece of infrastructure, and I will return to that point.

The budget will also continue delivering funding for projects that are underway, including other Tonkin Highway upgrades such as the Tonkin Gap project, and the Leech Highway and Welshpool Road grade separated interchange. Those projects are important because they are part of a very holistic approach that this state government is taking to upgrade our entire freight and infrastructure network. It is important to appreciate that, because the project I will now move on to discuss is part of that complete picture.

As part of the WA recovery plan, the state government announced funding of \$10 million towards planning for the EastLink WA project. This project will link Tonkin Highway to Northam. It is known locally as the orange route, and it has been around for 30 or 40 years. When my family first moved up into the hills decades ago, there was an orange route, a green route, a purple route and a brown route. The orange route was settled on as a major

piece of infrastructure. It has been in the works for an awfully long time. It has bipartisan support from the state and federal governments and it is a significant advocacy priority for both the City of Swan and the Shire of Mundaring, which my electorate covers. This project has had an incredible amount of support for a very long time. It is a key piece of economic infrastructure. It is very important that not only the community at large is aware of the importance of it, but also, simultaneously, some of the community concerns that have been expressed to me are addressed.

The planning phase for EastLink WA is now underway. That phase is expected to take about three years. Construction will be commenced in stages as funding becomes available. There are three elements. The first stage is Reid Highway west of the Swan River, and a lot has happened there. If members drive along Reid Highway, they can see the duplication of Reid Highway that has been delivered under this state government. It is incredible. It was a one-lane terrible road that was a complete bottleneck. The duplication has been absolutely incredible. There will be continued upgrades to Reid Highway now as part of the EastLink project. The second stage is the Reid Highway, Roe Highway, Toodyay Road and Perth Adelaide National Highway to Clackline phase. That is the bit that goes right through my electorate. The third phase is Great Eastern Highway from Clackline through to Northam. That is not in my electorate; that is the member for Moore's patch. This project is a key part of WA's broader infrastructure and transport planning and will lead to a more efficient and safer freight network. It will enhance our economic capacity and will contribute to our sustainability objectives. It is important that that is understood, because there is a lot of debate at the moment around the sustainability values surrounding this project. It is important that we have the full picture. The project itself complements a swag of recent infrastructure upgrades, such as Gateway WA, the upgrades around the airport, which Anthony Albanese, as a former infrastructure minister, initiated; the Westport project that this state government is absolutely committed to delivering; the Tonkin Highway upgrades; NorthLink and the intermodal transport hub that will be located in south Bullsbrook in my electorate; and, as I said, the duplication of Reid Highway.

This is all part of a big picture of modernising and upgrading our infrastructure to ensure that we can modernise or deliver as efficient a transport, infrastructure and freight network as possible to help our economy grow and develop. It will deliver a range of local benefits. On Great Eastern Highway, it will considerably improve safety. That will help my constituents who come down Great Eastern Highway from Chidlow, Sawyers Valley, The Lakes, Mt Helena and Wooroloo. It will bypass the Mundaring town site. A hell of a lot of freight traffic that currently goes right through the heart of Mundaring town site will be bypassed. All the way down Great Eastern Highway, driveways from residences go straight onto a highway that carries heavy freight traffic. It is not safe. Great Eastern Highway is very densely populated. It cannot expand. It cannot accommodate any growth. There are far too many truck movements on Great Eastern Highway as it is. Anyone who goes down Great Eastern Highway knows how dangerous that steep descent is and how terrifying, frankly, the infamous Scott Street intersection can be. EastLink will also improve safety on Toodyay Road. There are also driveways straight onto Toodyay Road. Trucks go up and down Toodyay Road all the way. There will be grade separation and on and off ramps. Again, we have the infamous Red Hill descent, which is incredibly dangerous. Toodyay Road also cuts right the way through the centre of the Gidgegannup town site. Trucks speed regularly straight past Gidgegannup Primary School. It is not safe, it is not appropriate, and EastLink will divert those trucks away from the town centre.

The project will of course lead to improved connectivity for hills residents to the rest of the metropolitan area. We will be able to get from the hills down to the flats far more quickly. It will improve our commuter times. A lot of people from the hills drive to Midland train station, and this asset will directly decrease travel time to enable people to access the Midland train station more quickly. Combined with the upgrades to the Great Eastern Highway bypass and the Roe Highway interchange that are underway, it will improve our travel times and links to the airport. It will be a safer, better highway for everyone and that will mean more efficient transport use also for our road freight. It will contribute significantly to the modernisation of the entire freight network. An improved road system with fewer intersections will also lower carbon emissions from existing diesel combustion engine trucks. Projects such as this perfectly complement moves towards a more efficient and electrified truck fleet into the future. Electrified fleets should run on efficient, modern and safe roads.

There has been quite a bit of debate as well about this project on getting freight to rail. The improved interconnection that this asset will deliver with existing and planned transport upgrades, particularly to the intermodal transport facility where road and rail will meet planned for Bullsbrook, will expand the scope from freight to rail and on to Fremantle port and the new Westport facility. I want to dwell on freight to rail, because some of the things I have said about it have not been as well understood as they potentially could be. This project is an enabler of freight to rail. I fully support freight to rail, particularly given, as I said, its inextricable links with other infrastructure projects. I just want to put it out there that I absolutely support freight to rail. Freight to rail is a key component of this government's agenda. When we were elected, we set a target to lift freight to rail to 20 per cent for Fremantle port. That was met in 2018–19, with an average of 20.2 per cent. Fremantle port now enjoys the nation's highest mode share on rail. In fact, in April last year, at the Heavy Haul Rail conference, Minister Saffioti affirmed this government's commitment to freight to rail and spoke of the need for more efficient pathways to ports. This project,

its interconnectedness with the Bullsbrook intermodal terminal through the first phase of EastLink and the recent completion of NorthLink, is a key enabler for freight to rail.

I also want to underscore the importance of having a range of freight options, particularly given that we are facing, in real time, an increasing frequency of extreme climatic events. Members will be aware of the massive floods in South Australia in January this year that washed away significant sections of the Trans-Australian railway. Rail-based freight could not get to WA. This affected our supermarkets; it affected business continuity. It interrupted a whole range of normal activities and brought home to us that a dependence on one form of freight is probably not a good idea.

In response to the interruption, a land bridge was instituted, relying heavily on road freight. The debate about freight is not a zero-sum game. It is not one or the other, it is both. We need both rail and road freight and they should both be as modern and efficient as possible. I would argue that in caring about climate change, this project makes sense from both a prevention perspective, because it reduces emissions from road freight, and an impact mitigation perspective, because it will provide redundancy in the event of climatic events. There is no two ways about it: we have to try to act to prevent climate change, but we will increasingly have to respond to it, and I would argue that this asset is a key part in this state government's response to the impacts of climate change.

We need to modernise our eastern road transport connections. That is the last piece of the road infrastructure puzzle. In decades to come we know more freight will be coming from the east coast and Great Eastern Highway cannot be widened. There is far too much density between Mundaring and Midland and that stretch of road needs to be far safer. Toodyay Road, our major link to the wheatbelt, is also not suitable for significant increases in road freight. If we want a more sustainable, efficient road and rail transport network, we need the EastLink WA project.

Having said that, I know there are concerns in my community. I would like to thank the constituents who have reached out to me to share their views. I really appreciate it. People in my electorate are very concerned about the environmental impact. Certainly, this project will involve some clearing of vegetation. People are concerned about that and the impacts on wildlife. I say to my constituents that in 2017 I secured a commitment for a \$25 million upgrade to Toodyay Road. The initial plans rolled out for that upgrade involved quite a bit of vegetation clearing. I worked with the community and we advocated to Main Roads WA and achieved a 40 per cent reduction in the amount of trees and vegetation cleared in association with that project. I am very, very keen to continue to work with the community to advocate on this project to ensure that we get the best possible environmental outcomes when it comes to clearing and impacts on native fauna.

People are also concerned about the impact on watercourses and heritage. These are very legitimate concerns. In terms of the impact on amenity, people are worried about noise abatement.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms J.J. SHAW: If there is one thing I know from my experience of having the NorthLink project in my electorate, it is that these types of projects can have significant noise abatement. Again, I worked with the community in Ellenbrook and Bullsbrook to have their concerns addressed.

My constituents are also concerned about connections to local roads into town sites. These are incredibly legitimate concerns. I completely understand people's concerns in the wake of the Wooroloo bushfires that our emergency services have to have the ability to move around the local area.

As someone who has lived in my electorate and been a hills local for 16 years, I know how important the environment is. I appreciate the amenity and that is why I live there, too. I understand and deeply relate to these concerns. I will be side by side with my constituents to ensure that those concerns are communicated and those issues are addressed to the best extent possible. On 6 July last year, I sought and received a very extensive briefing from MRWA at which I clearly communicated all these concerns. Main Roads WA assured me that the concerns will be considered in the planning phase. The planning phase will last three years. We will need further funding for this project to proceed to construction. As part of the planning phase a number of studies are underway looking at vegetation, flora and fauna, heritage, hydrology, noise, and engineering and geotechnical investigations. I understand and share my community's commitment to sustainability values. I strongly encourage people to visit the website and look at the explanations and descriptions of the studies underway and particularly to review the sustainability report for the project. People will see that an incredible amount of thought is being given to incorporating sustainability values into this project.

There is also extensive community consultation underway. On 11 September, Main Roads held a drop-in session at Gidgegannup. I attended the session with Tania Lawrence, our outstanding candidate for Hasluck who is very connected to her community and really understands this project. We listened intently to the views that were put to us. Main Roads WA is currently seeking community views on access and connectivity. I really encourage people to engage in that process, which will be open until 30 June. The plan is to release a report in August, which again the community can review. People can subscribe to project updates on the Main Roads WA website.

This piece of infrastructure is needed for a range of reasons. It is needed because we must facilitate the development of a strong economy that will deliver jobs and prosperity across the state. We have to deliver this EastLink asset to increase the sustainability of our transport system, lower transport carbon emissions and facilitate initiatives like freight to rail. We need to improve the resilience of our freight network in the event of extreme climatic events. We need to improve local road safety and connect our hills communities in a better way to the rest of the metropolitan area. But there are important environmental and amenity considerations that the government must have firmly in mind as this project is developed.

I am always willing to meet with my constituents to listen to their views and discuss their concerns. I will work with them to ensure that our local voices are heard. I look forward to ongoing engagement with the many individuals and groups who have reached out to me. This budget will deliver key infrastructure that is necessary for the state. The EastLink project is necessary for future economic development, so I encourage people to fully apprise themselves of all the issues surrounding this project. I commend the bills to the house.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Treasurer) [3.55 pm] — in reply: I thank members for their contributions to the debate on the Appropriation (Recurrent 2022–23) Bill 2022 and the Appropriation (Capital 2022–23) Bill 2022. I am sorry I was not in the chamber to listen to many people's addresses.

I want to make a few points. A lot of work goes into the budget and I would like to thank the staff at Treasury, in particular Michael Barnes, Michael Court and the team at Treasury. It is an outstanding agency that has once again done a terrific job. The outcomes or the expenditure contained within the budget is the envy of the rest of the country. Under Treasurers and their colleagues in other states and nationally obviously look at Western Australia with some considerable admiration and perhaps a degree of envy. That is a good position for Western Australia to be in. We are very proud of the position we are in. Treasury staff worked very hard to create the budget. Obviously, they did the same last year and the year before in the very, very difficult COVID environment. The budget last year was late because of the state election and the year before it was late because of COVID. This year it was at the normal time in May. The last budget was in October 2021, the midyear review was in December and this year's budget was in May, so it has been an incredible period of work for Treasury staff, and I would like to thank them for that. Obviously, they have been working in the environment we are all in in which a lot of people have been unwell or required to stay at home because of COVID protocols. I thank Treasury staff for all their work.

I thank members for their support. The budget delivers a whole range of things. It delivers a significant surplus—the second biggest surplus in the history of Western Australia. It delivers major debt reduction of over \$2.5 billion. It will take the debt down below \$30 billion for the first time since 2014–15, I think it is—or around then. It will be significantly lower than the earlier government's projections of around \$44 billion. In effect, one-third of the state's debt has been removed in an environment in which we had to spend over \$11 billion on the COVID response. Doing the maths on that, it has been a remarkable period of debt reduction, surplus delivery and good economic management. Despite the criticism, that is a virtue for Western Australia, because as interest rates climb and other states' debt continues to climb, Western Australia will be in a unique position nationally. As we will be one of the only governments in the world in that unique position, we are hopeful and working towards strong credit rating assessments of our state. As Treasury constantly tells me, it is very easy to lose a credit rating, which obviously the last government did—it lost our AAA credit rating—but it is very hard and takes years of effort to regain it. We are doing what we can to perform well and show our good budget management.

I will give members one quick example of this. I note the Victorian government has been critical of Western Australia for what we have done. I also note that the Victorian government bid for and successfully secured the Commonwealth Games. That is a nice thing to have. The Commonwealth Games is a lovely thing to have. It cost Victoria \$2.6 billion. It is going to be a regional sporting event in Victoria at a cost of \$2.6 billion. Had we done that when the opportunity was open to us, that would have been, according to the Victorian experience, an added \$2.6 billion in an environment in which interest rates are climbing and there is nervousness about a soft world economy. We decided not to; our priorities are health and economic diversification. There are people out there saying that we should have got the Commonwealth Games. That would have just been a massive drag on the budget, as Victoria has shown, and we are far more disciplined than that. If Victoria or the other states want to complain about Western Australia's financial position, perhaps they should not do things like that. Perhaps they would have a little bit more credibility if they did not do things like bid for the Commonwealth Games and add \$2.6 billion to the credit card.

There is a record asset investment program of nearly \$34 billion contained in the budget, and there is an additional spend on health, including for our COVID response, since last year's budget and the midyear review. It is over \$5 billion—\$5 000 million—of additional spend. We spend the most on health per capita of any state in Australia.

There will obviously be significant investment in climate change initiatives.

One initiative that some members have mentioned, particularly the member for Kimberley, is the investment in remote communities. We have set up a \$350 million fund specifically for remote communities. There are 200 or

so remote communities and they have some of the most inhospitable conditions in the world. Obviously, housing provision and repairs and service delivery in those areas is very difficult. It requires enormous expense. We have set aside this fund. We would seek whoever is elected on Saturday at a national level to assist us with that expense. The commonwealth has been involved in remote community funding since 1968. Some of the remote communities formed around that time. In 1968, the commonwealth stepped in and said that the cost of service delivery in those areas—the remotest parts of the country—should be shared between the states and territories and the commonwealth. That was the arrangement until a few years ago, when the commonwealth government pulled out. We have put a massive amount of money in and we would seek some support from the commonwealth to match, or at least assist in, this ongoing effort to provide a decent standard of living for some of the most disadvantaged and isolated people in Australia and perhaps the world.

We have also put \$400 million of our surplus towards information technology upgrades. That is because across government, information technology is not a sexy issue. It does not win public support. It is not something that people march around the streets cheering about. But it does mean that we can have good service delivery and avoid service failure. There is \$400 million in this budget; there was \$500 million in the last budget. There will be a competitive process for agencies to access it.

In addition, we are providing cost-of-living relief. I know that the opposition has criticised it, but the criticism seemed to be that it was not enough and then the criticism seemed to be that we were giving it to everyone. Members opposite are walking both sides of the fence, and that is always a dangerous place to be. When they have one foot on either side of the fence, it is a dangerous place to be. As Joh Bjelke-Petersen said one day, “You don’t want to walk with one leg either side of a barbed wire fence.” We have obviously had to balance many things, but the \$400 electricity credit will reach everyone. As I mentioned in question time the other day, all those families in my electorate who never receive any support from government will get some cost-of-living support. It is not debt funded. The commonwealth’s fuel tax relief has just been added to the credit card, so that will have to be paid off in due course. The initiatives of other states and the commonwealth—I think the commonwealth has some initiatives for older Australians—as worthy as they are, are debt funded. Ours are not debt funded. We can do this while reducing debt. That is a \$545 million addition to help people. In net terms, it is around \$250, but in overall terms, it is a 3.8 per cent reduction in the overall cost of state government goods and services. That is important.

The opposition says that the government is just lucky. I do not see how it is lucky that we have reduced our recurrent spend over our first three years in office and we have taken the measures necessary to protect the economy and continue to deliver revenue for the first time in 20 years. Do members opposite think it is just a coincidence that the GST arrangement was improved? It was not just a coincidence. It was because of the election of this government.

In terms of the opposition’s complaints about the economy, today we have an unemployment rate of 2.9 per cent and one of the highest participation rates in the history of the country. The biggest complaint—it is strange—is that we do not have enough people for the roles. It is difficult to get the balance right so that we have exactly the right number of people for the entire number of jobs. In fact, it is impossible to achieve that. We have kept in place the low fees for TAFE courses, at a cost to the budget. We are also delivering the lowest unemployment rate in Australia.

As I indicated earlier, the opposition’s theme on Tuesday was “Why aren’t you reducing debt?” and the opposition’s theme on Wednesday was “Why are you delivering surpluses?” The two things do not compute. We are reducing debt. This is the third year in a row that we have reduced debt. We have taken a very cautious budgeting approach across the forward estimates. We do not want to put in overly optimistic estimates of our revenue and then spend accordingly and, as a consequence, have deficits and debt. That is why we have relatively stable debt levels across the forward estimates, certainly compared with those in other states in Australia, and a very conservative methodology for estimating our revenues in the state budget. That is just sensible budgeting. It is amazing that the opposition can criticise us on one day because debt is too high and then criticise us on the next day because we have a \$5.7 billion surplus. Every question yesterday was about why we have a \$5.7 billion surplus. If we do not have a surplus, we cannot reduce debt. We need to have a significant operating surplus to do that, which we do. That is the reality.

As I said, families will be given major assistance through cost-of-living relief within the state government’s capacity. We do not have massive capacity, but the major delivery mechanism we have for families across the state is through electricity and water charges, because we run the systems. The credit we put in place in 2020 was a good model. We have showed that it worked, and we have been able to replicate it this year.

The spend on health has gone from \$8.8 billion per annum in 2016–17 to \$11.6 billion per annum in 2021–22. That is a 31 per cent increase in health spend since the election of this government. That is a massive investment in the health system. The demand on the health system has been enormous. As I have said, I have seen it myself and there is a range of factors. As I said before, when general practitioners put signs on the door saying, “Do not come in if you have a respiratory illness”, which I find disturbing, it just sends people to emergency departments. That is the problem we face. We also have the lowest number of GPs per capita of anywhere in Australia. That is a federally funded matter. We also have people in hospital beds who should be in aged-care or disability beds. All

these things combine and they make the situation difficult, but we are putting in an enormous amount of resources. We are putting more beds into the system. We have done our best to deal with COVID. Members will have seen what happened in the health systems across Australia over the last two years. They will have seen the huge dislocation in the eastern states, and the delay in treatment that occurred in Sydney and Melbourne because of the COVID experience. Many people did not receive surgery or attention during the huge lockdown periods because the hospitals were overrun with COVID patients. That has caused a massive backlog to build up over there. We have not had in any way, shape or form the same experience here. But there have been huge pressures, as I said earlier, so we are putting in place an enormous amount of resources to deal with that, but it will take time. Most reasonable people who listen to the reasons for it and the issues behind it and who understand that we have the strongest spend per capita of anywhere in Australia will understand that there is a major problem that the government is doing its best to deal with. The health minister and I focus every day on how to alleviate the situation.

I know a lot of issues were raised about specific electorates. It is a good opportunity to raise those issues about members' electorates and I look forward to the estimates process and seeing whether I can answer questions on some of those specific electorate issues. I look forward to the estimates process next week because it will be a good opportunity to tease out the details of the budget. In overall terms, I think Western Australia more generally should be very proud of the budget. It has come down in the last days of a federal election campaign, so it probably has not received the attention that it otherwise would, but if we want a barometer for how well the budget has gone, we probably need only look at some of the reactions of the Treasurers over east. There is a sort of inverse relationship. The angrier they are, the better our budget is. That seems to be the way it can be judged.

As a state, we should all be very proud of what we have achieved. I am very proud of it. On every measure, the government is investing in the appropriate things, providing cost-of-living relief and a massive capital works program and ensuring that our priorities, particularly for health, climate change and remote communities, receive the attention they deserve.

I commend the bills to the house.

Questions put and passed.

Bills read a second time.

Pursuant to standing order 222, bills and estimates referred to Estimates Committees A and B.