



# Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION  
2024

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 17 April 2024

Uncorrected Proof

## Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 17 April 2024

**THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts)** took the chair at 12.00 noon, acknowledged country and read prayers.

### SHORT-TERM RENTAL ACCOMMODATION BILL 2024

*Returned*

Bill returned from the Council without amendment.

### LANDGATE ANNUAL REPORT 2022–23

*Correction — Statement by Speaker*

**THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts)** [12.01 pm]: I received a letter dated 15 April 2024 from the Minister for Lands, requesting that an erratum be added to the *Landgate annual report 2022–23*. The erratum corrects an error in the figure relating to the spend on My Media services on page 58 of the report. The incorrect figure of \$3 917.59 has been corrected to \$13 917.59. Under the provisions of standing order 156, I authorise corrections to be attached as an erratum tabled paper.

[See paper 2769.]

### CIVIL LIABILITY AMENDMENT (PROVISIONAL DAMAGES FOR DUST DISEASES) BILL 2024

*Notice of Motion to Introduce*

Notice of motion given by **Mr J.R. Quigley (Attorney General)**.

### IAN PARMENTER, OAM — TRIBUTE

*Statement by Minister for Culture and the Arts*

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Culture and the Arts)** [12.02 pm]: It is with sadness that I acknowledge the passing of Ian Parmenter, OAM, a Western Australian chef, broadcaster, author and much-loved personality.

Ian Parmenter was born in London in 1945 and cut his teeth as a journalist on Fleet Street before moving to Australia in the early 1970s. Initially working in advertising, Ian joined ABC Perth in 1974, where he worked behind the scenes as a producer and director. His notable roles included director for news and producer for the ABC of the first Leeuwin concert in 1988, which featured Ray Charles and the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra.

Described as a natural showman, it was perhaps inevitable that Ian's career led him in front of the camera. In 1992, he began hosting the highly successful five-minute program *Consuming Passions* on ABC television. This show, recorded from his home in Fremantle, and later in Margaret River, combined Ian's passion for food with his warm and cheerful personality and transformed Ian into a national identity. *Consuming Passions* produced a remarkable 450 episodes over 10 years and was sold to 15 countries.

In 1999, Ian moved to Margaret River and became a committed advocate for the food, wine and culture of the south west region and Australia more broadly. Ian continued to make regular media appearances, including his weekly "Foodie" segment on the ABC Radio 720 *Breakfast* program and held prominent roles in food events and festivals. Ian was the festival director of the highly regarded food and wine tasting event Tasting Australia, which is held biennially in Adelaide. During this period, Ian published several books of recipe collections, including *Cooking with Passion* and *Consuming Passions: Cooking with Ian Parmenter. Sheer Bottled Bliss*, released in 2003, traced his journey from being a city boy in England to Western Australia and his experience of moving to Margaret River to establish an award-winning winery.

Ian Parmenter was a stalwart and stoic supporter and agitator for the national broadcaster, the arts and ethical journalism. In 2011, he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for his service to the food and tourism industries as an event director, author, journalist, and broadcaster. Within his local community of Margaret River, Ian will be remembered as a huge character and a community-minded person who celebrated the rich diversity and distinct community feel of his adopted home. He was an enthusiastic advocate for local produce and the environment and was an ambassador for the region.

Ian Parmenter will be warmly remembered by all Australians. I am sure members of the house will join me in acknowledging the achievements of this Western Australian treasure and offer our sincere condolences to his wife, Ann, his family and his many, many friends.

**The SPEAKER:** Hear, hear. Vale to Ian Parmenter.

**HERITAGE COUNCIL — RETIREMENTS***Statement by Minister for Heritage*

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Heritage)** [12.06 pm]: I rise today to acknowledge the work and achievements of four members of the Heritage Council of Western Australia, whose terms ceased in December 2023.

Nerida Moredoundt retired as chair after serving on the Heritage Council in various roles since 2010 and making a significant contribution to heritage conservation in Western Australia. Nerida is a dedicated heritage architect with a keen understanding of cultural landscapes and the practical application of heritage conservation. Lloyd Clark was another long-serving council member. He also started his tenure in 2010, and ended his term as deputy chair. Lloyd's knowledge and understanding of commercial development within the heritage context supported the work of the Heritage Council to engage with owners to deliver sensitive and creative adaptations of heritage places. Sally Malone, an Albany-based urban and landscape designer, brought a regional perspective and an extensive heritage background to the council's deliberations. The final retiring member, Dr Erika Techera, is a legal practitioner and academic who is recognised for her contributions to the council's appreciation of the legislative environment and good governance.

As the state's advisory body on cultural heritage, the Heritage Council plays a key role in identifying and promoting state-significant historical heritage places. These places collectively tell the story of our state of Western Australia. Through the statutory referrals process, the council also provides advice on proposals that may impact cultural heritage significance and can guide proponents to creative solutions that respect heritage values. The Heritage Council continues to engage across all sectors to inform, advise and assist in delivering heritage outcomes. On behalf of the state, the council operates an annual heritage grants program worth \$1.2 million, which regularly delivers outstanding work in heritage conservation and supports owners who care for our state's heritage resources.

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As with all the state's statutory boards and committees, members of the Heritage Council of Western Australia bring a wealth of experience and understanding to their decision-making and provide a dedicated service to the state in their specialist field.

I am sure that members will join me in thanking our departing members, in particular former chair Nerida Moredoundt, and welcoming newly appointed chair, Darren Foster, and new members Flavia Kiperman, Graeme Gammie, Martin Silk and Rebecca Moore.

**MINISTER FOR HOUSING — UNITED KINGDOM VISIT***Statement by Minister for Housing*

**MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing)** [12.09 pm]: I rise to update the house on details of my mission to the United Kingdom from 2 December to 12 December last year. The main purpose of the mission was to investigate large-scale alternative construction and manufacturing methods and the ability to adapt them to a Western Australian context. It was a productive mission, with a number of tours and site visits at new and conversion manufactured housing sites, as well as tours of offsite manufacturing plants.

I first travelled to London, where I met with representatives from Laing O'Rourke and had the opportunity to tour a number of its project sites that are delivering regeneration and affordable housing options on a large scale via innovative offsite manufacturing technologies. I met with the UK Minister of State (Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety) and the City of London Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development to discuss their jurisdiction's utilisation of manufactured housing options and experience of large-scale redevelopments for social and affordable housing. I also took the opportunity to meet with the Lords Select Committee on Built Environment, which has investigated the barriers to the expansion of alternative build types, including offsite manufacturing.

It is very clear that the UK is experiencing many of the same pressures, such as construction costs and supply shortages. In London, I also met with several UK agencies including the Cabinet Office, to discuss their experience and what challenges they face working with new build technologies for housing and other applications.

I took the opportunity when in Retford, Nottinghamshire and Birmingham to tour some of Laing O'Rourke's advanced manufacturing facilities that contributed modules to the sites I had visited in London. In Retford, I toured the Centre of Excellence for Modern Construction. It is an advanced concrete products manufacturing facility that employs over 400 people. The site manufactures a range of components for use in major building and infrastructure projects, including floor slabs, pillars and a range of building facades. In Birmingham, I toured the Crown House Technologies facility. It is a 12 000 square metre manufacturing centre, employing over 1 000 staff, which prefabricates modular building services including mechanical, electrical and public health building services. In Scotland, I met with the CEO of Simon Community Scotland to discuss the success of its engagement hub and homelessness support model, which is recognised worldwide. I also took the opportunity to privately tour CCG Group Scotland's sites in Glasgow, including the Anderston regeneration project and the Willowbank conversion for student accommodation in central Glasgow.

It is clear that opportunities lie in large-scale redevelopments and that early engagement is the key to ensuring maximum efficiency in the projects and that this could be beneficial in an Australian context as well.

I table a copy of my itinerary.

[See paper 2770.]

### **HOUSING — WARANYJARRI ESTATE — BROOME**

*Statement by Minister for Housing*

**MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing)** [12.13 pm]: I rise to update the house on the Cook government's work to deliver housing in Western Australia's north west. Construction has commenced on stage 12 of Broome's Waranyjarri Estate, which will deliver a significant boost to the long-term housing supply in Broome. Forty new residential lots will soon be available as part of stage 12, including six lots reserved to deliver more social housing. Located just five kilometres north of the Broome town centre, the estate is part of the 700-hectare Broome North master-planned community, which will ultimately deliver up to 4 800 new homes for around 13 000 new residents in Broome. This latest stage is set to add 40 new residential lots just two kilometres from Cable Beach. The design of the estate offers climate-responsive design, sustainability, and technology-enabled community living with diverse, affordable housing options.

Works will also begin on the first phase of construction of Tanami Drive, which will link the estate to the iconic Cable Beach. Broome-based Roadline Civil Contractors will carry out the construction, having previously built stage 11 of the estate. The new stage, which is moving development of the estate west towards the coast, is also adjacent to a future shopping centre and within walking distance of Broome North Primary School and parkland. Titles for stage 12 are expected to be available in late 2024. When complete, Waranyjarri Estate is expected to be home to around 1 600 residents. This development is creating an accessible, environmentally conscious community that will ultimately bring more housing diversity to the area as the community continues to grow and thrive into the future.

### **PARTNERSHIP, ACCEPTANCE, LEARNING AND SHARING PROGRAM**

*Statement by Minister for Aboriginal Affairs*

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Aboriginal Affairs)** [12.15 pm]: I am pleased to inform the house that the successful Partnership, Acceptance, Learning and Sharing, or PALS, grant program is currently open for applications. This year is the twentieth year of the PALS program, which is open to all Western Australian primary and secondary schools to undertake reconciliation activities. Almost \$800 000 is available in this funding round, with grants of up to \$3 000 over two years, aimed to support projects that enhance the understanding of Aboriginal cultures, achievements and histories.

The PALS program aims to see Western Australian students gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and diversity of Aboriginal people and cultures. There are six categories of PALS funding: arts, community relationships, connecting to country and culture, inclusive environments, history, and language. Projects supported by the PALS program are wonderfully varied, ranging from excursions and incursions, murals and performances to yarning circles and bush food gardens. One great example of the broad impact of the PALS program is Harvey Senior High School, where 250 students participated in a week of cultural activities led by local Aboriginal community members. Activities included a smoking ceremony, traditional dance, art workshops, cooking and bush medicine classes, and a movie night.

PALS projects are individual to each school and provide an opportunity to celebrate local communities and inform a better understanding of shared histories and a unified future. The 2022–23 PALS grant program distributed over \$650 000 to Western Australian schools. This year, with a new online application process, more than 80 schools have already applied, and a number of grants have already been approved. Applications close on 8 May 2024, so I encourage any schools that are yet to apply to do so. I look forward to seeing the many positive outcomes this program delivers to the students and communities of Western Australia.

### **CENTRAL REGIONAL TAFE — KALGOORLIE CAMPUS — NEW FACILITIES**

*Statement by Minister for Training and Workforce Development*

**MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Training and Workforce Development)** [12.17 pm]: I rise to inform the house that on 22 March 2024, I officially opened the new \$10 million heavy plant and engineering trades workshop at Central Regional TAFE's Kalgoorlie campus. I was joined by the member for Kalgoorlie, Ali Kent, in touring the state-of-the-art facility, which is already providing a major boost for the goldfields–Esperance region by training more skilled workers for local jobs, including those in the resources sector. During the tour, I had the opportunity to meet Andrew, a local auto-electrical apprentice from Northern Star Resources. He told me that the upgrades to Kalgoorlie TAFE will mean that local apprentices and trainees like him will be able to gain industry-standard skills, making them job ready when they graduate. He also emphasised that in his situation, having grown up in Kambalda, the upgrades will support locals to learn and work close to home during and after their training.

The \$10 million upgrades form part of the Cook Labor government's record investment of over \$243.3 million into the TAFE capital works program, in which of 15 projects, nine are in regional Western Australia. As well as new workshop infrastructure, the upgrades include a refurbishment of existing workshops at the Kalgoorlie TAFE campus and \$2.4 million of industry-standard training equipment. We know that the goldfields–Esperance region is vital to Western Australia's economic prosperity and, like each of the state's regions, has its own unique workforce and training needs. Qualified tradespeople are in high demand in the region, with almost a third of the workforce employed in mining and demand expected to continue over the next four years. I am proud to be part of a government that ensures that all Western Australians can access high-quality training and TAFE facilities in their own communities.

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## LOCAL GOVERNMENT — LONG SERVICE LEAVE REGULATIONS

*Statement by Minister for Local Government*

**MS H.M. BEAZLEY (Victoria Park — Minister for Local Government)** [12.20 pm]: I am proud to inform the house of new local government long service leave regulations, introduced by the Cook government, that clarify and give certainty to the entitlements for Western Australian local government employees.

The new regulations will take effect from 1 September this year, replacing laws that have not been substantially updated since the 1970s. Around 23 000 Western Australians serve our community through their employment in local government, including many part-time and casual employees. These new regulations have been designed to ensure that their dedicated service is reflected in contemporary long service leave entitlements. Importantly, the new regulations improve the operation of the local government long service leave portability scheme. This means that when staff change employment from one local government to another, their previous service continues to count towards their long service leave entitlements. The new regulations provide for a longer permitted break in employment between local government employers while maintaining the employee's continuity of service. They also allow parental leave to count towards long service leave and provide options for employees to request advanced leave or to cash out long service leave. The regulations also deliver administrative improvements to streamline the transfer of entitlements when an employee moves from the employment of one local government to another.

Parents and caregivers, younger workers, and the thousands of women who work in local government in WA are particularly expected to benefit from these changes. I am advised that policy work on these regulations has been ongoing since at least 2013, and I am proud to finally deliver them on behalf of our government. I also acknowledge the important work of my predecessors in the local government portfolio—Ministers Michael, Carey and Templeman—during the development of these regulations. These new regulations continue the delivery of the Cook government's landmark local government reforms, which are the most substantial changes to the system of local government in Western Australia for more than 25 years. I thank the sector unions, the Western Australian Local Government Association and Local Government Professionals Australia WA for their engagement and input. More information on the new regulations is available on the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries' website.

## BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES REGISTRATION AMENDMENT (SEX OR GENDER CHANGES) BILL 2024

*Introduction and First Reading*

Bill introduced, on motion by **Mr J.R. Quigley (Attorney General)**, and read a first time.

Explanatory memorandum presented by the Attorney General.

*Second Reading*

**MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Butler — Attorney General)** [12.21 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment (Sex or Gender Changes) Bill 2024 will repeal the Gender Reassignment Act 2000, abolish the Gender Reassignment Board, amend the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1998, and make consequential amendments to other acts, to create a new streamlined administrative process for sex and gender recognition in Western Australia. Western Australia and New South Wales are the only Australian jurisdictions that require applicants to have undergone medical or surgical reassignment in order to change the sex on their birth certificate. All other states and territories have reformed their processes regarding the registration of a person's sex or gender. Western Australia is also the only jurisdiction in which a board determines a person's application to change sex. In all other Australian jurisdictions, applications are administered by the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. Through this reform, the Cook Labor government upholds an important value—that everyone deserves the respect and dignity of being recognised as themselves, and to have their legal identity align with their lived identity. These reforms will mean that trans and gender-diverse members of our community will no longer be required to undergo medical or surgical reassignment if they want to change their gender on their birth certificate. Significantly, this bill will implement a commitment taken to the 2017 state election to abolish the Gender Reassignment Board and ensure

that all trans and gender-diverse people have proper access to official identity documents that match their lived identities.

In January 2018, I asked the Law Reform Commission of Western Australia to report on issues and inconsistencies in WA's legal framework relating to the recognition of sex and gender. In the final report dated December 2018, the Law Reform Commission of Western Australia recommended abolishing the board and introducing a new administrative application process for people seeking to change their sex or gender on their birth certificate. Over 500 written submissions were received by the Law Reform Commission of Western Australia, the majority of which supported the abolition of the Gender Reassignment Board. Although many people had a positive experience with the board, others found the process difficult, archaic and onerous, and viewed the role of the board as unnecessary gatekeeping. I understand and accept that the current process is viewed as challenging and problematic to many. In December 2022, the government committed to repeal the Gender Reassignment Act 2000 and the Gender Reassignment Regulations 2001, abolishing the board and introducing a modern administrative process to change sex or gender to be implemented through the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. I am delighted to deliver on this commitment through the introduction of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment (Sex or Gender Changes) Bill 2024.

The bill strikes a balanced approach between providing ease of access to those who wish to change their sex or gender on their birth certificate and ensuring appropriate safeguards and thresholds, particularly for children. With the abolishment of the Gender Reassignment Board, the reforms in the bill are a significant leap forward for gender recognition in Western Australia and represent a key step towards a more respectful and inclusive approach to gender diversity in our state.

I will now take the house through the key reform features of the bill.

The bill will insert new part 5A into the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1998. Division 2 of new part 5A will provide an administrative process to change a person's sex or gender in the registration of the person's birth. It is important to note that the reform does not change the existing procedures that relate to the registration of sex on a birth certificate when a child is born. Currently, a person's birth certificate displays information against the following fields—surname, given names, date of birth, place of birth and sex. The reforms will enable a person to apply to the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages to change the registration of sex or gender on their birth certificate. Sex or gender classifications will be specified in the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Regulations 1999. This approach is similar to that in South Australia and the Northern Territory where reforms were introduced in 2016 and 2018 respectively. The sex or gender classifications I intend to prescribe in the regulations will be male, female, non-binary and intersex/indeterminate. I reiterate that these descriptors relate to those available for a change to a person's sex or gender under the new regime introduced by the bill, and not the descriptors available when a child is born.

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The classifications proposed for WA are largely consistent with those available in South Australia and the Northern Territory. The commonwealth government has also offered non-binary, indeterminate and intersex options on an Australian passport since 2011. Under the new process for WA, applications can be made directly to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages by adults—that is, persons 18 years and over. The reforms will remove the requirement for surgical or medical reassignment and bring WA broadly into line with most Australian jurisdictions.

Under the new process, applications for a change in sex or gender must be supported by a statement by a doctor or psychologist certifying that the person has received appropriate clinical treatment regarding the person's sex or gender. The evidence requirements largely reflect those in place for applications for an Australian passport. Since 2011, a person has been able to apply for an Australian passport in their preferred gender by providing a statement from a registered medical practitioner or psychologist confirming the person's gender.

Applications for children will understandably involve a few more steps and appropriate safeguards. Applications for children aged 12 years and over must be made by both parents or guardians and must be accompanied by a statement from the child consenting to the change. In addition, the supporting statement from a doctor or psychologist must certify that the child has received appropriate clinical treatment in relation to the person's sex or gender and that the child understands the meaning and implications of the application.

When making an application for a child, each parent or guardian must believe the child's sex or gender to be the sex or gender specified in the application. For cases in which both parents or guardians do not support the change in sex or gender, or when the child is applying with no parental support, a pathway for applications is provided through the Family Court of Western Australia. All applications for children under 12 years of age must be considered by the Family Court. The bill also contains provisions to expressly allow the CEO of children and community services to make an application when a protection order is in force in respect of a child. The provision ensures that consideration is given to the role of the parents before an application is made.

People who were born outside of Australia will be able to access a formal document that acknowledges their sex or gender. Currently, recognition certificates issued by the Gender Reassignment Board are available to adults and children who have been resident in WA for at least 12 months. To ensure continued access to a formal recognition of sex or

gender, division 3 of new part 5A of the bill provides for the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages to issue a document acknowledging a person's sex or gender. The availability of an acknowledgement document is significant for people who live in Western Australia but are not able to amend their birth certificate in their country of birth.

To apply for an acknowledgement document, a person must have been born outside of Australia and have lived in WA for at least 12 consecutive months immediately prior to the application being made. The application process and evidence requirements for adults and children for an acknowledgement document is the same as the process for a person born in WA applying to change their registration of sex or gender. This includes approval by the Family Court, under certain circumstances, for applications for an acknowledgement document for children. People born in other Australian states and territories will continue to have access to change of sex or gender processes in their birth state or territory.

Division 4 of new part 5A provides restrictions on changes of registration of sex or gender and the issue of acknowledgement documents. The first type of restriction is based on frequency of change. A person will not be able to change their sex or gender in the registration of their birth or obtain an acknowledgement document more than once in a 12-month period or more than three times in their lifetime. Changes made before the person reached the age of 18 are not counted for the purposes of these restrictions. These restrictions are consistent with the existing position for changes of name.

The second type of restriction relates to certain classes of offenders, such as prisoners and supervised offenders, who will be restricted from changing their sex or gender without first obtaining the approval of the relevant supervisory authority. Reportable offenders under the Community Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004 who change their sex or gender, or are issued with an acknowledgement document, will be required to report this change to the Commissioner of Police within seven days.

The bill provides for commencement on proclamation. This will allow time to draft the necessary subsidiary legislation and to develop and implement the supporting administrative arrangements across multiple agencies that will be required. Implementation of the reforms is a priority, and it is expected that the new processes will commence approximately six months after passage of the bill.

The Gender Reassignment Board has provided an important service to transgender Western Australians since 2001 and I thank the current and past president and members of the board for their contribution to the LGBTQIA+ community. However, it is clear that the more formal processes of the board are no longer appropriate and a more modern approach, as reflected in the bill, is now required.

In introducing this reform, the Cook Labor government acknowledges the tireless efforts of those individuals and organisations who have advocated for advancing equality for all, regardless of their sexual or gender identity. The government looks forward to engaging further with the LGBTQIA+ community in implementing the reform, to ensure it delivers on reducing barriers to accessing identity documents.

The bill strongly supports the government's recent commitment to WA's first LGBTQIA+ inclusion strategy, which will promote inclusiveness and wellbeing to ensure LGBTQIA+ people experience full social and economic participation and recognition. I acknowledge the presence in the chamber on this important day of the President of Rainbow Labor, Avery Wright, and Gabby Newman and Serene Moll. We welcome them to the chamber today to witness this historic occasion. They are all from Rainbow Labor LGBTQIA+.

With the reforms to gender recognition, I know many in the LGBTQIA+ community will be asking when the reforms to the state's Equal Opportunity Act will be introduced. Wideranging reforms to the existing discrimination protections in WA remain a priority for government, and a new Equal Opportunity Act is currently being drafted. The new Equal Opportunity Act will implement much broader protections for gender identity than are currently in place. I commend the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment (Sex or Gender Changes) Bill 2024 to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr R.S. Love (Leader of the Opposition)**.

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**ROAD TRAFFIC LEGISLATION AMENDMENT  
(INFRINGEMENT MANAGEMENT REFORM) BILL 2024**

*Third Reading*

**MR D.R. MICHAEL (Balcatta — Minister for Road Safety)** [12.39 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a third time.

I wish to thank a few people. During yesterday's second reading debate, contributions were made by the members for Hillarys and Burns Beach. I thank both of them for their contributions and their support of the bill. In particular, I thank the Leader of the Opposition. I did not disagree with a lot of what he said during his second reading contribution when he spoke about what the Parliament and the community can do to deal with road safety issues. Obviously, this bill is



one of them. Last night's consideration in detail was quite constructive. We went through some of the issues and what this bill will do.

I remind the house that if we were to synthesise this bill into a few key topics, the first would be the massive transformation of a new system of infringement management in Western Australia. It will move across from the Western Australia Police Force to the Department of Transport. Work has been ongoing to get that system right. We hope and expect that that system will be up and running on 1 July when this legislation takes effect. We discussed some of those key transition issues during consideration in detail last night. The old system managed by the WA Police Force is very much on its last legs. Moving from that system to a new system managed by the Department of Transport will provide a much better experience for people who unfortunately receive an infringement. Again, we hope that fewer and fewer Western Australians will need this service because they increasingly continue to do the right thing on the road. I hope that those who may not do the right thing from time to time improve their behaviour.

I think another road tragedy occurred today—one involving a motorcycle. We all need to be aware of the decisions that we and our family members make when we are on the roads. We are really proud of the work that we have done to upgrade local and state roads around Western Australia, but a lot of the deaths and serious injuries that occur on our roads are a result of driver behaviour. A lot of incidents can be prevented through a range of things, such as not drink driving, not speeding, keeping to the speed limit and looking at the conditions. For instance, if it is dusty, foggy or wet, people need to ensure they drive to the conditions. Drivers should not get distracted and not use their mobile phones while driving. There is a temptation to do so; I have that temptation. These days, mobile phones can be connected to most cars so we do not need to look at or touch our mobile phones. People get killed on the roads as a result of touching their mobile phones. Like all of us, that does not go through our heads when we are tempted to touch our mobile phones. I feel numb when I see the reports of people who have been killed on our roads.

Again, this is an important piece of legislation. The modernisation of the infringement system by the Department of Transport will allow people who unfortunately receive an infringement notice—I hope they do not—to either extend the payment date by a month or, as we discussed last night during consideration in detail, elect to enter into an instalment plan with the Department of Transport rather than suffering from increased costs, fines and fees and the indignity of the fine punted up to the Fines Enforcement Registry, which occurs now.

As we discussed yesterday, we will allow for those new technologies to come in. The procurement of the regional road safety trailers from the Road Safety Commission closed yesterday. The technology associated with those new trailers will be able to detect people not wearing seatbelts and using mobile phones, along with point-to-point speed cameras. They can be deployed in our neighbourhoods and on regional roads on which incidents of people being killed and seriously injured in crashes have occurred.

I thank the opposition and all members in this place for their support of this legislation and for their continued support for road safety in Western Australia. I commend the bill to the house.

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [12.44 pm]: I would like to make a brief contribution to the third reading of this important bill. As the minister said, we concluded consideration in detail last night against the backdrop of some rowdy celebrations in the courtyard. As always, I would like to put on record my thanks to the advisers for giving the best advice they could. They served their role on behalf of the state throughout the proceedings.

I also wish to put on record the support of the opposition for the Road Traffic Legislation (Infringement Management Reform) Bill 2024. We understand the need to ensure that the road toll, which is such a blight on the community, is reduced. This bill could be an important deterrent to people who do not do the right thing, including using mobile phones, not wearing seatbelts, speeding et cetera. The staggering number of incidents that were detected during the trial period indicates that there is still plenty of work to do.

We went through the intricate details of a number of matters, including the introduction of the legislation, which helped to explain the reasons some sections of the legislation were included and how the transition from the current system to the newer systems would occur, along with the fact that there may be new and evolving systems in the future as technology increases.

Before I conclude, I reiterate that the extra funding that will presumably come from some of those infringements being dealt with and the fines that would have been levied if those detections during the trial period were carried through and infringements issued were estimated by the Auditor General to be well over \$60 million. It is a very substantial increase in the road trauma trust account. We need to ensure that that money is spent wisely on the reduction in the road toll. In my view, the provision of an emergency helicopter in regional areas such as the goldfields and the midwest would be a tremendous way of using some of those funds.

I conclude by again putting on the record that we support the legislation. I thank the minister for his good grace as he went through the matters that we discussed last night and patiently provided me with the answers required.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a third time and transmitted the Council.

**CRIMINAL CODE AMENDMENT BILL 2024***Second Reading*

Resumed from 22 February.

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [12.48 pm]: I would like to make a contribution to the second reading of the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2024. The opposition will be supporting the legislation.

As we have seen in recent years—it has often been raised in this place—there has been a concerning rise of violent crime in Western Australia. The devastating rise in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic has been well demonstrated. Many people in public-facing roles found themselves at the blunt end of people’s frustrations. I am sure we all remember when supermarkets were systematically stripped of essentials. For some bizarre reason, toilet paper became more of an economic commodity than perhaps precious metals; it was more sought after anyway. I wonder whether garages or storage sheds are still stacked to the roof with toilet rolls, which are no longer as valuable as they perhaps were two or three years ago. We know that the people who often funded that behaviour were retail workers.

<006> R/2

I am sure that many people in this place have seen instances in which people have been abused. We saw incidences in which people fought over scarce goods. If there were limits on the amount that they could take, they shouted at staff. I think that highlighted that there was a level of disregard for the rights of those workers, which was being exhibited. Since that time things have perhaps calmed down a little; however, I do not think that we can say that people’s behaviour towards retail workers is as polite and respectful as it could be. There are circumstances in which people feel unsafe and they have been assaulted.

I want to send a clear message that violence is not acceptable, no matter who it is levelled against, whether it is a retail worker or somebody else captured under these enhanced provisions, under section 318 of the Criminal Code. I note that there are a number of other workers who are already captured under that code. Under section 318, a serious assault includes anyone who assaults a public officer; a person who is performing a function of a public nature; any person who is acting in aid of a public officer; or assaults a driver or person operating a vehicle travelling on the railway, a ferry or a passenger transport vehicle. It includes someone who assaults an ambulance officer or a member of an FESA or SES unit or VRMS group or a member or officer of a private fire brigade or volunteer fire brigade. It includes the assault of someone who is working in a hospital or is in the course of providing a health service to the public. It also includes assaults on workers contracted to the court or prison systems. Those people are already captured; however, this will add to the definition of people captured here. This will include retail workers who are operating in a shop or other premises selling retail goods.

The definitions of some of these matters are interesting and we will talk a little bit about the definitions. When the opposition had the opportunity for a briefing, it became apparent, to me at least, that sole traders were not covered by this bill. There is an amendment, which has been opposed by the government, to capture that matter. When that comes up the Attorney General can explain how that works. It seems that everyone has been considered except the person who owns the shop. As we know, many shops are operated by the owner—sole traders et cetera who are not employees; they are not employees of a company that owns the shop. They are a partner or a sole trader who is working in the business.

The bill will provide for a rise in penalties for assaults on workers, for common assault through to serious assault. The penalty will rise from 18 months’ imprisonment and a fine of \$18 000, or, if it is committed in circumstances of aggravation, three years and a fine of \$36 000, to a maximum penalty of seven years’ imprisonment. There will be a penalty of three years and a fine of \$36 000 if dealt with summarily, or 10 years if in company or armed with a weapon. I note that there is no minimum sentence. This is perhaps a signal to the judiciary that this is to be treated more seriously. It will be interesting to see whether the Attorney General could, in consideration or in response, perhaps provide an indication of whether is any statistical analysis on these measures that have been implied by increasing the maximum penalty. Have they led to any significant differentiation between the penalties, which are applied to those officeholders under section 318 and to the general community? If a bus driver is assaulted, is the penalty more than if it was a person in a park somewhere? That will be interesting to know, because then we will know whether or not this legislation will be effective and achieve what we hope it will.

We know that there is a rising tendency for violence in the community. If we look at figures in 2017–18 in regional WA, for instance, there were 14 537 offences against a person. That is a wide range of offences with everything from homicide, at the very worst, to threatening behaviour and assault and all things in between. If we contrast this with 2023, the number is 24 672. That is a very significant uplift in offences. Perhaps there is an increase in reporting, but I imagine there is an increase in the figures themselves. That is a nearly 70 per cent increase in violent crime in regional WA. In the seven years that Labor has been in office we have seen a staggering rise.

In the metro area in that same year, 2017–18, there were 29 476 offences, and that has grown to 37 691 in 2022–23. That is a nearly 28 per cent increase in the metropolitan area. The rise of violent crime in regional Western Australia is particularly damning. Although it is good to see that all the staff who work in shops will be protected, there are some

interesting exceptions, including contractors who may not be public facing but may still be on the premises. We will talk about that in consideration, perhaps. There are a few nuances in this bill that I think will be quite interesting to delve into.

Another area that I think has escaped attention so far from this government is the matter of another group of essential workers. Police and nurses are protected or mentioned under section 318, but we know there is a rising tendency to violence in the education system and yet teachers are not specifically mentioned in the proposed legislation. It could be argued that they are public officers and I am interested to hear the Attorney General's views on that; however, they are not specifically mentioned under the legislation. Perhaps that is an omission that could be looked at in the future. The other matter addressed in this bill is around the repeat offending for shoplifting and theft of goods under \$1 000 in value. There are interesting bits in there as well. If the person is a repeat offender, then it will remove the simple fine option as a punishment for that activity. It also says that offences that occur on the same day are treated as one offence. Someone could have a mini spree with a number of offences occurring on a particular day; however, only one offence is recorded for the purposes of this legislation. Can the Attorney General explain why that provision is there because that is something that I think would be of interest to the public? I find it a bit hard to understand because I would have thought they are separate offences.

I am interested to know whether there is statistical analysis on the rise of thefts under \$1 000, as we know the cost-of-living crisis is affecting many people in Western Australia. We know that that will be feeding into the decisions of some people to break the law and take something if they think there is little penalty.

<007> F/3

That may be feeding into the rise in shoplifting. We need to keep a tab on trying to understand how that has been moving in recent years. We have seen over the last three years, especially, rising inflation and its compression of people's household capacity to make ends meet, whether or not that makes a material difference to the number of shoplifting offences that are occurring.

I spoke earlier about the general rise in violence in regional WA. It is proposed that the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2024 will address violence against a particular sector of the community, but it will not necessarily do anything to address violence in the community more generally. I refer to an article from a recent edition of the Western Australian Police Union's *Police News*, about road trip taken through the Kimberley by the police union president and a communications officer who works for the police. It states —

As soon as we arrived at Fitzroy Crossing Police Station, all three officers were dispatched. And just like that, the station was empty. Not a person in sight to field calls from the public. Scary right?

Like Fitzroy Crossing, was Halls Creek. Not only were a majority of the existing staff Regional Shield deployments, but the station had many vacancies. Vacancies leading to existing officers working overtime and inevitably leading to burnout and fatigue. Which begs the question, is WAPOL and the State Government providing our officers enough incentives to relocate to bush? And is Regional Shield a short-term solution to a long-term problem?

...

At this point I figured how could coppers lives get any worse. It can! We end on Kununurra. Another beautiful tourist town, with issues similar to those prevalent in Broome. As I looked up at the surveillance in the station, I saw that every holding cell was full, and I am fairly certain had we not locked our car we would have definitely lost our travel gear.

Everyone told us, "lock your doors...not only at night, but at all times". It's unfortunate to have that unsettling distrust within your own community. To heavily rely on the higher powers to keep you protected. What's worse, is that the higher powers are being assaulted daily by those offenders. One of the foremost issues in the Kimberley is the alarming rate of police assaults. Assaults against police in the Kimberley were the highest for any regional WA Police district in the 2022–23 financial year, increasing 53.3 per cent from the year before.

That just goes to show what is taking place in regional areas. I am not picking on one particular area; I do not want to do that. I am highlighting that this has become an issue right across the state; it is an issue in the midwest and right around Western Australia. That staggering increase in the level of assaults on police—53.3 per cent over the last financial year—when they are protected under section 318 of the Criminal Code points to the fact that, on its own, this legislation is not a panacea and will not deliver safety for the people involved. We all need to be conscious of the need to do everything possible to bring down the rates of violence in our communities generally.

That points to the failure of this government to make good on some of its promises around police numbers and ensuring that police officers feel supported and safe. The Minister for Police conceded, after many months of defiantly denying there would be any problem fulfilling the Labor government's promise of boosting the force by 950 officers over four years, that he is, in fact, unable to fulfil that promise. That is a very big problem that is affecting the police, but no doubt other people in those communities are also affected.

Many people will have witnessed shoplifting incidents, for instance, and the reaction from the shop owner is often that there is nothing they can do and that if they go to the police, nothing will happen because it will not be treated seriously. Shop owners have often said that to me—that there is no response, or if there is a response, it is so slow that it is unrealistic to expect any action to be taken. There also often does not seem to be any willingness to take those matters much further.

While that is happening, I am concerned about the efficacy of the second part of this bill, around penalties for shoplifting and theft of amounts under \$1 000. If no-one is going to actively arrest offenders, no offences will be recorded and no history will be built up, so we need to strengthen community policing to be able to take action and take these matters seriously because the ability of small businesses to keep going and remain viable is materially affected.

On behalf of the very many small business owners I know who are desperately affected by increasing levels of shoplifting, my plea to the government is to enact legislation that takes this issue seriously and to ensure that there are sufficient resources in the community for active prosecutions when these offences occur, so that shop owners are not left in a very serious predicament. They feel that if they take action themselves, they might expose themselves to danger or claims of assault or other matters. That leaves them feeling very vulnerable, especially in very small workforce situations of only one or two people in the shop, as opposed to a large department store where there might be security and other measures to assist.

For those people, I think it is very important for signals to be sent that violence and theft are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. I hope the government is listening and will put in place measures to ensure that there is both legislative change and boots on the ground to carry out the necessary investigations, arrests, prosecutions and so forth.

In conclusion, I will wind up by saying that the opposition will support this legislation, but I point out that violence is not an issue in just retail circumstances; it is an issue everywhere in the community, and we know from the increase in domestic violence that there is a lack of safety in our community generally. We should be doing everything we can to make our communities safer places for all.

**MS K.E. GIDDENS (Bateman)** [1.08 pm]: I am really pleased to make a contribution to debate on the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2024. Many of the amendments we bring into this house for debate are administrative in nature, and although they are important changes to bring bills into line with modern and current standards, I know that this bill in particular is going to make a real and meaningful difference to the everyday lives of retail workers in Western Australia.

The bill addresses two key areas. The first is to amend the available penalties for repeat offenders who steal and the second introduces a new offence of assaulting retail workers. Both aspects of this bill will contribute to increased community and retail worker safety. The bill will also make Western Australia one of the leaders in Australia in moving to better protect retail workers, with only New South Wales and South Australia having similar legislation.

The retail sector in Australia is diverse and comprises anything from small family-owned businesses up to large, international retailers.

<008> T/5

But it is an important sector of our economy and makes an important contribution to Western Australia's employment and economic viability. Australia wide, it makes up just under 11 per cent of employment. In 2021, there were over \$341 billion of total retail sales in Australia.

I want to address first the part of this bill that increases the penalty for repeat offenders who steal. This is a really important part of this bill. It brings in line the opportunity for penalties that are consistent with community expectations around perpetrators who consistently steal with the knowledge that the penalties meted out to them are not severe. Spend any time on a community Facebook group, and members will find examples of people who report offenders just walking out of a retail store—that is, brazenly walking out maybe with a trolley of food—or, as happened with me standing in a Bunnings line waiting to check out, somebody just walking out with a box under their arms. Examples like this across the community exist. Not that Facebook is my go-to place to get my feedback on community expectations, but I think it is fairly accurate in this instance. A comment often seen is, “Oh; nothing happens to these people. They just do it and there is no consequence.” The amendment in the bill will enable magistrates and the judiciary to impose far more significant penalties for those who regularly and repeatedly steal from shops. This is very important. My brother-in-law and my sister come from a family of small business owners. In this case, my brother-in-law owns a Toyworld store. It is a hardworking business. They turn up and put their own money on the line to run and operate these businesses. He reports that people often just walk out stealing scooters or other expensive parts. It is a real cost to those small businesses, often family businesses. The opportunity to impose up to two years' imprisonment or \$24 000 will act as a significant deterrent, and I think it is important to bring those penalties in line with community expectations.

This bill will introduce a new—sorry I do not know what the word is—crime —

**Ms J.L. Hanns:** Offence.

**Ms K.E. GIDDENS:** Thank you. This bill introduces a new offence for assaulting retail workers. Now, of course, assault is already a crime across the community, but, as we have heard, this bill will make it a particular offence to assault retail workers. It is important that we recognise the vulnerability of retail workers. They often work alone —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Ministers! You can do your fashion chat outside the chamber. It is disturbing the member for Bateman.

**Ms K.E. GIDDENS:** Nice ties, though, ministers!

Retail workers very often work alone and often young people in their first jobs, which makes them a particularly vulnerable group. Of course, they are just going about their duty in their workplace. It is very important that we recognise that they have the right to be safe in that workplace, just as every other worker has a right to be safe in their respective workplaces. The penalty for assaulting retail workers will increase to seven years' imprisonment or three years' imprisonment and a fine of \$36 000. This will create a new provision to apply these higher penalties, as I said. This already exists for other key workers under Western Australia legislation. In fact, the Criminal Code—for lawyers or members interested in particular sections—section 318, already includes assaults on public officers, passenger transport service drivers, ambulance officers, firefighters, medical staff, court security staff and prison officers.

What has brought about this amendment to the code? A 2023 national survey by the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association that attracted over 4 600 responses showed that 87 per cent of those respondents experienced some form of abuse from customers in the last 12 months. Of those, 12 per cent had experienced physical violence; nine per cent had been spat on; and 15 per cent reported abuse being sexual in nature. Disturbingly, there was a 56 per cent increase of reported physical violence when compared with 2021 figures. I have already alluded to some of the vulnerabilities that some retail workers may have. This survey demonstrated that women are disproportionately affected by the verbal and physical abuse by customers in their retail work. Young women in particular, probably not surprisingly, are the demographic most likely to experience verbal and physical abuse in their retail work. This is closely followed by young male workers. My first job that supported me through university was working at Sunglass Hut. That abuse is a very common experience. I think most of us have a retail worker in our families. Either you started there yourself or you are still working in that field.

I now outline some of the stories reported under this SDA national survey from real retail workers —

Punched and threatened to have a knife pulled.

That was from an 18 to 25-year-old male —

Verbal, physical, knives shown, things thrown at you, exposure of inappropriate body parts

That was a report from a female retail worker aged between 46 and 55 years. Another young female worker reported —

A man tried to sexually and physically assault me in the cool room. He had a knife on him. He went to jail and is now out on parole.

These are horrific stories. We like to think that they are rare, but, as that survey demonstrated, a significant number of our retail workers are experiencing abuse and assault in their jobs. It is unacceptable.

Support for these reforms is wide across the community. Last November, Hon Kate Doust, MLC, who is a former SDA organiser and a very staunch advocate for the rights of all workers, in particular retail workers, last November tabled two petitions in the upper house with over 9 000 signatures from members of the Western Australian community supporting the amendments in this bill. I acknowledge Hon Kate Doust's role in particular for bringing this to the awareness of the Parliament of Western Australia. These reforms have support among our major retailers as well—namely, Woolworths, Coles, Hungry Jacks, Bunnings, BWS Liquor, Big W, Officeworks and Dan Murphy's. The CEO of Australia's peak retail body, the Australian Retail Association, welcomed these plans. CEO Paul Zahra said —

“Actions speak louder than words, and we're extremely pleased that Premier Roger Cook has responded to our views, our member's views and the SDA, and, more importantly, the needs of retail workers by taking strong action to deter these violent incidents and keep our retail staff safe.

He went on to say —

“Recognition and thanks must also go to SDA secretary Ben Harris for his significant work and collaboration on this issue.”

It is on that note that I would like to talk a little bit more about the important role of the SDA and secretary Ben Harris in helping to shape this legislation. The SDA—Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association—is one of the largest organisations in Western Australia with nearly 20 000 members representing workers in the retail, fast-food and warehouse industries. This large membership base speaks volumes to the hard work that the SDA does on a daily basis to improve and advocate for the working conditions of retail workers in Western Australia; that includes safe wages, but, importantly in this case, safety.

Worker safety is everyone's business and it is a fundamental right of all workers. That is the belief of the SDA, and it is the belief of the WA Labor Party. The Cook Labor government believes in doing what is right for Western Australia.

<009> M/G

We are doing what is right for retailers and small business owners by cracking down on repeat stealing offenders and the costs to those businesses. We are doing what is right for the community, reducing the costs of stealing and assaults across our community. We are doing what is right for the police, giving them the tools to respond to stealing and assault offences. We are doing what is right for our judicial system, giving magistrates more sentencing choices in line with community expectations. Most importantly, we are doing what is right for retail workers, ensuring that they enjoy the right to go to work and be safe. There is no excuse for abuse. I congratulate Attorney General John Quigley and Premier Roger Cook for bringing this bill to the house and stand here to give it my full support.

**MS C.M. ROWE (Belmont)** [1.20 pm]: I rise today to make a contribution to the debate on this critical piece of legislation, the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2024, which seeks to address two really pressing issues that especially affect people in my community—assaults on retail workers and penalties for stealing offences, especially continual and repeat stealing offences. I am incredibly proud to be speaking on this bill today because I think this is such important legislation that has come before us. I acknowledge the work of the Attorney General in bringing this bill to our house. Our party has a really strong and proud history of supporting retail workers, and I think that this bill reflects this commitment to protecting workers' rights and safety in the workplace. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association of WA—the SDA—the union that represents retail workers. We especially acknowledge its secretary Ben Harris for his and the union's tireless work each and every day to make sure that workplaces are safe for its members, and for advocating for these important changes to the Criminal Code that we are debating here today, because the union was very instrumental in working collaboratively with the government to bring this legislation to fruition. I acknowledge its work on this bill.

Within my electorate, retail is a really important trade. It is the second largest employer in the City of Belmont. I have the Belmont Forum shopping centre, Crown casino and also DFO Perth in my electorate, so it is a significant employer. All those venues are well attended by certainly me and others across the whole state. They are large centres for not only retail workers, but also a lot of small businesses operate in those areas, as well. Retail workers and owners of retail shops are affected by both elements contained within this bill.

I will begin by talking a bit about the impact this legislation will have for retail workers. Obviously, they play a critical role in our everyday lives. That was really obvious during the pandemic. Retail workers were opening up their shops each and every day and facing what was a really hostile community, as everyone seemed to be panicking about getting their normal day-to-day goods, especially for some reason toilet paper. We saw an increase in hostilities towards retail workers, but they, like all workers, fundamentally have a right to feel safe in their workplace. That is something that we in the Labor Party philosophically feel very strongly about.

The SDA conducted a survey right across its membership. I think it had over 4 600 respondents. Respondents to this survey reported that they had seen an increase in the level of abuse. From 2021 through to 2023, there was a major jump of 56 per cent in instances of abuse. That is completely unacceptable. Again, this is not just a small number of survey respondents; 4 600 is a lot of people saying that they had experienced abuse. The numbers do not lie. That tells a really bleak story in terms of the challenges that retail workers face. I note that women are over-represented in these workplaces, and, as a previous member outlined, a lot of young people also work in retail. But regardless of gender or age, the prevalence of this experience of retail workers is shocking. As I said, 87 per cent of retail staff have experienced some form of abuse. That is completely unacceptable. It should not be tolerated.

I want to highlight what abuse can be. It can be anything from verbal abuse through to physical abuse, the threat of sexual assault, being threatened with a knife or being spat on. As I mentioned, women are disproportionately represented in these workplaces, so I think that these measures are very much welcome, but it is completely unacceptable that this is occurring in the first instance. I think it is fantastic that we are introducing this legislation because the penalties associated with the new offence defined under this bill mean that there will be appropriate deterrents to this abuse occurring to the same extent. That is certainly what we anticipate and are hoping will be the outcome.

The higher penalties are significant. This legislation will basically bring assault on retail workers in line with other forms of assault that are already in place under law. The maximum penalty will match what is in place for serious assault. That will be seven years' imprisonment or three years' imprisonment with a fine of \$36 000, and, if the offender is armed or in company with another, it will be 10 years' imprisonment. I think that these proposed amendments send a really clear message that violence will not be tolerated and those who perpetrate it will face serious consequences. This is also in line with what other jurisdictions have done to protect their retail workers. New South Wales and South Australia have already introduced similar consequences; I think that is important.

This legislation will insert the new offence so that an assault against a retail worker will have the same penalty as serious assault, but it also defines what constitutes assault. The definition captures the direct and indirect application of any kind of force to another person. Obviously, these changes are very much welcomed by many in my community.

Another element of this bill that I want to touch on is the enhancement of penalties for stealing offences, which aims to target repeat offenders. Stealing from retail establishments has become really commonplace in my electorate. Certainly that can be seen not only in the Belmont Forum, but also the service stations, small businesses, delis, pharmacies and so forth right across my electorate. They talk to me in despair at the fact that there is nothing they can do other than watch people on a regular basis come in and walk out with arms full of things from their shop. I think that implementing these stricter penalties for people who are repeat offenders with the possibility of imprisonment will hopefully mean that they are no longer able to evade consequences, and this will act as a real deterrent. I think that will be especially impactful for those retail businesses in my community, but I was also pleased to see that the courts will have a greater flexibility to provide tailored approaches in situations in which the underlying problem for the person who is engaging in these behaviours is a drug, alcohol or some other substance dependency. There will be allowances and support provided in those instances. I am very happy to see that, too.

In conclusion, I think that by implementing these reforms, we will not only strengthen the rights and safety of retail workers but also address a scourge of theft, especially repeat offenders. I think it is a welcome thing that we are going to see justice served to those people. As I said, both those elements will be impactful for retail workers and business owners alike in my community. I once again thank the SDA for all its hard work and, especially, the Attorney General for bringing this important bill to the house.

<010> C/G

**MS J.L. HANNS (Collie–Preston — Parliamentary Secretary)** [1.29 pm] I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2024. Previous speakers went through the specifics of the bill, so I will not replicate that in my contribution today. I acknowledge and commend the introduction of a new offence of assault on retail workers, and I will begin my contribution today by giving some context around why I feel so strongly about this issue.

As a teacher and vocational education and training coordinator for many years before entering this place, one of my main roles in schools was to find appropriate work placements for young people to gain often their very first step into the world of work while still being supported in their studies at school. Retail operators throughout my electorate were overwhelmingly very grateful to host work placement students in their businesses. I want to thank those businesses because they do an incredible job in supporting young people in their first steps into a workplace. I also outline that for many young people, this is their first experience of work. They learn new things, such as customer service skills and how to operate EFTPOS machines, that are sometimes tricky and take some time to learn. We have all had a first day on a job—all of us. There are a lot of things to take in, and particularly so for a young person on a work placement.

In that context, and as the member for Bateman spoke about, we are reflecting on the results of the surveys. Overwhelmingly, young people and women make up the retail sector workforce and they are very vulnerable to abuse in many forms, which, again, have been outlined today. We really need to make sure that the first experience for young people in their work placements, such as in the retail sector, is a really positive one. Young people were over-represented in the survey results. That means that some young workers, in their very early stage of gaining confidence in a workplace, have been absolutely devastated by an assault. I do not think we could find any young person who has not been intimidated by someone who has come into their workplace, such as a disgruntled customer. When a person is young, they do not have the experience to deflect and say that that person was clearly having a bad day. A lot of the young people I worked with took such things really personally and it had an impact on their feelings about work experience and work in general.

I note that the member for Moore took us back to the days of COVID, when all of us were guilty of driving around trying to find supermarkets that had toilet paper in stock. I think the member for Moore was right; there are potentially some garages, bunkers or something full of toilet paper. It does not expire, so that is a good thing, I guess. I, too, remember driving from Collie to all the Woolworths or Coles stores in Bunbury, Australind and Eaton that had displayed that they had toilet paper in stock, but when I got there it had clearly sold out in the first 10 minutes of the shop being opened. We reflect on that now and say that it was a really strange time, but it was a crunch point for retail workers. When I went in to try to find staples for my family's cupboards, whether it was the things that we were looking for or toilet paper in this instance, there was not a day when the retail workers would apologise and say that the store had run out of those things. I would say, "That's okay; no worries. I'll pop back tomorrow and see if you've got some then." They would say, "At least you're nice about it." That really struck me because, clearly, I was possibly the only person who had been reasonable to them that day. It was really disappointing that that was the experience of retail workers during COVID, but it is also really disappointing to see that that has continued and that we need to introduce this bill to support retail workers.

I want to highlight some of the amazing retail excellence that happens in my local community. I know that on Thursday nights, a number of members in this place will get in their cars and drive back to their respective homes. I use Forrest Highway on a regular basis. I have tried to time it so that my car is full of petrol by the time I leave Collie on Sunday night, but I sometimes have to stop on Forrest Highway and refuel before I get back to Collie. I stopped recently at Ampol Foodary in Baldivis. It was late at night, about eight o'clock, as I had been stuck in traffic on the freeway on the way home. Mick at Ampol Baldivis served me and was very polite. I could not remember my bowser number, but he

knew what it was. Thank goodness your name or face is on the side of your car so they recognise you! He finished the transaction and then said to me as I was leaving, “Have a really safe trip, Mrs Hanns.”. That was the loveliest thing that anyone has ever said to me in terms of appreciating that what we do as members of Parliament requires us to be on the road a fair bit. Good on you, Mick, at Ampol Baldvis. If anyone calls in and sees him, please say hi; he is a great young man. Another place that I frequent, I have to say, is Shota Sushi in Eaton—try saying that quickly 10 times! I am a regular at Shota Sushi and Winnie is one of the amazing proprietors there. When I walk around the corner at Shota Sushi—jeez! I am going to keep messing that up when I say it—Winnie says to me, “Hi Jodie, how are you? Do you want your regular?” She knows that I order a tuna and avocado sushi roll with brown rice and a chicken and avocado nigiri. Before I even get to the counter, she will be packing up my order. That is incredible customer service from an amazing retailer in my electorate. It is the best sushi, I have to say. If members are ever at Eaton Fair, please drop in and say hi to Winnie.

I thought I would also touch on the fact that retail workers provide an important service to people in our community. A lot of retail workers I have spoken to have said that they are often the only person with whom somebody might have an interaction in their day. I am referring to lonely people or older people, who come out and have their weekly coffee in a particular coffee shop and form a really great relationship with the workers in those places. Retail workers provide an outstanding service that involves not just serving a person their regular sushi or coffee or whatever it is, but also looking after a lot of vulnerable community members. My daughter worked at McDonald’s when she was going through high school and she had a regular customer who came in on Wednesdays. She did not know his actual name, but she called him “Mr Piccolo” because he would come in on Wednesdays, order a piccolo, sit down and have it, and then off he would go. That was his Wednesday routine. A lot of our retail workers develop those really lovely relationships with their customers and do an incredible job. I mentioned that my daughter worked at McDonald’s. She now works at an amazing little cafe called Wassup Dog Cafe in East Perth and is one of the baristas. I walked in there yesterday to grab a coffee and say hello to her on my way to work here. Again, she has a regular clientele and she knows their orders when they walk in. That is incredible. My son works at Domino’s; he has just started work. It is a pretty fast-paced environment in which pizzas are churned out at the best quality for people who are waiting for their food.

<011> H/3

In just the short time he has been working there, he has faced frustrated and angry customers. It is absolutely atrocious that people should think it is okay to respond to workers in that way about a perceived lack of service or if their food has not come out on time. There is absolutely no excuse for the abuse of retail workers. All of us should do our absolute best to call that out if and when we see that happening in our communities.

That brings me to another example from a recent trip to, shall I say, an outside-of-hours—no, it is an inside-of-hours liquor establishment. Sometimes you buy a bottle of wine on your way home from Parliament. I walked into this liquor outlet at about eight o’clock at night and a young retail worker was there on her own. She was about 19 or 20 years of age. A customer was being not particularly pleasant to her. He was not being physically abusive, but certainly his tone and what he was saying to her was not particularly nice, so I took longer than normal to select my bottle of wine because it did not feel or look right. When he left the shop, I went over to the counter, put the bottle of wine down and asked, “Are you okay?” She said, “Yes, but I do not like working here on my own at night-time. I get that sort of thing all the time and I have only just started here.” I asked her if she had support and a plan if something went wrong. She said that her boss was really good and they had that all worked out, but she just did not feel comfortable. The next time I walked in there, surprise, surprise, she no longer worked at that location. The behaviour of those customers led her to decide that that kind of workplace was not for her. I do not think that is at all appropriate in any workplace, particularly, in this case, a retail outlet that is open in the evenings. I just wanted to make people aware that I understand and stand against the abuse of retail workers in any context.

I also want to quickly touch on another example. In January this year, some friends and I went to Busselton, in the member for Vasse’s electorate, as many of us do over the summer holidays. We decided to go out for lunch, after which we left the venue and rode some scooters down the footpath. We then returned to the same location for an evening meal. The venue turns from a restaurant into a nightclub after a certain hour, so when we went back we found that it had opted into the voluntary scanning of identifications at the venue entrance. During the day a person could have a meal there, but by the time we got back there in the evening, we were required to show our IDs. As a 52-year-old woman, I do not generally carry my ID on me anymore. I generally have all my cards on my phone.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** That is when you get asked.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Yes, I know, member. I said very apologetically that I did not have my ID on me, that I had been out all day and that I just had my phone that had all my cards on it to pay for things with, but not the ID. They said, “Look, we are really sorry, but if you don’t have photo ID, you can’t come in.” My friends were saying, “But she’s a member of Parliament. She needs to be let in.” To that I said, “No, that does not wash. If a person needs to show an ID, it applies to members of Parliament as well as members of the community.” He very politely said that I was not able to come in, despite the fact that I was 52 years of age. I thanked him for doing his job. I can tell members that other people in the line were not so understanding of that policy. The door person said that they had been regularly abused for that policy, but for the venue, the policy had meant that not only are they able to track false IDs and people who have offended and



been banned from that licensed premise, but also the photo ID provides them with the opportunity to check those things against a database. If there has been an assault or something, they can go back to the CCTV and look at the IDs of the people who were in the venue to help resolve some of these issues. He made the very sincere point that because of the policy at that licensed premise, the workers had been abused on a regular basis. This 52-year-old woman without an ID was not one of those people; I want to make sure that everyone understands that.

Those couple of examples certainly highlight the rights of retail workers, which are front and centre of this legislation. The other point I make is that with the tight market for workers at the moment, if we can support those retailers by supporting their workers, people are more likely to seek work in the retail sector because they know that they will be protected and backed by not just the customers who may be in the shop, by their employers, very definitely, but also by this legislation, which is incredibly important.

In closing, I want to say a big thankyou to the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association of WA for its advocacy around this on behalf of its workers. Ben Harris has been mentioned by a number of members today. I want to say a huge thankyou to Ben, his organisers and the union itself; to Hon Kate Doust, MLC, from the other place, for her role in advocating for this legislation; and to all those retail workers who work on Christmas Day, Boxing Day or all those other days of the year when some of us have time off. I will conclude by commending the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2024 to the house.

**MS M.M. QUIRK (Landsdale)** [1.46 pm]: I will need to speak like a race caller because I have limited time in which to speak, so excuse my rapid delivery. Firstly, like other members here, I certainly want to congratulate the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association of WA for its fantastic advocacy on behalf of its members. Some of the ads in its campaign have been quite graphic and we should all be ashamed that especially young female workers have been exposed to violence and harassment in the way that they have. Likewise, I thank the Attorney General for responding to this need to change the legislation so expeditiously through the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2024. It is important to note that this issue is not isolated to Western Australia. In fact, in 2021, the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee undertook a parliamentary inquiry that looked into the violence and abuse towards retail workers. Members can access those reports online. The issue is well summed up in the report of September 2021 by recommendation 35 that states —

Retail workers, by the very nature of their employment, are placed at an increased risk of violence and abuse compared to members of the general public. They are vulnerable to repeat offenders who are able to return time and again to stores, compounding abuse and leaving them feeling trapped and fearful in their place of work. The uniquely local nature of their employment means that retail workers face the terrifying prospect of offenders following them home or extending abuse into other parts of their lives in the local community.

Retail workers are responsible for enforcing laws with regard to age-restricted sales and restricted goods such as medicines or weapons. It is well established that conflict over these types of sales is a key trigger for violence and abuse. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen retail workers take on even more responsibility, enforcing Government legislation on social distancing and mask wearing, while putting their lives at risk working in public facing roles on the Covid frontline. Other categories of workers, such as emergency workers and customs officers, have rightly been afforded extra protection by the law in recognition of the service they provide to the public and the responsibility placed upon them by Parliament. We believe that retail workers must also be recognised, and that offences against them must be treated with additional seriousness, with extra protection from the law. We believe there is a strong case for extra protection in law for retail workers through a specific offence. The Government should consult urgently on the scope of the offence, recognising the particular pressure on those in different occupations who are asked to enforce the law.

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We can see, as I said, that it is an issue not just in Western Australia. Interestingly, despite this inquiry and the support for legislation, I read just this morning that the Tory government in England is only just now passing the law, so with any luck we might do it before the Sunak government in the UK.

Violence is not correlated just with shoplifting, which is the other thing to remember. As we have heard already, it also can relate to people with mental health or dependency issues, so to some extent the deterrent effect may well not work for those individuals.

One thing I want to stress—as it has turned out, I have coincidentally been working on some shop security and policy issues for government—is that it is a community issue. It is not the responsibility of just the shops, nor just the union or the shop assistants; we need to address this issue community-wide. In the course of that research, I wondered whether—I have asked some of the large shops—the cost of living has meant that theft has increased and, therefore, by definition, some violence has increased. They have said that there has been no correlation between the cost of living and theft, which is interesting. People are not going in there to steal a loaf of bread just because of cost-of-living pressures. Organised gangs are increasingly involved in shoplifting, and they should not be afforded any slack whatsoever.

The other thing that I think is worthwhile noting is that shops are insured, so any losses from theft are probably factored into the cost of goods for everyone who shops at the stores. In the present climate, I think that is worth remembering.

It will be great to have the new laws, but the laws will need to be enforced. It is all very well to say that we will have these new laws and a penalty will be attached that will act as a sufficient deterrent, but, at the end of the day, police will need to attend. If there is an assault, I expect that that would occur, as it would be a high priority. I suspect that at the moment, shoplifting, even if it is by a recidivist, is given a lower priority. We need to change that, and there is one way I think we can change it. As part of my research, when I was in New Zealand, I talked to the retail crime intelligence group Auror, which had all the major stores as clients. It processes all the CCTV from stores, does really sophisticated analysis and gives reports to police on patterns and particular intelligence issues that the stores need to be aware of. Some jurisdictions, such as Victoria, use that information to target recidivists, who are the very people we want to target, and real-time information can be sent to police, which of course assists in prosecution and apprehending the respondents. The Western Australia Police Force has said that it does not want full access to Auror because there will be too many reports and it will not be able to service it all, which is not the point of it. The point is to identify recidivists and recommend security measures for other stores. One thing I will say in the context of this legislation is that the WA Police Force needs to lift its game and sign on fully to Auror, which will enable it to more efficiently use its resources.

It is also worth noting that in my inquiries about the review, I found that some jurisdictions have banning notices. That means that with this intelligence from CCTV, certain individuals can be banned from the shopping centre. Again, how is that enforced? In New Zealand, for example, the big shopping centres also have car parks and there is numberplate recognition, so they are able to pick up very early that an individual is going to a store.

The other issue that I quickly want to raise in this context is young shop assistants. We have heard from numerous speakers that many shop assistants are young and female. There is an issue with those shop assistants having to be witnesses at criminal trials, which is quite confronting for most people. I would say in that regard that we need to be mindful of that in the course of a prosecution. In relation to banning notices, for example, the shop manager can give evidence about the need to ban a particular individual who has persistently been a nuisance. Although this legislation will send a message and is in response to a real need identified by the union, there is still more we can do logistically to ensure that shop assistants who may be victims of assault are supported through any prosecution process if they have to give evidence. That also goes to the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder that may arise from the offence. Poor old Woolies, Coles and ALDI are under the pump at the moment, as they should be, but I hope that there is some recognition of that in the industrial relations context and that those workers get a level of support. I am told that that is not readily happening at the moment. Shop assistants are now told that, if they can, they are supposed to ignore theft, as opposed to violence. That creates more problems for them because they feel very frustrated when they can see wrongdoing going on and they just have to ignore it.

Finally, in recent days, there have obviously been some discussions about shopping centre security. I am mindful that there have been some suggestions about stop-and-search powers or the use of metal detectors. I look at the Bondi incident and I wonder whether, if we had those laws, it would solve the problem that we are talking about. The reason I say that is that the offender in that case could have gone through a metal detector and then gone to half a dozen stores to purchase a knife. I cannot see that we would be better off. However, if the person had repeatedly entered the shopping centre, it may well be that technological systems such as Auror, which I briefly mentioned, could assist in the early identification of people who are staking out premises. I am not sure that stopping and searching the general public would be effective. It would certainly increase the cost to centre owners and would not necessarily achieve the outcome we are after. Some might say that the cost involved in that might be better invested in greater access for everyone to mental health services.

**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington)** [1.58 pm]: I think I have about 60 seconds.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Ninety seconds.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Excellent! I might have to continue after question time.

I will begin by acknowledging the hard work that was put in by the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association of Western Australia on behalf of its members and its secretary, Ben Harris, in bringing this issue to the community and lobbying government to respond. I want to congratulate the Premier, who is in the chamber now, for his strong response to that lobbying, which has led to this legislation coming forward from the Attorney General.

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As a Parliament, we are responding to a genuine need. I look forward to explaining in more detail my views on this important legislation and some of the background issues. As I say, it is an example of where the union has properly represented its members and brought an important issue to the community's attention, Madam Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** Yes, member for Cannington.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 28.]

### QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

**The SPEAKER:** I cannot see anyone who needs special acknowledgement today, so we will move straight into question time.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Madam Speaker, I must sadly announce that the LOOP printer is broken!

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** There is a lot of sympathy for that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Nonetheless, I will persevere with question time.

#### DRY SEASON TASKFORCE

##### 225. **Mr R.S. LOVE to the Premier:**

I refer to the announcement on Monday that the government will be standing up a Dry Season Taskforce.

- (1) When will financial assistance be available to farm businesses already carting water and food to sustain livestock on their properties?
- (2) Is the Premier aware that some farmers are already having to shoot sheep as they have reduced access to live export markets and limited options through domestic markets to offload stock?

##### **Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. Of course, this has been the driest six months on record in the Perth and south west between October and March. We are experiencing a particularly dry period. As a result of that, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development established a dry season response team on 23 December. It emerged to support grain producers and livestock owners. The response has now pivoted to the 2024 new season and will continue to provide relevant information as farmers prepare for the new season. This dry season response is extending beyond the wheatbelt, Esperance, midwest and great southern into the south west. Autumn continues to be drier than average for much of the state, though there has been extensive rainfall in the north and eastern rangelands.

Financial support for Western Australian farmers to assist in dry season response includes drought loans of up to \$2 million through the commonwealth Regional Investment Corporation's farm household allowance program, providing farming families experiencing financial hardship the ability to access Centrelink income support; the Australian Taxation Office's farm management deposit scheme; and the Western Australian government's farm debt mediation scheme to assist farm and pastoral businesses to resolve commercial disputes with their lenders. Recently, the Minister for Agriculture and Food has stood up a taskforce to look at assistance and mental health support relating to these drought-like conditions. Obviously, we are doing everything we can, working with the farming community to make sure that they have the support they need.

#### DRY SEASON TASKFORCE

##### 226. **Mr R.S. LOVE to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. What responsibility does the Premier think federal Labor has for this current situation in which farmers have no confidence in there being a market for their sheep?

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please! Premier.

##### **Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

Madam Speaker, I think I have just gone through a range of programs that people can access, which are sponsored by the commonwealth government. Farmers can have absolute confidence that the federal government will listen to their concerns and respond appropriately. I am not quite sure why the member would politicise an issue such as this. This is something that federal governments on both sides continue to respond —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Mr R.H. COOK:** This has nothing to do with a live sheep export industry, which continues today.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** You are showing your ignorance, Premier.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** No, you cannot change your argument midstream. The argument to date has been that farmers are destocking because they lack confidence about the future of live animal exports. What the Leader of the Opposition is talking about are the issues they confront with their current livestock. If there are issues to do with their current livestock —

Several members interjected.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** No, just —

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr P.J. Rundle** interjected.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Just shut up; just be quiet. What the Leader of the Opposition is talking about at the moment is the fact that they feel overstocked because of the current dry conditions. Of course, they have all the industry, as it currently exists, to resolve those issues. I understand that the member is trying to conflate drought-like conditions with the political campaign he is running with live sheep exports, but they do not match up and that is his problem here. This is a problem he has always had. The opposition does not have any policies or values, so they have nothing to fall back on when it comes to issues of this nature.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** This is not a political issue. Commonwealth governments of all persuasions always back our farming industry and back our farmers because they know they are a backbone of our economy. They know that farmers —

**Mr R.S. Love:** That is ridiculous. What a ridiculous statement.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition now says that farmers are not the backbone of our economy. That is the argument he is now making.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members, particularly the opposition; the Premier has made it quite clear that he is not welcoming your interjections. Other members, I would ask you not to respond to those interjections. Given it is a supplementary question, I am hopeful that the Premier may draw his answer to a close.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I am sorry, Madam Speaker, that those opposite should try to politicise a difficult situation for farmers at the moment. It is time for us to get behind our farming community, to make sure we support them because not only are they doing it a financially, but obviously this will impact on their families, and of course their wellbeing. We are looking at all opportunities to make sure we back them, rather than provide a rank political commentary from the sidelines.

#### EMERGENCY SERVICES — FUNDING

##### 227. **Mr H.T. JONES to the Premier:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to keeping the Western Australian community safe.

- (1) Can the Premier outline to the house how this government's \$74.5 million package to bolster emergency services will further protect Western Australians from the threat of fire?
- (2) Can the Premier advise how this package will deliver the biggest expansion of career firefighters in Western Australia in more than 50 years?

##### **Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. It is a very important one. He goes to the heart of the issues in his electorate, one of those electorates that backs up against a lot of bushland in our peri-urban areas and the fact we are now experiencing one of the driest stretches since rainfall data was first recorded 150 years ago. It is very pertinent to the member for Darling Range's community. Since September, we have received just 30 millimetres of rain. We all feel it. We all see our gardens and our communities, and the trees in our areas suffering. No-one is more on edge about the situation than our firefighters both career and volunteers. Whenever there is a hot day, whenever there is an easterly wind, whenever lightning is forecast, they are on high alert and the time they have spent on high alert has been longer in recent years. They are battling some of the longest and most severe bushfire seasons in Western Australian history and crews have responded to more than 4 300 bushfires since October 2023.

We thank them. They do an incredible job saving property, saving lives and saving livelihoods. Equally, we must make sure that they have the resources they need to do their jobs safely and effectively. Yesterday, I was joined by the Minister for Emergency Services, Hon Stephen Dawson, Department of Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner Darren Klemm and the local member for Forrestfield Stephen Price at the DFES academy. We saw their skills on display as the fireys battled simulated emergencies. We also confirmed a \$75 million allocation in the forthcoming budget to boost fire and emergency services in the state. It is an investment in our crews and an investment in community safety. The \$75 million package includes the biggest expansion of our career firefighting teams in more than 50 years. Madam Speaker, \$23 million will help

employ more than 60 career firefighters, increasing the total firefighters since 2021 by 132. The emergency services package also includes \$8.6 million for volunteer emergency services, which are vitally important in a state as big as ours; \$7.7 million to upgrade facilities at career fire stations; and \$5.8 million to progress replacement of Maddington and Armadale career fire stations. Lastly, there is more than \$30 million to bolster parks and wildlife service bushfire capabilities. That will fund 34 additional bushfire management staff and new firefighting equipment across the south west, great southern and Perth hills through the parks and wildlife service. This funding shows my government's commitment to always doing what is right for our frontline personnel. It is a recognition of the crucial work we do to keep all Western Australians safe.

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This comes on top of the significant investment that we made previously as a government, expanding our aerial firefighting fleet, creating a rural fire division, developing the Bushfire Centre of Excellence and, of course, creating the Koolinup Emergency Services Centre in Collie. This is part of our Collie transition package, which is seeing people transitioning to manufacturing and equipping our firefighting facilities, making sure that we continue to create and transition new industries into Collie.

We know that the Liberal Party shares our passion for bringing new things to Collie. In fact, we heard from Peter Dutton this morning on behalf of the Liberal Party, stating that it would be bringing nuclear power to Collie. I am not sure what the member for Collie's constituents think of that but they will have bright, sunny, glowing things for Collie in the future, including a new nuclear power facility. We know that the people of Collie will perhaps be concerned about that, particularly since the nearest opportunity for nuclear power to be developed in Australia is about two decades away. We want to transition out of coal much earlier than that. We know that the Liberal Party, being climate change deniers, do not share our sense of urgency around that.

We will continue to invest in our bushfire volunteer and career firefighting teams, making sure they have the resources and colleagues and making sure that we can continue to drive great excellence in bushfire and structure fire mitigation and control. We know that the Liberal Party does not share these concerns. It took a Labor government to create these investments. Its only future for Collie is one around nuclear power, not around a just transition.

#### TEACHERS — WAGES AND CONDITIONS — NEGOTIATIONS

##### **228. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Premier:**

I refer to the planned strike next Tuesday during which thousands of public school teachers will walk off the job to protest the government's lousy pay offer, nurses' failed negotiations, police failed negotiations and now teachers. Would it not be better for the government to strike a deal instead of its teachers going on strike?

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister for Education, please desist.

##### **Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

Madam Speaker, I feel ructions in the force. We have had two questions from members of the Nationals WA before the Liberal Party gets its turn and then of course we need the member for Cottesloe to have his turn, none of whom speak to each other about what questions will be asked.

I welcome the opportunity to talk about WA Labor's proud record in industrial relations, providing our public sector workers with the wages and conditions they need so they can continue to be proud members of our public sector. The government is committed to reaching a negotiated settlement with the State School Teachers' Union of WA and will continue to bargain in good faith. We will make sure that the teachers understand that we value their work and that we are doing everything we can to reach a settlement and avoid disruption to schools and families.

In the event that industrial action does proceed—let us be clear, we do not think it needs to proceed—we put a subsequent offer to the teachers on 10 April. We believe it is a very generous offer, one that they should carefully consider before pulling the industrial action trigger. We know that if industrial action does proceed, the Department of Education is preparing to minimise the impact on students and parents. Families can expect to receive information from schools shortly about what arrangements will be in place should that industrial action go ahead.

This is the first time I have come across a National Party that supports trade unions.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** He hates them.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** They do hate them. The National Party has provided them with a short moment of political convenience. State school teachers can be guaranteed of good faith bargaining and a commitment to valuing our public sector workers. That is something that they would never get from members of the National Party. We know that they hate unions and we know that they hate the public sector. We know that the agenda that they have for teachers is to continue to erode the public sector like it does every time it comes into government. We know that public sector workers always do better under a WA Labor government, and that is the message that we are delivering to the teachers as we negotiate in good faith.

## TEACHERS — WAGES AND CONDITIONS — NEGOTIATIONS

**229. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. Is the failure to provide teachers with fair pay and conditions indicative of an old, tired and arrogant Labor government that risks driving —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** — teachers out of WA due to an inability to survive Labor's cost-of-living crisis?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

In terms of sequels, that is one of the longest I have ever heard!

Obviously, we reject the entire premise of the member's question. We reject absolutely the suggestion that teachers feel undervalued under our government. We know that they feel valued. We know that by continuing to negotiate with us in good faith, state school teachers will get a good wages and conditions outcome. That is why we are continuing to negotiate in good faith.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT — COST-OF-LIVING RELIEF — C-SERIES RAILCARS

**230. Mrs L.A. MUNDAY to the Minister for Transport:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to public transport, including cheaper fares and the return of local railcar manufacturing to WA.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how this government's policies are relieving pressure on household budgets and creating more Western Australian jobs?
- (2) Can the minister please advise the house how these policies compare with the Liberal Party's new plan to increase public transport fares and move local manufacturing jobs out of WA?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:**

(1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. We on this side of the house know that the Labor Party has supported public transport over many decades. That could not be demonstrated more than by what we have already done over two terms, including building Metronet and bringing railcar manufacturing back to Western Australia, and introducing free public transport on Sundays, free public transport travel for students and, of course, capped fares. As we have discussed many times, in relation to the cost of living, which the opposition keeps ignoring, it means we are delivering thousands of dollars in savings to families in our outer suburbs. We know that the Nationals WA does not care about the suburbs. It hates it when we deliver services to the suburbs. We know that the Liberal Party does not like public transport; it is in its DNA that it hates public transport. If anyone listened to the MPI yesterday, they would have realised that that hatred is worse than ever. It completely ran down our new rail lines to places such as Byford, Ellenbrook, Canning Vale and Yanchep.

It hates Metronet. Yesterday we saw another chapter in what a Liberal government would do to public transport in WA. The member for Vasse said that we should be making trains in Queensland, saying it is better for the national economy to be making trains in Queensland than Western Australia. The Liberal Party is against local manufacturing. This is the party that tried to build the Matagarup Bridge in Malaysia. Then it lost it. It could not find it; it was on a container somewhere. Yesterday the Liberal Party said that building trains in Queensland added to national economic activity. The Liberal Party is against building trains in Western Australia—a new insight. Yesterday, we heard the same from the member for Cottesloe.

Members may recall that the previous Barnett government had a policy to increase public transport fares to reduce the level of subsidies to 50 per cent. Yesterday the member for Cottesloe said that our subsidies on public transport are too high. How do we change that? If the Liberal Party wins government, it will increase public transport fares. It will remove the two-zone fare cap.

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It will remove free public transport for students and there will be no free public transport on Sundays if the Liberal Party is elected. When the member stands up, like he did yesterday, there are consequences for what he says. If he says the subsidy is too high, it means the opposition will increase public transport fares for all the people of Dawesville, Mandurah, Byford and Ellenbrook. They will all have increased public transport fares.

I do not know whether members saw the graph produced by the member for Cottesloe yesterday. Now we know why the printer has broken down; the member for Cottesloe was out there and even the opposition's printer could not handle what was being produced yesterday! Again, yesterday: increased public transport fares and taking manufacturing away from Western Australia. Nationals WA members want to appeal to densely

populated areas, but they cannot even bring themselves to like public transport. They try, but they cannot do it.

It is very, very clear. This is a party that closed the Midland workshops and closed the Fremantle train line. It committed to the Ellenbrook rail line and did not deliver it over eight years. It broke a commitment to MAX light rail, after the then Premier said, “Buy real estate on the alignment”! That is the record of members opposite. Yesterday we saw the way they say “public transport”—like they are spitting poison! They cannot even say it properly. We have seen what the Liberal Party will do to the mums, dads and families of Western Australia if it ever wins government again.

#### ELECTIVE SURGERY — WAITLISTS

##### **231. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Health:**

On behalf of the Opposition I would also like to acknowledge the sad passing of Ian Parmenter, OAM—Western Australian chef, broadcaster, author and strong advocate for the Margaret River region.

I refer again to the minister’s comments in this place that there is no hidden waitlist for elective surgery in Western Australia and that the government is undertaking significant investment and reform around outpatients and outpatient referrals.

- (1) What is the current median wait time for first appointments to see a specialist in a public hospital outpatient clinic before being placed on the elective surgery waitlist?
- (2) Why did the government stop reporting this data in December 2017?

##### **Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

(1)–(2) Even the member for Vasse knows that that kind of question about specific data needs to be put on notice, so I request that she put it on notice and write it in a way that will enable us to answer it. It will be dependent on HSP and what region they are in. There is a bit of assistance for the member for Vasse.

I can confirm that this government is investing significantly in our health system. There have been 550 or so beds included in the system in the metropolitan area and the Bunbury metropolitan area; and FTE increases over the last couple of years of 4 000 nursing staff; 1 600 doctors; and 1 700 allied health staff. All of that significant investment has enabled us to carry out record numbers of elective surgeries. We are doing more surgery than we have ever done in the Western Australian health system. We are also reforming the way in which we manage referrals into the public system through GPs—GPs are a really important gateway—through our \$8 million investment in the Smart Referrals reform, which came through the sustainable health review. That is how we are managing those referrals and triaging those patients.

This government supports, invests in and backs our public health system.

**Ms L. Mettam** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Ms A. SANDERSON:** This government backs that in with investment in staff and beds and a 30 per cent increase in funding.

#### ELECTIVE SURGERY — WAITLISTS

##### **232. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Health:**

I have a supplementary question. Again, why did the government stop reporting this data in December 2017?

##### **Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

WA Health reports enormous amounts of data and information about emergency department waiting times, ramping times and elective surgery waitlist times. We report exactly what is required of us under the act and what is required of us nationally to report, in exactly the same way as other states.

**Ms L. Mettam** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please.

**Ms A. SANDERSON:** That is actually what we report. The public wants to know when they will get their surgery and how long they will have to wait, and there is more elective surgery being done in the system under this government than has ever been done before.

#### STUDENT ASSISTANCE PAYMENT

##### **233. Ms A.E. KENT to the Minister for Education:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government’s WA student assistance payment, which is delivering millions of dollars in cost-of-living support for WA families. Can the minister advise the house how this payment will support WA families with

school-aged children; and can the minister advise the house how the program has been received by the Western Australian community?

**Dr A.D. BUTI replied:**

Yes, I am very happy to answer that question, and I thank the member for Kalgoorlie for her continued support for, and interest in, all matters of education.

The Western Australian student assistance payment goes towards helping to defray the costs of educating the students of Western Australia. In yesterday's matter of public interest the member for Vasse seemed to be of the view that all education expenses stop on day one, term one; there are no more expenses, so no more need to get new shoes, winter uniforms, excursion costs or Country Week for country students, as the member should know, as a regional member. It is used to defray the education costs that happen throughout the year; they do not start and stop on day one. That is what it is being used for.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please, members! The question was asked by the member for Kalgoorlie.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I would like the house to know that we got away to a flying start. As of 1.00 pm today, 76 093 claims have been received via the ServiceWA app. As of 4.00 pm yesterday, there were 7 804 claims via alternative options. I note that these are unique claims from the one household, and a claim might include two or three students, so obviously that means more than 100 000 students. As of 1.00 pm today, we have had nearly 84 000 unique claims, and we only started on Monday. I should let people know that they have until the end of term to make an application, but that is nearly 84 000 claims in a bit over two days; that is phenomenal.

It is also very interesting. The member for Roe is very negative, because he has no policies; he is just negative, negative. He tends to tell untruths, so just for his interest, 6 524 of the people who made claims via the ServiceWA app rated the application process as positive, and only 18 rated it as a negative experience. That is 18 negatives versus 6 524 positives. That is a 99.72 per cent positive satisfaction rating—basically nearly a 100 per cent positive rating—so get with the show, mate. Get with the show. Most people use apps on their phones; that is not unusual nowadays. Get with the show, mate, and do not tell lies.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, you will refer to members of this house by their seat, please.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** The member for Roe.

I am not saying that there have been no difficulties. There were 18 applicants who said it was a negative experience, and others have made calls to the Department of Education call centre and the ServiceWA helpline, but it has overwhelmingly been incredibly positive. By using the ServiceWA app, their payment should be in their bank accounts within seven days. Hopefully, people who applied on Monday will receive payments in their accounts within the next 48 hours.

I want to refute some of the mistruths that the member for Roe has been peddling. After we had a press conference on Monday with the Premier and the Treasurer, we made it clear that there were alternative methods for claiming, although most people used the ServiceWA app.

<016> J/5

He said that there had been dozens of families complaining on my Facebook page. I thought, "Really?" because I do not go onto my Facebook page and look that often, but I did that night after the report came out in the paper. There were 13 comments and only one was negative. But he said that dozens of families were making complaints on my social media. Where did the member for Roe get that from? The member for Roe has been caught out a number of times. Stop it! Stop saying untruths. You are not doing anyone a service by doing that. He should spend time creating educational policies, and then we can have a debate about policy, rather than just being negative. He is saying to Western Australian families, to nearly 84 000 families, that the Western Australian student assistance payment system is bad. Is that what he is saying? His silence tells it all. This has been an amazing initiative by the Cook Labor government that continues our measures to try to alleviate cost-of-living pressures in Western Australia, and people are voting with their apps.

#### ELECTIVE SURGERY — WAITLISTS

**234. Ms L. METTAM to the Premier:**

I refer to the Premier's comments when in opposition when the elective surgery waitlist was under 20 000 patients stating —

No Western Australian should be left seriously ill, waiting for their pain-relieving surgery or waiting months and months for their first appointment.

With elective surgery waitlists skyrocketing to over 30 000 patients, and patients such as Shelley French waiting over three years for an appointment, how on earth can Western Australians have confidence in this government when, under



the Premier's watch, significantly more people are being left seriously ill, waiting for pain-relieving surgery or waiting months and months for their first appointment?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

I thank the member for the question. I remember those days of opposition when we used to talk about the failures of the Barnett government in relation to its health policies. Let me talk about some of those policies. Between July 2015 and July 2016, when I was in opposition—dark days indeed—the number of nurses employed by the Barnett government actually reduced by 645. As part of those dark days, between July 2015 and July 2016, the number of midwives reduced by 60. Also in these dark days, between September 2015 and July 2016, the number of doctors reduced by over 130. Dark days indeed. Between July 2015 and January 2017, the number of paediatricians actually reduced by 17. The reason we critiqued the Barnett government in the manner that we did was that everything it was doing was the antithesis of what you would expect a government to do if it took the waiting list seriously. We saw how those waiting lists grew and outpatients waited longer.

Let us roll forward some years in this post-COVID period when we know that the health system is under significant pressure. Despite that significant pressure, since coming to government in 2017, the annual health budget is up 33 per cent—one-third of when we came into government. There are an additional 4 000 nurses, an additional 1 600 doctors and the health workforce has grown by nearly 30 per cent. That is compared with WA's population growth of just nine per cent over the same period. Under my government, we spend more per capita on health care in WA than spent in any other state—in fact, 15 per cent above the national average.

We have an incredible Minister for Health in Western Australia who is doing so much to fight back against this post-COVID period. Ambulance ramping is down 21 per cent in 2023 compared with 2022, down 44 per cent in December 2023 alone compared with December 2022; and, of course, we see a range of measures taking place, part informed by the sustainable health review, but part simply because of the great leadership that the Minister for Health is providing. Our virtual emergency department, our State Health Operations Centre and our patient transport coordination hub. Our health system is the best in the country because of the policies and investment that we have put into our health system.

That is not to say that it is perfect. We know that particularly people who are waitlisted as a category 3 elective surgery patient can wait some time. As their situation deteriorates and if the pain continues to grow and they have concerns about their ongoing care, they should go back to their general practitioner to make sure their GP can then provide further information to the waitlist controllers to make sure that person can be moved up the list or their category can be reassessed so that they can get their operation sooner. Of course, we do not always get it right, but because of our investment and because of the priorities that we place on our public health system, we have the best healthcare system in the country.

#### ELECTIVE SURGERY — WAITLISTS

**235. Ms L. METTAM to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please! Seriously; it is not that funny.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Given these poor health outcomes, how does the Premier justify spending only \$40 million on boosting elective surgery compared with an additional \$2 billion on Metronet blowouts last year, given patients such as Shelley French —

**The SPEAKER:** No further comment; you have asked your question.

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

We invested an extra \$40 million in an elective surgery waitlist blitz at the end of last year. We are cognisant of the pressure that our health system is under, which is the reason why expenditure on health care has grown so much under our watch, and why the number of nurses and doctors in our health system has increased so much. Do members know who are reaping the benefits of that? It is the people of Western Australia, because they know that we are putting patients first, and they know that they live in a state with the best health system in the country.

#### MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES — COCKBURN

**236. Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's record investment in mental healthcare services.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the 75-bed Cockburn mental health clinic will expand access to mental healthcare services for Western Australians?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how the clinic will support specialised support for women and people with an eating disorder?

**Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

(1)–(2) I thank the member for Cockburn for the question and thank him and Hon Stephen Pratt, member for South Metropolitan Region, as well as the Premier for joining us at the Cockburn clinic for the handing over, if you like, of the clinic to the South Metropolitan Health Service. It was obviously devastating to hear that the then Bethesda Clinic was due to close its doors due to some challenges around private health funding and managing a psychiatric workforce that is moving away from inpatient care in a private setting. Not one to let a good opportunity pass us by, there was no way that we could stand by and leave this beautiful brand new facility empty when we know that there is need in the community. Within a month, the Cook government provided authorisation for south metro to sign a three-year lease, essentially taking over the lease of that facility. That is 75 beds onto the system overnight, which is fantastic. Those beds will come under south metro, and the vast majority of staff have transferred over into the public system. Very quickly, south metro put out offers of employment to those staff and many of them have transferred over and remain working at the clinic.

Two floors will be dedicated to women for inpatient mental health episodes. That is 50 beds, including for eating disorders for women aged over 16 years. There will be a focus on a range of services, but eating disorders will absolutely be one of those specialised areas. The ground floor of 25 beds will be mixed gender for alcohol and drug addiction withdrawal services. That is an extra 25 beds for supervised medical withdrawal, also significantly of need. These will be available across the metropolitan area. They will not be limited to the catchment of the South Metropolitan Health Service. It will work with other metropolitan health service providers to understand the need and other patients can be referred into that service.

<017> D/3

The Cook government—and, prior to that, the McGowan government—takes mental health very seriously, and that is why we have seen a 50 per cent increase in funding since we have been in government. We are also undertaking significant reform in the public mental health provision for children, infants and adolescents. As incoming Minister for Mental Health, I delivered the *Final report—Ministerial taskforce into public mental health services for infants, children and adolescents aged 0–18 years in WA* with the government accepting all 32 recommendations. Since then, we have implemented 12 new models of care and given more peer support to the workforce. We invested \$46 million to deliver acute care response teams and, importantly, the \$31 million youth eating disorder service. That is an investment of \$80 million just for infants, children and adolescents. The Graylands Hospital reconfiguration is also an incredibly important reform in mental health, with a \$218 million commitment to forensic mental facilities. Our specialist eating disorder clinic, which also opened in Cockburn, provides intensive outpatient support for people experiencing eating disorders. Similar services have opened in the north metropolitan and east metropolitan regions. Of course, we are increasing the number of mental health beds at Fiona Stanley Hospital by 40 and adding 102 mental health beds as part of Joondalup Health Campus. This is a serious and significant investment and uplift in mental health services under this government. This government will continue to improve access to mental health services. It will not only improve access but reform those services so that they are meeting the need and are responsive to our community as we move forward.

#### SUMMER OF FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT — FINES

**237. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Premier:**

I refer to the government's free public transport summer program. After months of questioning, the opposition has revealed that of the 4 000 fines issued during this period, 764 were given to children under the age of 18 during the so-called free public transport period. At the eleventh hour, WA school-aged families received a school payment from the government. How does the Premier reconcile giving families a cost-of-living payment with one hand while taking cash out of their pockets by fining them with the other?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

I thank the member for the question; it provides me with an opportunity to give him a lesson on how the public transport system works. It was the summer of free public transport, a policy that was widely welcomed by the community. We saw at least a 40 per cent increase in the number of passengers who took public transport over that summer program. As I have reported before, I remember speaking with a retail worker on the train who said that she had not caught the train to work before but had estimated that it had saved her over \$300 that summer alone in foregone petrol and parking fees. In addition to that, she said that once it was over, she would keep using the train because it is a great way to get to work. It was a terrific and incredibly successful program because people got to ride on the trains for free. What that does not allow them to do is to escape any other rules associated with travel on public transport. You still cannot eat or drink on trains. You still should not put your feet on the seats, and you should still carry a SmartRider. The fundamental nature of riding public transport is that you should follow the rules. Although one aspect of public transport was suspended over the summer holidays, which was that people did not have to pay a fare, they still had to follow all the other guidelines, rules and regulations associated with catching public transport. One of those was that people still had to tag on and off. Of course, it is an incredibly sophisticated and complex system that feeds a city of around about

2.5 million people. It is important from a safety, planning and network management point of view that people tag on and off. It is not a lot to ask. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Many people took the opportunity to travel for free on public transport over the summer holidays, and we are really pleased that this popular program was so successful.

I say this to the opposition. The two things that it hates are Metronet and the WA school assistance payment. I do not understand that because they are widely popular with the people of Western Australia that opposition members say they want to represent. I implore the member for Roe to have a look outside his window to see how much people are appreciating the WA school assistance payment, how much they love Metronet and how they love the fact that people will be riding on trains that were built here in Western Australia. For goodness sake, get on board!

#### SUMMER OF FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT — FINES

**238. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. Will the government waive or refund the fines for the 764 young people and their families who are struggling to make ends meet?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

I do not know what these people were fined for, and I do not know the nature of the circumstances of their case, for want of a better description. I will leave that up to the experts and the operational managers in the Public Transport Authority. That is the appropriate way to do it. I do not think people want a politician to start waiving fines and making that sort of political gesture simply for their own sake. I will leave that up to the experts to manage, as they do on all occasions.

#### ROAD SAFETY — SCHOOL CROSSINGS

**239. Ms C.M. TONKIN to the Minister for Road Safety:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to improving safety on roads across Western Australia. Can the minister outline to the house how this government is prioritising the safety of kids travelling to and from school through safety improvements at 165 school crossings across the state, including some in my electorate?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL replied:**

I thank the member for the question. Like most, if not all, electorates in the state, our local communities care deeply about road safety, especially the communities in the seat of Churchlands. I say that as a former candidate for Churchlands, along with the member for South Perth over there. I know that even back then, the people of Churchlands cared deeply about road safety. I thank the member for her ongoing advocacy and support in targeting some of these important projects, especially for that commute for families and kids across the state to and from school, and for working with local governments and the state government on all those other road safety issues in the electorate of Churchlands.

Last week, the Minister for Transport and I announced that the Cook government will be leading the charge on road safety by investing an extra \$10 million to expand the school zones and crossings program. It will be funded from the road trauma trust account. Every single cent from our road cameras goes into that account. This is a great example of how that funding can be used. This \$10 million investment will extend 40-kilometre-an-hour speed zones to all 165 warden-controlled crossings that currently just fall outside of the 40-kilometre school zone limit. Of course, like regular school zones, these speed limits will only be in place at times that align with the current school zone times during school terms. This investment by the Cook government is aimed at supporting the installation of electronic speed limit signs at 93 sites where current speed limits are posted at or above 60 kilometres an hour. Further, the commitment will also enable the installation of static speed signs at a further 72 locations where the speed limits are currently posted at 50 kilometres an hour. The member will be aware—hopefully, her community will be very happy—that in her electorate this will impact Churchlands Senior High School, Lake Monger Primary School, Wembley Primary School, Wembley Downs Primary School and Woodlands Primary School. I would like to take a moment to rattle off a few other sites that will form part of the delivery of these projects. They are West Busselton Primary School, Kellerberrin District High School, Lesmurdie Primary School, Baldivis Secondary College and Cowaramup Primary School, just to name a few. This program is no doubt crucial in increasing safety of our schoolchildren and their families and communities going to and from school, but it is also important to ensure the safety of wardens working across these busy routes.

<018> C/4

I think we should all encourage more people to put up their hand to be wardens in their local communities. I am sure that when we talk to wardens in our communities, they all have a story to tell about a close shave or one or two incidents in which a driver has done the wrong thing and has not obeyed street signs. This targeted program, which will reduce speeds to 40 kilometres an hour at children's crossings outside the existing school zones, highlights our government's commitment to prioritising the safety of our most vulnerable road users. I am proud to be part of a Cook government that prioritises road safety. I thank the member very much for her continued advocacy.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Cottesloe with the last question.

## PUBLIC AND SOCIAL HOUSING — AVAILABILITY

**240. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Housing:**

I refer to the minister's comment in this place yesterday that —

Across the board, we are driving large numbers of measures to boost social and affordable housing and to boost housing supply.

- (1) If the government is doing such a sterling job boosting social housing, why has the number of people on the public housing waitlist now reached 35 924, a 21 per cent increase on the number of people waiting in 2017?
- (2) Does the minister honestly believe that a net increase of 114 social dwellings in seven years is addressing the issues plaguing WA?

**Mr J.N. CAREY replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for his question. As we know, COVID radically reshaped our housing market. There are enormous pressures in both housing and rent. I say this: every Western Australian knows that we are not alone and that every state in this country is facing the same critical issues relating to housing and rental markets. Let me be very clear about that: we are not alone in this scenario.

We also face another significant pressure—that is, Western Australia is a preferred place to be for Australians and people from around the world. We have a very strong economy, as the Premier talked about, with 300 000 new jobs and an incredible lifestyle. Also, of course, in comparison with Sydney and Melbourne, our housing prices are still affordable—they are half that of Sydney. We are seeing 220 people coming to Western Australia each day. These extraordinary circumstances that mean there is more pressure on our rental market and more pressure on our housing market.

I do multiple media conferences. I go on radio constantly and talk about the challenges that we are presented with. I know that the opposition works by being black and white, but we know that the pressures will continue. There is no silver bullet or magical solution. These pressures will continue over the next few years. I want to assure Western Australians that this government is doing everything it can to boost the social housing supply, to boost affordable housing and to boost the wider supply in Western Australia through our infrastructure fund, through our planning reforms that the Liberals oppose and through our record investment in social housing and homelessness measures.

We know that when there are tight rental markets, people seek assurance in the public housing system. Even the opposition and the shadow housing minister have recognised that the majority of people on the public housing waitlist are actually housed or have accommodation. It is natural that when people are uncertain about the rental market, they register for the waiting list. I was asked today whether it was a record number. No, it is not a record. The record rests with the previous Barnett government. Back in 2010, when the population was of course far less, there were 24 000 people on the waiting list. I again say to Western Australians that we take this very seriously. We are throwing everything at it through a range of measures in both housing and homelessness.

## PUBLIC AND SOCIAL HOUSING — AVAILABILITY

**241. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Housing:**

I have a supplementary question. The minister blamed COVID, but was it not his government that stopped critical construction workers from coming into the state during that time, precipitating the current crisis?

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members, the wall of noise is unacceptable. I am going to ask the member for Cottesloe to ask the question again. I am hopeful that we will hear it in silence so that I can at least hear what he has asked.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The minister blamed COVID, but was it not his government that stopped critical construction workers from coming into the state during that time, precipitating the current crisis?

**Mr J.N. CAREY replied:**

I just find that extraordinary. What it demonstrates is that, at his heart, the member for Cottesloe did not agree with the position —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please, members. Member for Cottesloe, you have asked a supplementary question and we are getting the answer. I ask you to desist, and for the Deputy Premier to desist as well.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Let us be very clear: the member for Cottesloe is on the record again saying that we should have had open borders.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** No, only for critical workers.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** No. You have just changed your position again!

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Don't verbal me.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** You flip-flop all over the place.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Don't verbal me.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** He is getting very agitated because he realises —

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The member for Cottesloe is on the way out. He has been dumped by the Liberal Party not because of his age but just because he is incompetent.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, can I ask you to get back to the question, please.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Yeah, not personal insults!

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** You deliver those all the time, member for Cottesloe; you are the master of that. You lecture us here —

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** You are an extraordinary individual! It is no wonder the Liberal Party dumped you.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Cottesloe, I have asked you to not continue to interject so incessantly. Minister, I asked you to briefly respond to the question that was asked.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Let us come back to the basis of the issue. The record number on the public waiting list was 24 000 applications. That was under the previous Barnett government, at a population level that was far less than we have now. We are making a record investment—\$2.4 billion over four years—to deliver 4 000 social homes, of which we have delivered 2 000 to date, with another thousand under construction. That is in significant contrast to that side. Let us go back to the nuts of it; let us get right to it. After seven and a half years, the Liberals have not had one social housing policy, not one housing policy and not one policy response on homelessness. That is their record. They do not take this issue seriously; they actually do not care. They have no interest in housing in Western Australia. It is only this side, our state government, through all the measures that I have previously reported in this Parliament, that is taking this issue seriously.

**The SPEAKER:** That concludes question time.

## CRIMINAL CODE AMENDMENT BILL 2024

### *Second Reading*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

**The SPEAKER:** I give the call to the member for Cannington, on the resumption of his remarks.

**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington)** [2.58 pm]: Yes, after having been so rudely interrupted! I must say that having sat here and watched question time, the opposition is still not getting any better. Opposition members have still not learnt anything about the purpose of question time or the approach that should be taken in question time. It staggers me that after all this time in opposition, they still do not have a clue what it is that they are doing. I used to try to give them advice when I was a minister and they never listened. They have learnt nothing and they have forgotten nothing. It is just appalling how badly served the people of this state are by His Majesty's loyal opposition.

### *Point of Order*

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** This is a debate on a particular piece of legislation. The member is just meandering along with some political claptrap that has no relevance to the bill that is being discussed.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members, thank you!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It has no relevance to the simple piece of legislation and I ask you to draw him back to the matter at hand.

**Mr D.A. Templeman** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Leader of the House, thank you! There is no point of order. The member has just commenced his contribution to the debate. Carry on, member for Cannington.

*Debate Resumed*

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**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** If members want a demonstration of the lack of understanding of the purpose of the Parliament, that point of order is it. This is a second reading debate. I am entitled under standing orders to roam over policy issues relevant to the legislation, which is exactly what I was doing. The member for Moore, the Leader of the Opposition, is a year older than me, but he has learned nothing at all in the time that he has been here! He is the first Leader of the Opposition who does not want to be Premier. Every other Leader of the Opposition has wanted to be Premier, but he does not want to be Premier! The member for Vasse perhaps wants to be Premier, but she will not be the Leader of the Liberal Party at the election. She is only the current Leader of the Liberal Party. There is somebody who is not a member of Parliament who is arrogantly telling people that he will be the Leader of the Liberal Party.

*Point of Order*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Point of order!

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order, members! Point of order.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Although the member for Cannington likes to lecture us on purpose, this has nothing whatsoever to do with the legislation. I ask the Deputy Speaker to bring the member back to the topic, as has been done to me on occasions when I have deviated from the bill that we were supposed to be discussing.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member for Cottesloe. There is no point of order. Carry on, member for Cannington.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** In deciding whether we should support this legislation, we should carefully examine the performance of the opposition. This is very important legislation. It will protect retail workers—people I so proudly served for nine years. In doing so, it is absolutely relevant that we examine the performance of the opposition. The fact that the opposition does not want their appalling behaviour to be critiqued is an example of why we need to do it. As I say, the Leader of the Opposition does not want to be Premier and the Leader of the Liberal Party does not have the support of the party, and a person who is not a member of the chamber who arrogantly expects and takes for granted the votes of the community. It is just an omnishambles, if I can use that wonderful word from the judgement on Monday—a judgement that did not reflect so well on the Liberal Party, did it?

In examining whether we should support the policies underpinning this bill, members should think about what has happened in the Liberal Party. It says it now wants to have nuclear energy. We are here concentrating on issues that are important to the people of Western Australia like protecting retail workers, but what are Liberal Party members talking about? They are talking about nuclear energy. The member for Cottesloe has already outlined to this chamber why nuclear energy is a joke here in Australia, particularly in Western Australia. He knows the truth, but the Liberal Party leader is saying that Collie should have a nuclear power station. They are concentrating on issues that are irrelevant, while we are concentrating on issues like protecting retail workers. It is an embarrassment for this state to have an opposition that does not do its job and represent the interest of Western Australians.

I was very proud over nine years to serve the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association and its members. There are very few jobs in the community in which you can have such a big impact as a union official. The member for Bassendean, who is just leaving the chamber, is another person who proudly served as a union official. There are very few jobs in which your day-to-day work is just about helping people who work hard for a living and have no other resources than the ones that they receive. The Deputy Speaker, of course, is another person who rose from the tools to be a secretary of a union. He is another example of a person who greatly served the workforce. Unions do an important job. Their job is to provide the collective voice for people in an industry or a workplace. There are very few jobs that come with that privilege. I was very pleased to serve the union for that long period of time. Of course, the member for South Metropolitan Region Hon Kate Doust, MLC, was the longest serving female employee of the shop assistants union and was on the board of control; she was a member of the national council and worked both for the state branch and at various times the national office of the union. Of course, she is able to pick quality people; that is why she married me, I am sure! She should be justifiably proud of the work that she did on behalf of the union and with the union and its members and other organisations in the industry to bring the petition and other representations of workers to the Parliament. I was proud to stand with the SDA, the retail associations and the union members upon the steps of Parliament House when the petition was handed over.

I emphasise the fact that this is one of those examples of the union being able to work with the employer associations to bring forward reform. I note that there were many occasions when I was a union official that we worked together with other social parties to bring forward reform on behalf of working people. It is not always the case that unions have to be in conflict with employers. On many occasions, they can find common ground and work together. I know that all

unions are able to do that. Unions are an important element of society. It is not so much talked about anymore, but it used to be the idea of social partners—that is, employers and their representatives and unions and their members. In other parts of the world, the social partners are much more clearly understood. Interestingly, we are the only country in the world where freedom of association is taken as a right not to join a union. Everywhere else in the world, it is a right to join a union. It is a strange interpretation. Even the United States understands that the idea of freedom of association is the right to join a union, not a right not to join a union. Indeed, people who do not join unions are not serving their own interests. When I was Minister for Industrial Relations, I often had people contact me regarding workers compensation. Had they been represented by a union, they would never have got into the circumstances they found themselves in, because they would have had an advocate on their side from the very moment of the injury. It becomes much more complicated when nobody is on your side. No matter how many times an employer says, “I’m on your side”, the reality is that an employer always has a separate interest.

Nonetheless, on this occasion, the union was able to work together with employer associations to bring forward the need for reform, and the Cook Labor government was able to respond to that need. This is important legislation. I just make two comments about increasing penalties for people who are systematically involved in repeat offences of shops stealing. We cannot have a situation in which shop stealing becomes normalised. That would undermine particularly small businesses, as the member for Landsdale pointed out. Many retailers are self-insured and costs are simply borne by other consumers. The other point is that we need to ensure that there is not some sort of organised campaign of shop stealing because that would undermine society as a whole. Therefore, we need to ensure that proper accountability is available to the court so people can be properly held to account for shop stealing.

This is an example of a health and safety issue relating to workplace safety. Of course, health and safety legislation applies in the situation of a person being assaulted in the workplace, but it is not necessarily the only response needed. Therefore, the Attorney General has taken up the obligations to increase protections for retail workers as an example of a circumstance in which a broader perspective needs to be adopted.

<020> H

Health and safety legislation is important and it applies, but sometimes it is not the only response to a health and safety challenge, and we need to think about other responses.

I conclude by congratulating Ben Harris and the Shops, Distributive and Allied Employee’s Association of WA for the work that has led us here. I note that other branches of the SDA have been working with other state governments to bring forward similar legislation. I cannot believe the change in the level of violence in retail workplaces over the last 30 years. In 1989, when I started in the union, it was almost unheard of to see any violence in the workplace. I do not know what has happened. The general level of crime has gone down, but we have had an increase in this particular crime. Right around the western world, crime rates are falling, including murder rates and serious crime rates, despite what sometimes gets talked about, but we have had this change in circumstances to the retail industry, so it is good that the government has responded. I congratulate the Attorney General and urge members to support the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2024.

**MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Butler — Attorney General)** [3.11 pm] — in reply: I rise to thank the members for their thoughtful and considered contributions to the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2024. I am pleased to note that the opposition will support this bill that will send a clear message that violence against retail workers is unacceptable, as well as provide a greater deterrence for repeat offenders who engage in shoplifting and petty theft. Members will have noticed an amendment on the notice paper that will be considered when we move into the consideration in detail stage of the bill. I will provide a more detailed explanation for the rationale behind the amendment in due course. I can briefly advise that the amendment seeks to ensure that sole traders are covered by the definition of “worker” in the bill. Our formulation will include all workers under the control and direction of retail businesses, even when their duties do not primarily involve working in an area of the shop that is open to the public. This will mean that unlike the legislation introduced in New South Wales and South Australia, a retail worker in Western Australia who steps in to perform duties on the shop floor will be covered, regardless of what their primary duties might be. We think this is a fair approach because the legislation in New South Wales and South Australia refers to it being their primary duty. In those states, if a person who works in administration fills in at the counter over the lunch hour, it is not their primary duty so they are not covered, whereas in Western Australia they will be covered on the passage of this bill.

Firstly, I thank the member for Moore for his and the opposition’s support for the bill and for his contribution to this debate. He noted that violence is unacceptable in any context. The government wholly agrees with that and that is the reason for bringing forward this legislation. He highlighted the special assault provisions and the categories of public officer already protected under those provisions. I once again thank the member for highlighting the importance of including sole traders in the definition of “worker”, which has led to the amendment being proposed today. That is the purpose of consultation. As I have mentioned before, I think the member for Central Wheatbelt said that during consultation we have to be openminded and take on board any little criticism or suggestion. The member for Moore also mentioned the exclusion of subcontractors and we will discuss that in consideration of the bill.

Another matter raised was whether or not other occupations such as schoolteachers, who are also subject to violence in the performance of their role, should be protected. I note that at this stage the schoolteachers employed by the state of Western Australia may be covered through the definition of “public officer”, which includes “any other person holding office under, or employed by, the State of Western Australia, whether for remuneration or not”. We suggest that they are covered. Public officers are captured by section 318 of the Criminal Code while performing a function of their employment on account of being such an officer, or performance of such a function.

The member raised the alarming rate of police assaults in the Kimberley, the effect of shop theft on small businesses and the importance of police presence to curb both the violence and shop theft. The member noted that there was no prescribed minimum penalty in the legislation, but a huge uplift in the maximum penalties under this bill. I note that when we come to public officers, like our police, who are assaulted, there is a minimum term of six months when bodily harm is inflicted. Before the introduction of that legislation, we challenged the former Barnett government to name a case in which police had suffered bodily harm and the person was not imprisoned, and most of them had been imprisoned for longer than six months. What is important to note is that the Western Australian Police Union is now saying that the six-month mandatory minimum is not enough because the assaults are ongoing, so it is calling for more mandatory sentencing at a higher level. It is proven that that has not been effective by reason of the police union’s calls for increases in that area. We can keep on increasing it, but it will not necessarily slow down those assaults. But it is important that the courts are sent a clear message by this Parliament that assaults on retail workers are to be treated very, very seriously.

Retail workers perform a public function. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this society could not have survived as a community if retail workers had stayed at home and locked themselves down. They put themselves out there to stack shelves, serve the public and make sure that families had food and supplies. They are very, very important workers in our community and they are public facing, so their risk of exposure to violence is greater than many other workers in our community and why they need special protection.

When people work in retail spaces, which can include restaurants that sell merchandise, food and the like, they need protection from unruly people who go in there with bad attitudes. I refer to an incident reported in *The West Australian* on Tuesday, 16 April, which was yesterday. It reported that in Scarborough, a 33-year-old man walked into La Capannina restaurant on Scarborough Beach. He was drunk and when asked to leave, assaulted Mr Chew, the highly regarded restaurant manager, who fell back and cracked his head on the floor. We can see from that how public facing workers in restaurants and other shops are exposed to these types of assaults, which is what this legislation is directed at. In uplifting the maximum penalty, the courts do get the message. When we uplifted the maximum penalties for the possession of methamphetamine with intent to sell or supply, there was a significant uplift in sentencing in the Supreme Court for people who were subject to a very heavy life penalty and maximum. As soon as a life penalty and maximum is introduced, it causes an uplift in all the penalties.

<021> A/G

I think that we should move into consideration in detail to see whether we can hopefully deal with this this afternoon, get it off to the other place and get some real protection in there for retail workers.

I commend the bill to the house and we will go into consideration in detail.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

[Leave denied to proceed forthwith to third reading.]

*Consideration in Detail*

**Clauses 1 to 3 put and passed.**

**Clause 4: Section 318B inserted —**

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY** — by leave: I move —

Page 3, after line 8 — To insert —

*contractor*, of a business, includes —

- (a) an employee of a contractor of the business; and
- (b) a subcontractor, and an employee of a subcontractor, of a contractor of the business; and
- (c) a person, and an employee of a person, with whom a subcontractor specified in paragraph (b) contracts;

Page 3, lines 17 to 28 — To delete the lines and substitute —



*worker*, for a business, means a person who performs duties for the business, other than as a contractor of the business who is not subject to the control and direction of the operator of the business in the performance of their duties.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Could the Attorney General explain the impact of both the amendments? I do not think there is a definition of “contractor” in the legislation currently, but it does refer to a contractor. The definition of “worker” for a business will also be changed. Perhaps the Attorney General can explain why this definition of “contractor” is being inserted and what clarity it will bring to some of the discussions that I referred to in the second reading debate about why contractors are captured under section 318 in some circumstances but not in others.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I am going to touch on both amendments at the same time because they are a bit interlinked. I want to acknowledge, as I did in my reply to the second reading debate, that the member had constructive input during the briefings on this bill. He raised the situation in which the owner of a business is the person who is assaulted in a retail trading operation.

**Mr R.S. Love:** I’m glad that after three and a half years of sitting in this seat, somebody has finally listened!

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I have listened to the member for three and a half years. I have not always agreed with him, but I thought we had a good working relationship in consideration in detail. This is the law. This is not ideology.

I thank the member for his constructive input. The issue was duly investigated and I made a decision to amend the bill to avoid any doubt that small business owners and sole traders will also be covered by the new offence. This will include, for example, sole traders like those at the Fremantle Markets, who might be just stallholders. They will all be covered. It is the government’s intention that all retail workers, including business owners and sole traders, will be protected by the new offence. The amendment seeks to redefine “worker” as a person who performs duties for the business, other than as a contractor of the business who is not subject to the control and direction of the operator of the business in the performance of their duties. The contractor will not be subject to the control of the business. This new formulation requires a definition of “contractor” to be added to the bill to ensure that employees and subcontractors of contractors are also included. The new definition of “contractor” therefore states —

- (a) an employee of a contractor of the business; and
- (b) a subcontractor, and an employee of a subcontractor, of a contractor of the business; and
- (c) a person, and an employee of a person, with whom a subcontractor specified in paragraph (b) contracts;

We have tried to cover the field of every worker; whether they are a sole trader, a contractor, a subcontractor or a worker for the subcontractor, they will be covered. Together, these amendments will align with our policy aim to ensure that all retail workers are protected in this reform. If a person is performing duties for a retail business either as an owner or under the control or direction of the business through a contract of labour, we are ensuring that they will be covered.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The amendment to the definition of “worker” seeks to delete lines 17 to 28, which refer to the provisions for a contractor but without defining “contractor”, and inserts a new definition. Just to clarify to try to get to the bottom of which contractors will be covered, currently the definition has some conditions to be met by the person who performs the duties, including that the duties are performed as part of the day-to-day operations of the business and that the person is subject to the control and direction of the operator of the business in the performance of their duties. The definition will now be a little different, will it not? Let us go back to the discussions that we had in the briefings. If a contractor from one of the soft drink companies is stocking the fridge at a business, that person may not be covered depending on whether they were under direction. Will that be different or the same now? I am talking about people who could be sales representatives or who do the rounds with meat pies or whatever they sell to the shop. Could the Attorney General explain whether there will be any change to the people who will be protected by this provision, other than, realistically, the sole trader situation?

<022> I/5

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It remains the same. The contractor will generally not be subject to the control and direction of the operator of the business, for the purpose of the definition, if they are running their own business. This means they would usually provide services to the shop to further their own business. We have to choose how, when and where their work is done. Is making meat pies done on the premises or is it done on the contractor’s premises? They have to be free to delegate to others to complete the work on their behalf. They have to provide tools and equipment to complete the task and be free to provide services to multiple clients. They are contractors who will not be covered. If they are running their own business, they are not subject to direction. A person who hires such a contractor would also generally not be subject to the control and direction of the operator of the retail business for the purpose of the definition. They have to be subject to the direction of the business. Even if they are a contractor, or a subcontractor to that contractor, or even if we drill down to an employee of the contractor’s subcontractor, we have drilled right down to make sure all those people are covered. We are not changing it; if they are not subject to the direction of the retail business, they are not covered.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Again, what is the definition of “subject to the control of the business owner”? If someone is a rep or a provider in a shop, they would be subject to some level of control because they can only come at certain hours and

they can only put their product in certain parts of the shop. They will probably be directed as to what they will supply. What level of direction is the test?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** There is no definition of “under the control or direction of the business”. It will ultimately be a question of fact for a court to determine on a case-by-case basis. The court might consider whether the business has the legal right to control how, where and when the person does that work and whether the person is required to perform the work as a representative of the business. For example, a person who is employed under a labour hire arrangement may be contracted by a labour hire agency, but nonetheless be under the control and direction of the business to whom the labour hire was contracted.

**Amendments put and passed.**

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Looking at clause 4 on page 3, lines 14 to 16 hold the definition of a “shop” —

... means the whole or any part of a building, place, stall, structure, tent, vehicle or yard in which goods are sold by retail, including by auction;

When we examine the explanatory memorandum, it explains the definition of a “shop” on page 2. It reads —

The definition of ‘shop’ is intended to capture any place where goods are sold, regardless of the quantity of goods sold or the predominant purpose of the business.

I am interested to look at the last example, which is about —

a part of a place if that part sells goods, such as a candy bar at a theatre, merchandise shop at a hotel, food outlet at an attraction, cellar door at a winery a florist in a hospital, etc.

When we look at a hotel, are we referring to the accommodation being separate from the bar area? What about if there is a pool area where a few drinks are sold? What is the definition meant to mean in the case of a hotel or some other place that is offering accommodation but also has areas that sell merchandise? Also, is any person who is involved in the occupation of selling alcohol covered by this legislation?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. The answer is yes because the definition of place is “part of a place that sells goods” such as a candy bar and those things he pointed out from the explanatory memorandum. If we take a hotel, the bar area where they are selling retail drinks is part of the place. All the workers in that part of the place will be protected by this legislation. However, they are not upstairs where they are renting out rooms. There will be areas that will be up for factual finding as to what took place in a particular area and whether there was retail sale or retail provision of food and drinks. It is a factual thing. When you enter a theatre, there is nothing for sale; you are there for viewing. Before you go in, like down at the Crown theatre, there is a bar where you can buy alcohol or light refreshments.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** To be considered a retail worker, a person has to be in a business that sells goods. It cannot be a business that sells only a service. For instance, a hairdresser is covered only if they sell product, as well as if they —

**Mr J.R. Quigley:** If they sell?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** If they sell product—shampoo or whatever.

**Mr J.R. Quigley:** Hairspray and the like.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes, whatever it is, even though they will consume some of those things incidentally in the provision of their service, that does not make them a retail worker of itself. Is that the case?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is correct. It has to be the provision of the goods to the customer. If I go to the dentist, the fillings he might put in my teeth is not the provision of a retail service. If we add in reception where I can buy dental care products, they will be.

**Clause, as amended, put and passed.**

**Clause 5 put and passed.**

**Clause 6: Section 426A inserted —**

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Clause 6 talks about the other part of the bill—the theft section. Line 21 on page 5 starts —

... has committed, and been convicted of, at least 2 offences that are also stealing offences (each a previous stealing offence) within the period of 1 year before the person’s conviction for the current stealing offence.

<023> F/5

I am just wondering what the time line is here. We are talking about “has committed, and being convicted of, at least two offences”. Presumably it takes some time for a person to go through a court process. Given that the courts are under such stress thanks to the Attorney General’s chronic underfunding, is there a likelihood that there could be a period of quite some considerable or indefinite time during which the person is not actually subject to the sanction because they

have not been convicted? For example, if I steal from Woolworths on 14 March and from IGA on 15 March and at some point the police grab me, put me in front of the court and I get a conviction —

**Mr J.R. Quigley:** It's unimaginable, but, yes, go on.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is unimaginable, but it could happen; you never know. The cost-of-living crisis is affecting everybody!

What length of time does it generally take at the moment for someone to go through that sort of process? How long is the piece of string before this person is actually caught up? If they have committed crimes in March and then go through the process and are convicted, but then commit a crime in July but have not yet been convicted at that point, do they then automatically get caught up because they now have three convictions that are already there or do they have to have the conviction recorded before this provision can take any effect?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** There are a couple of questions there. One is the time to trial, and that will depend upon the number of witnesses and court availability, but if they are pleading not guilty, they are looking at six months in the Magistrates Court, but that is a guesstimate. I do not have those figures in front of me, but I will during the estimates hearings, so the member can question me further then, but it is from the date of conviction. Everyone who is charged is presumed to be innocent. Let us say they plead not guilty to the theft in March and the trial is put off until the first available date—in October. In July they are charged again, and on this occasion they plead guilty. That will be a first offence, unless they have previous, but I am looking at this on the scenario put forward by the member that the person otherwise has a clean record, so we do not have to worry about stealing offences from last year. Have I made that clear for the member? In other words, in March they have no prior convictions. They are charged in March, they plead not guilty and it is off to October. They are charged again in April or May and they plead guilty. The trigger will not be applied, because they have not been convicted of two offences, only one offence.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** There is something at the back of my head that does not seem able to come to the surface to explain exactly what I am thinking here. This provision applies when the sentencing is made, not when the commission of a crime occurs—is that correct? If I have already potentially committed two crimes and I have not yet been convicted but when I come to be convicted, this provision will be triggered only when the conviction for the third crime occurs, not when the other two crimes are committed?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is from the date of conviction. At the time they are convicted, the court will look to see whether they have had two prior convictions in the preceding 12 months. If they have not had two prior convictions over the previous 12 months, they will not be captured. Just to clarify for the member, to go back to his example: they steal in March and plead not guilty, and they are put off until October. They then steal twice in April and they plead guilty to both offences. They do not have any prior convictions. When they are tried and convicted in October, they will have two priors. It is from the date of conviction. The first offence they ever committed —

**Mr R.S. Love:** That's what I was trying to get at. That's exactly what I was thinking about.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Thank you, member.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Proposed section 426A(4) states, in part —

For the purposes of subsection (2)(b) —

- (a) convictions for 2 or more previous stealing offences committed on the same day are to be treated as a single conviction;

I am wondering what the purpose of that is. It could be at two separate locations or they could be completely different offences. Why are they treated separately?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Across the statute book there are a number of offences—I am thinking of restraining orders at the moment—where there are counting rules for subsequent strikes. We want to get consistency across the statute book, so for restraining orders, it is whether they are committed on different days. A person can go into a newsagency and steal *The West Australian* and then go next door and steal a coke, all on the same day. That is one strike. That is the same as for the Restraining Orders Act and other legislation. It is the date: how many offences have been committed on that day?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I do not know whether there are any other examples of the two-strike matter the Attorney General was talking about, other than a restraining order, but I would have thought that a restraining order would be the commission of some sort of offence against, probably, the same person or of the same order, so there are two occurrences of the same thing, if you like, whereas in the Attorney General's example, they go into shop A and steal a product and then go into shop B and steal a completely different product. They are clearly two separate offences; they are not at all against the same person. I could understand it if the Attorney General were saying that they went to Woolworths and stole a coke and then stole a newspaper from the counter as they left. That would make some sense, but I am not really seeing from the Attorney General's example that the two things should necessarily be treated in the same way.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** If they take a product from counter A and a different product from counter B within the one store, it is one act of stealing; they are not charged with taking it from two separate counters. It is one act of stealing.

<024> J/3

We are trying to aim at the course of conduct. If on a day he takes something from the deli and then goes next door and takes something from the newsagent, it is a course of conduct on that day. If the next day he gets out of bed and embarks on the same course of conduct after he has got two of those minor convictions and is caught, he will be at risk of imprisonment. I do not want to cast an opinion, but do members remember the case on television of a gentleman who looked mentally challenged who said, "I'll take a bottle of liquor. I don't pay the fine. I drink it and when that's gone, I'll just go take another bottle of liquor, because you don't go to jail for not paying a fine." We are trying to capture that and say, "No, you're liable to go to prison after two of those." If he just does it on one day and it is a course of conduct on just one day, and then on the next day and the day after that he continues that course of conduct—like the gentleman I witnessed on TV saying, "It doesn't matter; I can keep on doing this"—sorry, sir, but no. If he keeps on doing that and already has minor convictions for stealing and comes up again on a third offence, he will be at risk of imprisonment.

**Clause put and passed.**

**Clauses 7 to 9 put and passed.**

**Title put and passed.**

### SCHOOL EDUCATION AMENDMENT BILL 2023

#### *Second Reading*

Resumed from 21 March.

**MS M.J. HAMMAT (Mirrabooka — Parliamentary Secretary)** [3.53 pm]: I am very happy to have the opportunity to speak on the important School Education Amendment Bill 2023. It is important legislation, one of a number of bills that addresses the implementation of recommendations arising out of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. A number of bills have been considered during the forty-first Parliament and there have also been many organisational level responses to the extensive work undertaken by the royal commission. This is a relatively straightforward bill to give effect to some of the important recommendations arising from that royal commission, but it is part of our ongoing commitment to ensure that children are safe in institutional settings and that we faithfully implement the work of that royal commission.

Before talking specifically about the bill, I want to make some general comments about the royal commission, because it is a very important moment in Australia's history. I acknowledge the work of the former Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who put that royal commission in place in 2012. The work that it did of examining very complex and confronting issues of how institutions have responded historically and contemporarily to child sexual abuse was incredibly important. It must have been very difficult and confronting for the commissioners and the people who worked on that royal commission. In my comments today I acknowledge the victim-survivors who came forward to give their evidence and share their stories. It must have been incredibly difficult for them to do that. I think we understand from some of the stories that have been shared that it was indeed a very traumatic and difficult experience, with victim-survivors often reliving events that might have happened many years ago, clearly unable to recover from the circumstances that they found themselves in as a result of sexual abuse in institutions. We have a responsibility to give effect to the recommendations of that royal commission to honour the work of those victim-survivors by implementing the recommendations to make sure that all our systems and structures are stronger for children and young people in the future. We have a responsibility to honour and learn from those stories and the mistakes made in the past, and honour the contributions of those people who suffered to make sure that we make changes that will ensure that young people in the future will have a very different experience in institutions. As part of that, it is essential that we have in place proper structures, policies and reporting schemes that will ensure we minimise harm to children.

As I said, the bill before us today is one of a number of pieces of legislation that arise from the work of the royal commission. This bill deals with some very specific circumstances that relate to Western Australian public schools' exclusion of students who demonstrate harmful sexual behaviours. Although the royal commission overwhelmingly considered circumstances whereby sexual abuse was undertaken by adults, that was not always the case. We know that harmful sexual behaviour and sexual abuse can be undertaken by children, those under 18, and impact on children. It is important that our schools have an appropriate framework that recognises that that can occur in a school setting and that we have a way to deal with students who have demonstrated harmful sexual behaviours.

The current provisions of the School Education Act 1999 give the authority to commence an exclusion process to the school principal. The provisions as they are currently drafted are intended to deal with situations that are specific to schools when the reasons for exclusion might be disruptive behaviour or dangerous behaviour, but always occurring in a school context. For a student who is behaving badly at school, exclusion processes would start as a way of dealing with that behaviour. They do not properly anticipate that that behaviour might occur outside the school grounds and

school hours, but it might impact on a school student and therefore have a very real impact in a school context. This bill recognises that when we are dealing with harmful sexual behaviours that indeed may happen from one school student towards another school student, it might not occur at school; it might occur after school hours away from school, but clearly when a student has been impacted by another's behaviour, having them continue together in school might in fact be retraumatising for that young person. It is essential that we have structures and processes that allow that to be dealt with.

<025> D/5

The context of the bill that comes before us today is to ensure that we have in place appropriate structures to assist victim-survivors to manage circumstances in which they have been impacted by another student. As I said, under the current scheme, there is no power to exclude a student whose harmful behaviours outside the school context have impacted another school student. The school principal may simply be unaware of events that are taking place outside the school. There is no general requirement that a principal be notified.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

## **COST OF LIVING — GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE — INQUIRY**

### *Motion*

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house —

- (1) condemns the Cook Labor government for its poor economic management, failure to deliver projects on time and on budget, and failure to deliver essential services when Western Australians are grappling with a cost-of-living crisis; and
- (2) calls for a special inquiry into Labor's near-eight-year track record of mismanagement and wrong priorities.

In moving this motion, I note that we had a discussion in this place yesterday about one such problem program, the Metronet program, and its impact on the state's finances. Throughout this boom period that Western Australia is supposedly in with surpluses running all the time, the state's net debt continues to climb. Under this government, debt will climb. We see debt climbing in the forward estimates. This government is blowing the boom. It is blowing opportunities to make Western Australia a stronger, more diversified and resilient economy following the inflow of money. Time after time, we see industry crying out, not for handouts, but for assistance to make sure that approvals are timely, and that the government is not just paying lip-service towards making sure that we have an opportunity to capture new industries that want to establish themselves in this state. I have knowledge of many projects that are seeking to invest billions of dollars in our state, but they cannot get off the ground because of the Western Australian approvals system. They cannot get help from organisations such as the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, because it is one of those failed departments that was created through the machinery-of-government changes when Labor first came to office—changes that have led to dysfunction and chaos in the public sector. We have an isolated group of directors general with vast super departments who have lost touch with their departments, and ministers who are unable to exert the necessary control and ensure that the necessary direction from government is given and carried out by the departments in their task. How can public servants know which minister to answer to when four or five ministers have a role in a department, with none of them being preeminent?

In yesterday's discussions, the Treasurer, who is also the Minister for Transport, got quite upset about imputations that she was singled out because of her gender. That was simply not the case. The transport minister is also in charge of Treasury. We know that the transport departments under her control, such as Main Roads, the Department of Transport, the ports and the Public Transport Authority, have embarked on some of the government's largest projects in Western Australia. The risk is that the person who holds the purse strings is also pushing to develop these projects, and that is a conflict of interest. It is not a personal thing at all. It would not matter whether the former Treasurer or the Treasurer before that were in that position. If they were the proponents of these vast projects and, at the same time, were responsible for trying to keep the costs of the state under control, I would see the embodiment of those two roles as a conflict of interest, no matter what. I wanted to put that on the record.

When the Metronet project was first announced at a cost of \$3 billion, there was the lofty view that nearly \$1 billion would be funded from the uplift in land values via developer contributions or the from the sale of land et cetera. None of that happened because nobody wanted to invest in the areas in which the Metronet stations are located. Maybe one day down the track that will happen, but it certainly is not the funding mechanism to pay for the program. From the very beginning, there was a serious miscalculation in the business cases and planning of those projects, because one-third of the expected income never arrived and funding had to be sourced elsewhere. Yes, the Western Australian government was fortunate to have the support of a coalition government in Canberra, which was very generous in funding the cost blowouts and the further programs that were added to the Metronet system. But that largesse has evaporated and Canberra, under Labor, is not as friendly towards Western Australian projects. After the King review

of major projects and the investment pipeline across the nation, money for Western Australian projects is being wound back. Furthermore, in the old system, 80 per cent of major road projects were funded federally, but that contribution in the future will reduce to 50 per cent, which will have a significant impact on transport infrastructure projects from here on end.

We know that there are problems with Metronet and that what was originally a \$3 billion project has now blown out to \$5.5 billion. The government has not given an explanation for that, other than to say that costs have gone up. Costs have gone up for everybody. Other organisations have had to control costs by making some changes and keep their spending in check.

Another good project is the Bunbury Outer Ring Road, which is valued by the members of the South West Region and the population in that area. It, too, has suffered huge cost overruns. In fact, if it had been developed in scope, the costs that were first promised would have doubled, and doubled in a very short time. We do not see pushback from the government or any control being exerted over those extraordinary changes. It has been said in this place—we have heard the claims—that somehow this government is driving up patronage on our public transport network. During 2014–15, 149 million journeys took place on Western Australia’s network. In 2023, the number of journeys was 123 million, which is a 17 per cent decrease in patronage on the network. I do not know the reasons behind that, but that is not a positive move in making use of the network into the future. We know that the number of people using Metronet is not what the government would like; if it is, the government has a very low bar of what is acceptable use for the very large investments that have been made.

<026> C/3

We hope the situation will change because the cost of those projects to the Western Australian community is actually mind blowing; it is huge. It is taking up a very large portion of the construction effort in Western Australia at the moment and is very much competing with private businesses that are also trying to develop and go forward with their projects. Traditionally, we would want some sort of countercyclical investment by government at a time when investment in the private sector is lower as that would even out the boom-bust cycle. Instead of that, the government is amplifying the boom-bust cycle, with the most recent example being the closure of the Armadale line and the expenditure that is taking place there. That project has basically sucked up pretty well all the concrete in Perth to make the precast panels et cetera. That is placing a lot of stress on construction at a time when that was not necessary. The Byford rail extension could easily have taken place without the closure of the Armadale line—the two are separate and different. In the meantime, we would not have seen the chaos on the roads that seems to be occurring more and more. The government has lost control of that project. The Treasurer has no incentive to keep that matter under control because she would like to see the project developed.

I would also like to talk a little about what the business community is feeling at the moment. The main thrust of a report in *The West Australian* earlier this month, headed “Trust in WA Government down, boards grapple with cyber threats: Australian Institute of Company Directors poll”, can be summed up with this quote —

Confidence in the WA Government among local company directors has slipped to its lowest level since pre-pandemic, with more disagreeing it —

The government —

understands business than agreeing for the first time in years.

We are seeing an increasing disconnect between the Labor government, both here and in Canberra, and the business community and its needs. I hear that all the time. When I have gone to meetings with some of the key players in the minerals industry, for instance, they have told me that there is no support to get their projects off the ground. We live in a competitive environment. Western Australia is not the only place people can spend money. Once upon a time, Western Australia was the pre-eminent destination for mining investment. It has now slipped from that lofty place and will continue to slip. The hundreds and hundreds of projects—mining leases—waiting in the approvals network were highlighted in question time yesterday. The government has made announcements around streamlining approvals. It has been talking about streamlining for as long as I can remember—a long time—yet we have seen no real change. The government is committed to making announcements, but it is not committed to following them through into programs and practices that make sense and will work. I believe that is why businesses are reporting a quite gloomy view of the government and what the government will do. A recent report on business confidence from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia stated that almost one in five businesses are at risk of closing or significantly scaling back their operations this year. Rising operating costs remain the most prevalent barrier to business growth over the next 12 months, as reported by 71 per cent of businesses, which are struggling with labour and costs, as we know.

Household confidence has obviously gone down and we are seeing the cost of accommodation going through the roof, but there have been no real answers from the government about fixing that situation. We have a housing crisis but no acceptance that there needs to be some action to actually fix it. We also know that this is flowing through to younger people who want to enter business. Young entrepreneurs are not confident that their businesses will go forward. That was from another report on small business and the uncertain future for young people and their businesses.

Regionally, we saw the situation in Kalgoorlie when businesses lost, in some cases, hundreds of thousands of dollars as a result of the power outages out there. This government promised support and delivered none—a \$250 payment, I think. That is nothing. There was no support, despite the promises.

In regional development terms, strategic industrial areas sit idle across the state. Oakajee in my electorate has been talked about right the way through this government, yet nothing has been developed out there and no progress has been made. We do not see any sort of coherent strategy from this government to drive regional development. The current Minister for Regional Development dropped the ball on the Bunbury Dolphin Discovery Centre in his home town. That had to close and be bailed out by the government, despite the millions of dollars of royalties for regions investment that the government had put into that project. The minister had not been looking closely at that project in his own home town to make sure that the money was well used and that this very important tourism asset would continue into the future.

In tourism, there are some really worrying trends in terms of Western Australians, other Australians and international travellers being able to enjoy the natural environment in our state. The mooted closure of Horizontal Falls is one example. We know that has happened. I know that the Gloucester tree in Pemberton is closed; nobody can climb it, despite it being a key attraction in that area. We have the skywalk in Kalbarri, yet there is talk that Nature's Window will be closed to people. That is very worrying for people in that area. There is talk about the future use of Wave Rock as a tourist attraction. I have also had people come to me with their concerns about the way in which the Pinnacles are being used at the moment. There are all those issues. Tourism, which again comes under the remit of the Minister for Transport; Treasurer, is suffering in regional areas because of the mooted closure of those attractions going forward. The government does not seem to understand how important tourism is to many of our regional communities.

In terms of regional development, again, energy is one of the huge opportunities that presents itself to our state, but it is also one of the great barriers. The member for Central Wheatbelt has talked about the effect of poor power supply on communities in her electorate. I acknowledge that there have been some very bad incidents and a lack of service in those areas. I will examine what it means when that happens in a community. It means that everything shuts down. The communications shut down because the Telstra towers usually last only an hour or two. Sometimes they have been upgraded and might last seven or eight hours, and in one or two cases in the state they have a generator, but for the most part towns will lose communications. There will probably be a cessation of trading and spoilage of products in shops. It becomes quite debilitating for those communities. The community of Mullewa, which I represent, has virtually not had one week for the entire summer period when the power has not been out. The power supply out there is so tenuous that Western Power has had generators parked permanently at Mullewa over the last few years that are designed to come into operation when the power goes out. However, oftentimes they do not kick in, for whatever reason, and the power does not arrive. I have seen a staggering accumulation of incidents in which power has not been supplied to regional communities over the last few years. We had the Shepherd inquiry into the power situation after the 2021 blackouts. The opposition called for a more far-reaching inquiry, but that was rejected. What have we seen since then? We have seen the events in Kalgoorlie and the wheatbelt.

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We know that this situation is not being addressed in a satisfactory way to ensure that our communities have reliable power. Without reliable power, how can we have industrial and economic development and how can we develop a community?

Another matter that is of huge concern to people right across the state is the rising crime problem, especially violent crime. Today we passed a bill that addressed part of that problem as it relates to retail workers. The government has acknowledged that change is needed in some circumstances. I and everybody who lives in regional WA knows that crime is getting out of control in regional WA especially. I might have already given some statistics during debate on the retail workers legislation. In 2017–18, in regional Australia—that is when Labor came in—14 537 offences were committed against people, which includes everything from homicide to assault and threatening behaviour. In 2022–23, that figure blew out to 24 672, which is nearly a 70 per cent increase in violent crime in regional Western Australia. The number of offences committed in the Perth metropolitan area has also increased, going up roughly 30 per cent over the same time.

We know that incidents of violent crime have increased across our state. We know that police resources are important in battling those incidents, but it is not the only thing that will help. We need a whole-of-community approach to battling some of these crime issues.

Police presence is undoubtedly important. When offenders in towns get out of control, Operation Regional Shield sends in officers who have no understanding of the area; they are sent in for a short period to quell the problem and keep it under control. A blitz approach has been taken in places such as Bentley. There was an incident in Cannington in 2022 and quite a bit of antisocial behaviour occurred in Scarborough in 2021. Even in the metropolitan area, we have seen these emergency responses from the police. All credit to the police who attend. I am not criticising the police, but they have a lack of resources and this government has a lack of commitment when it comes to getting crime under control.

The government talks about protecting the communities. It manufactures fear in the community, like it tried to do with the gun debate, but it does not do anything to protect the community in a meaningful way.

We have been calling for diversionary services for youth who have been offending in regional areas for years. When this government came in, calls and promises were made that on country solutions would be provided in the Kimberley, for instance. We are nearly eight years in and it still has not been provided; there is nothing in place.

We do not have to be rocket scientists to know what will happen if we take young people from all over regional WA and put them in one building in Perth. When they come back, will they be rehabilitated or better criminals? I do not know the answer. For some people, maybe they are rehabilitated but many people in regional Australia call that the university of crime. It probably has its issues and it would be far better if we could deal with people in their own area.

In that regard, I was recently contacted by people who are concerned about the ongoing situation in the midwest. In Geraldton, community work orders imposed by the courts cannot be carried out because no staff are available to supervise the work orders. Therefore, if there are no staff, the work orders cannot be carried out. It would be quite unreasonable for a magistrate to use that as a setting procedure knowing that there are no staff to undertake those work orders. We are told that the position has been advertised. Again, we are seeing this lack of foresight, planning and commitment from the government that leads to these situations. We then have to bring in things like Operation Regional Shield because there are not enough local police and youth need to be sent to other places because they cannot be dealt with locally. Even community in a centre with well over 50 000 people does not have a solution and appropriate work orders cannot be supervised because there are no staff.

These are the types of things that are going on in various areas of the state. There are not just issues with capital projects. The member for Vasse has been very vocal on the health system. Regional health is especially problematic. We know of this government's miserable approach to the patient assisted travel scheme. It simply will not fund it adequately. We know that similar schemes are funded much more appropriately in other states. The amount paid to people for their mileage is 16¢ a kilometre. Come on! If we were to increase that fivefold, I imagine that would still be less than a public servant would be paid if they had to use their car to go somewhere. It is absolutely reprehensible for a government that is sitting on such a massive surplus and generating massive surpluses due to the price of iron ore and other minerals, and also the huge revenue from payroll tax and stamp duty that are flowing into the coffers in Western Australia, and of course the GST fix that was put in place by the coalition government. In those days of the coalition, we had a government in Canberra that cared about Western Australia rather than one whose sole preoccupation seems to be bringing about damage to our industries. I am thinking of the Nature Positive Plan, parts of which have been withdrawn. Professor Samuel, who wrote the report that led to that plan, is very confident that it will still be implemented. I am sure that after the next election, the new government will come back and have another go.

People need to be wary that federal Labor has industry in Western Australia in its sights big time. It is not there to help Western Australian industry. Its industrial relations policies, environmental policies and policies around the banning of live export directly affect Western Australian industry and Western Australian jobs. People need to be very careful when they make their choice at the next federal election because we know that the government in Canberra cannot be trusted. In fact, we know that this government secretly knows that. That is why it set up the embassy in Canberra in the first place—to try to keep in touch with what is going on.

We know that when this government first came in, it introduced its machinery-of-government changes. I have spoken about that. There have been plenty of reviews, discussions and admissions because of the continual need to implement these task forces, which never seem to achieve anything. The day-to-day business of those departments has broken down; they are not working. I believe that a change in government would see a change in attitude and a return to a system with a responsible minister in an area with a clearly defined service, expectation and budget where, as is required under the Westminster system, that minister can take some responsibility. No responsibility is being taken by this current government. We have seen the way this government has mistreated the processes of Parliament. We have the Standing Committee on Legislation in the other place, which has examined only one bill in this Parliament.

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It was sent there only as a bit of a smokescreen so the government could say that it had used the committee. We know there was a bit of heat about it soon after the Premier assumed office from the former Premier. It all blew up that this committee was sitting there and these politicians were being paid but were not doing anything. The government found the smallest piece of legislation and threw it the committee's way, and what happened, member for Roe? What was that legislation called?

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** The Sports and Entertainment Trust Bill 2023 was introduced into the wrong chamber.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is right. It backfired. It was such an own goal. It just goes to show how important it is to scrutinise the government's legislation. Imagine if the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill 2021 had gone to that committee for consideration. Would the government have had the backlash and the embarrassing backdown that it has had? Probably not. It might have realised that there were some unworkable elements in the legislation long before it got to that situation. When it does not use the processes of Parliament properly, that is what comes of it. We know that this



Parliament does not have the ability to properly scrutinise what the government has been doing because the government controls the Parliament with its numbers. Committees are unable to do the jobs that they should do because the government controls what they can look at. We know that answers need to be given about what has been going on, which is why in the second part of this motion, we are calling for a special inquiry into Labor's near-eight-year track record of mismanagement and wrong priorities.

We know that the Labor government was very keen on bringing in the now Agent General in London. When Labor first came to office, it launched a special inquiry into the projects of the former government. We know that when this government was first elected, it had its own little slush fund that it prosecuted—Local Projects, Local Jobs. We had a Premier who went outside the normal ways of doing business, if you like, in terms of the government raising funds through royalties and taxation and in other ways. The government had a very powerful political position, with dominance in both houses of Parliament, and the former Premier had a 90 per cent approval rating in the polling at one stage. At the peak of that, he knocked on the door of industry and said that he wanted it to cough up some money for a fund. Despite the state surplus, the captains of industry were called upon and \$750 million was put into a community investment fund. Businesses have a right to spend their money how they wish, but I wonder how much of that was due to fear of what would happen if they did not put the money in. What was the implication for them from the need to do that? That is one of the most worrying matters that I have seen during this term of Parliament. There does not seem to be much output from that investment fund at the moment, but there might be some down the track, potentially.

Why a special inquiry? As I say, a special inquiry is the vehicle that was used by Labor in 2017. The definition of a special inquiry and its purpose and arrangement is in the Public Sector Management Act. Section 24I, "Powers of person conducting special inquiry", provides that they have the power to enter the premises of a public sector body, by written notice require a person to produce to him or her any document that is in the possession or under the control of the person, and inspect any document. Section 24J states that a special inquirer is not bound by the rules of evidence and may be informed as the special inquirer thinks fit. Basically, they are powers akin to those of a royal commission and provide the ability to look beyond the veil and peer into the murky undertakings that we see by government.

There are all these contracts with head contractors that are delivering major projects, but there does not seem to be any transparent accounting of the costs, certainly not in Parliament. Yes, some total amounts are given, but there is no detail of what went wrong. We need to know the answers. We need to know how the government let a project that was originally worth \$3 billion blow out to \$5.5 billion. It still has not delivered the project in full.

In the end, that is just one example of the mismanagement of this government and its inability to run those projects correctly at a time when the state is already under stress to provide the construction workforce for our housing and our economic output from our mines and future industries. In the middle of all that, it has closed the Armadale line and embarked on the billion-dollar plus investment in concrete that is the elevated rail project. It could have waited for another 10 years until there was not much activity in the private sector and the economy needed a boost. That would be a far more responsible way for the government to act, not go into an already inflated and difficult construction environment and make it worse by chucking in more money when it needs to be directed to far more meaningful purposes.

I will conclude my discussion, but I believe that there is every ground for there to be a special inquiry. If this government does not accept that there is such a need, I can assure it that when there is a change of government, there will be the immediate launch of a special inquiry into WA Labor's mismanagement of the boom and the potential economic growth that we could have seen. Instead, we have a government that is unable to manage projects, cannot deliver services and continually does not meet its budgets.

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [4.36 pm]: I rise to contribute to the debate on the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition that this house condemns the Cook Labor government for its poor economic management, blowing the boom and failing to deliver key services, compounding the stress on Western Australian households. I will focus on the shadow portfolios of health, mental health and the prevention of family and domestic violence.

With \$20 billion in surpluses over the past five years, thanks to booming iron ore royalties and a GST fix put in place by the former federal coalition government, it is fair to ask why so many Western Australians are struggling to make ends meet and what this state and Western Australians have to show for it. Although we are a wealthy state, the riches are not being used to help address a number of significant issues, including the increased number of working families who are being forced to choose between paying bills and putting food on the table. Seemingly, Labor is too busy spending and is obsessed with budget blowouts on Metronet totalling over \$12.5 billion—up by more than 300 per cent from the original assessment.

Our state has enjoyed \$44 billion in royalties since Labor came to office, yet Western Australians are not seeing this prosperity in practice. It is appalling that in a state as prosperous as WA, with a government that is recording multibillion-dollar surpluses on the back of a mining boom, we have to fight for investment in our health system. Our health system is the backbone that carries us from infancy into childhood to adolescence and on to adulthood. Whether someone uses the health system routinely, sporadically or unexpectedly, access to timely and attentive medical care is

a primary responsibility of any government. There is no hyperbole in that. To quote from the Australian Medical Association —

... we have increasingly heard stories of people dying waiting to be seen in public hospitals that are operating at breaking point, patients waiting years for essential surgery, and ambulances ramping outside hospitals because there are not enough beds and staff to cope with demand.

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It is as simple as that. Western Australians such as Aishwarya Aswath and Ashleigh Hunter, with bright futures ahead of them, deserve better than a mismanaged health system. Western Australians deserve better than out-of-control ramping rates or being left in corridors until beds become available. They deserve better than red squaring and significant medical wait times. Medical professionals, who do their very best with what our health system provides them, deserve to work in a sector that sees real investment and positive outcomes and support, because we also know our health workers feel that they cannot speak up when they want to.

Our state has the highest recurrent expenditure per person of all states. The Premier and the Minister for Health are seemingly proud about investment in our health system per capita. However, it is one thing to spend an extra \$500 above the national average, but another about what those outcomes actually deliver. Although the government spends an extra \$500 above the national average, we have some of the worst-performing emergency departments in the country. It is not enough to boast that we are spending more than every other state if it is not leading to better health outcomes, bed capacity and more support for our frontline health workers. It means that the system is inefficient and that this government's policies are not working. It begs the question of what the money is being spent on if it is not on the resources essential to retaining staff and driving down long wait times and ambulance ramping. It is clear that despite record surpluses and promises of record investment, the health system remains in crisis, and those who experience it firsthand are left wondering where our state's money is actually being allocated.

Our state's hardworking health professionals right across our health system are constantly being asked to do more with less. Our frontline health workers regularly go above and beyond by working longer shifts to maintain patient care. They face abuse from a system that they cannot fix. Even Labor's own union mates at the Australian Council of Trade Unions have reported that over half of frontline workers say they are overworked and skip entitled breaks, leading to increased stress. Everyone will remember in 2022 when nurses and midwives gathered outside this building chanting, "We're not going to take it anymore!" The response to their ask from the government was that the surplus will go down and it was a one-time thing—yet here we are some two years later and the surplus is still going strong. The government either does not understand the economics of its budget or it opposes spending money on our necessary health sector and health professionals—or both. This government has a long way to go in providing support for our dedicated health workers. Hospital staff, who are the key to caring for the sick and vulnerable in our health system, are admired so much by the broader community, yet this government undervalues them.

In January of this year, 50 clinicians from St John of God Hospital, the public hospital in Midland, wrote a letter stating —

We as the clinicians are desperate and are exhausted... we are working in a ticking time bomb, another Aishwarya incident will happen.

The Australian Nursing Federation's state secretary, Janet Reah, has outright stated that "it is primarily about respect and investment in our nurses and midwives". Our health professionals know what they need. They have consistently been looking for a government to listen, and these pleas continue to fall on the government's deaf ears. It is up to the government to provide the necessary support so that our health staff and patients' lives are not put at risk.

All around the country we see record investment to support the retention of healthcare workers. Here, our health system is clearly not the employer of choice. However, we should not be surprised that our health workers care. They are so dedicated that they cannot walk away when caring for a patient, and they feel such a strong commitment to their fellow workers and staff; there is great camaraderie amongst them. They have been put in an incredible situation of responding to a hospital system that is under-resourced.

Last year, ambulances spent more than 52 000 hours stuck outside our hospitals. When the government first came to office, it was under 10 000 hours. Roger Cook called ambulance ramping a crisis when he was in opposition. What does the Premier call it when current figures are now more than five times what would supposedly be a crisis or when, in just three months this year, ambulance ramping has already exceeded 2017 levels? There has been no shortage of excuses from the other side as to their failure to support our health system. Across our health sector, people are being made to wait unnecessarily, contributing to the domino effect of issues across the sector.

Given their inaction on these issues, those opposite need to think no further than a story heard last year in a litany of forms from different people right across this state. This particular incident—a tragic story—involved Mitchell Pearce, a 52-year-old Busselton man who spent 130 days in hospital waiting for appropriate disability accommodation so he could be discharged. He had recovered from the original illness that he was in hospital for, but the inability to be accepted into aged care was a significant barrier to his release.

Appallingly, that is not where it ends. Elective surgery numbers in our state keep getting worse. This state has seen a 55 per cent increase in the number of people on the elective surgery waitlist. In March 2017, the elective surgery waitlist was at just under 20 000 cases and it now sits at over 30 000. In a perfect world, no-one should have to wait for medical intervention. At the very least, a 55 per cent increase should never have been allowed to occur. As of February, over 5 000 people fell outside the boundary waiting in pain or discomfort. Of those, nearly 300 category 1 urgent patients—by definition, those who could deteriorate rapidly—were waiting longer than necessary. In 2017, those opposite claimed that the elective surgery waitlist was unacceptable, yet, seven years on, they have again proved they are out of their depth when it comes to these issues. They cannot manage or support them, and they refuse to effectively fund them and address these issues.

It is an absolute disgrace that Western Australian are still waiting. Adding insult to injury, these wait times extend to our children and their future. The first major report from the Select Committee into Child Development Services released in November last year made clear recommendations about what can immediately be done to reduce unacceptable wait times and expand service provisions. The Minister for Health's one-page response to the committee's report was beyond underwhelming, and gave no indication at that time of extra funding or meaningful plans for addressing these recommendations. In metropolitan Perth, nearly 10 000 children were waiting to access a paediatrician, as highlighted in figures obtained last month. For primary school ages, the wait list has jumped by around 2 200 children, with the median wait time ballooning out from 17.8 months to 21.3 months in the year to February 2023.

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Constant pressure on this issue, led by my colleague in the other place Hon Donna Faragher, has finally pushed the health minister five months later to announce a \$39 million commitment of funding for these under-pressure services. This was recognised quite clearly in the report, which had only seen an additional \$300 000 committed in that previous budget. This comes from a government that can throw \$10 billion extra at Metronet, which has blown out over the last seven years, with no issue, but takes five months—even longer, if we consider how long these wait times have persisted—to allocate funds for this vital sector of our health system. It should not be so difficult. We are enjoying the largest boom in WA's history, yet it took a petition, numerous calls from the opposition, led by Hon Donna Faragher, a committee making strong recommendations and at least five months for this government to commit \$39 million. As I stated in question time today, over that twelve-month period, an additional \$2 billion was committed through Metronet.

In the Child and Adolescent Health Service, these wait lists are unacceptable. The current system gives no confidence to parents or their kids that they are a priority for this government. Likewise, one year ago this month, the government announced that it was moving the proposed women's and babies' hospital from the desired location at the QEII site 20 kilometres south to Murdoch. The Premier and the Minister for Health have forged ahead with this unnecessary move despite warnings from over 200 clinicians about the increased risks associated with this decision.

Stories like those of Angela Courtney demonstrate the lack of forward thinking from this Premier and his ministers. When Angela had her son Hunter at 25 weeks, he was considered very high risk and required surgery at a nearby hospital. Angela had to wait anxiously until Hunter was stable enough to travel the very short distance for surgery, and even then the travel was always very much touch and go. Instead of having a women's and babies' hospital tri-located with the Perth Children's Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and being supported by various health institutions, families and their babies will face increasing rates of morbidity and mortality due to commuting to and in between these hospitals after high-risk births. This government's decision to move the women's and babies' hospital away from the widely supported location at the QEII site proves that its decisions do not reflect the reality experienced by those in the healthcare sector. The Premier should know the health system inside and out, given that he was the previous health minister and the shadow health minister. In such roles, he supported the women's and babies' hospital being at a tri-located world-class site, and should now know better.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms L. METTAM:** The Premier should be fighting for our health system and its future functionality. A real Premier would be taking active steps to address this issue. As is international best practice, a world-class women's and babies' hospital can only be at a site that is tri-located alongside an adult tertiary hospital and the equivalent of Perth Children's Hospital. A real Premier would be fighting for our frontline workers and supporting their needs. A real Premier would make sure that Western Australians see the prosperity that lines this government's pockets being put into our critical services. Across the health system, this government has shown that its priorities are not where they should be.

I will touch on now the area of mental health. Ward 5A, the mental health inpatient unit at Perth Children's Hospital, recently moved patients who are over 14 years old to Hollywood Private Hospital so extensive upgrades at Perth Children's Hospital can be made. It is a matter that we have been raising. The health minister stated that moving over-14s is a permanent move and that the leasing of beds at the private hospital would be utilised until a longer-term solution can be found. Despite the ward having been reported as the location of a number of assaults involving children and staff over two years ago, including an alleged rape of a 13-year-old, it has taken as long as this for the government to take any proactive steps on this issue.

Our children, especially those struggling with the mental health, deserve better stability than a bandaid model. They deserve long-term plans that are made with an urgency befitting their need for safety and support. The health minister has made it clear that these age cohorts needed to be separated because they need different treatment regimes and that facilities would need to be built. We know that this government knows that need for mental health support has grown significantly in recent years, with nearly 43 per cent of Australians aged between 16 and 85 experiencing some form of mental health disorder. Why has it taken this long for the government to take action on this issue, and why does the government not have a concrete plan for these children going forward? Again, that rape and the assaults happened years ago. If it were not for the parents of the alleged victim of that alleged rape speaking up, the public would be none the wiser about that. If the mental health of our children had been a top priority, decisions on the long-term future of the mental health inpatient unit would have been made when these incidents occurred, or better yet, the unit would have been assessed on its capabilities before these assaults were able to occur.

In 2017, the WA Labor platform stated —

WA Labor recognises ... the provision of mental health services is a priority and will focus on preventative and early intervention programs, appropriately qualified professional support ...

Either the government broke its promise by taking seven years to consider the future of this facility, or it should look up the definition of “priority”. This is not the only time that this government has turned a blind eye to the struggle of many Western Australians in accessing critical mental health care.

We have heard time and again of young children, many reaching their teen years, when they should be having fun with their friends and learning for their future, who feel so unable to cope with their mental health struggles that they are, sadly, taking their own lives. I think regularly of one particular individual, who I am not sure is able to be named. She is a 13-year-old, whose family I am in contact with, who tragically took her own life shortly after she left an appointment with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in 2020. Her story highlights a serious problem with a system that has been struggling to cope with the rise in demand for years.

WA’s Chief Psychiatrist, Dr Nathan Gibson, stated, after his review into this individual’s death —

“The death of any child is appalling ... it cannot be rationalised for her family or for any of us in the broader community” ...

The deaths of our children, or any Western Australian desperately seeking care, is one death too many.

<031> 1/5

Incredibly, four years later we are awaiting the outcome of this inquest. I understand it is imminent in relation to the failings. Sadly, it is happening more and more every day. Nathan Gibson also touched on the fact there is no shortage of reports and recommendations about what is required in the mental health system but what is missing is a government taking action on these issues. As I have stated, it is several years on from 2020 and we are awaiting an outcome from the coroner’s report.

Sadly, it is happening more and more every day, including the south west where this system failed a 14-year-old who committed suicide in February last year. His mother, Michelle, had tried desperately to get her son an appointment with a paediatrician or a psychiatrist. It is incredibly concerning that Michelle, who was trying desperately to help her son, could not get a psychiatrist appointment until November—nine months too late—or was told she would have to wait 18 months to see a paediatrician.

Former Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People Michelle Scott put it quite eloquently —

For children and young people, mental health is critically important—not only because it is the key to a rich enjoyment of childhood and adolescence, but also because it provides the foundation for a resilient and mentally healthy adulthood.

As leaders, it is essential we ensure appropriate mental health support services are in place and effective. This is a vital part of keeping our children safe. In the words of the Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People, “Our children cannot wait.” This government is failing children, families and so many Western Australians across the board.

In relation to the portfolio area of the prevention of family and domestic violence, no priority has been given to addressing family and domestic violence and protecting those who are most vulnerable. Our Western Australia Police Force remains under-resourced, and our support systems for those fleeing domestic violence cannot meet the sheer number of people trying to access these services. Unlike the Premier and his ministers, we in opposition take time to talk and listen to individuals who are impacted by these issues. In 2017, there were around 19 000 family assaults in WA and that figure seven years later has reached over 29 000, a nearly 54 per cent increase in these assaults. Similarly, there have been around 3 000 more breaches of family violence restraining orders since Labor came to power. In our regions, family-related assaults are on the rise as well. In the Kimberley, 453 family assaults occurred in December 2023 alone, which is an average of over 14 per day. These figures are very saddening. In November, the Premier announced a \$72 million investment into family and domestic violence. Although funding for this area is necessary, it

raises the question: how can Western Australians feel confident that this money is being directed appropriately and will help address family domestic violence and those fleeing it when the \$300 million invested since 2017 has not seen a reduction in this crime?

In the south west, Harbor Refuge and Support Services has received 718 calls since the beginning of this financial year and it has had to turn away 314 individuals due to a lack of accommodation. This is on top of figures that show five Western Australian women were turned away from domestic violence shelters every day last year, with 50 people going unassisted in their pursuit of short-term emergency housing. That is simply horrifying. Support from charities and not-for-profits is vital in getting many survivors of family and domestic violence back on their feet. Instead, these charities continue to struggle to meet demand escalated by cost of living and the housing crisis. The opposition has been calling for more support for our charities to assist the vulnerable in a range of areas. This is a compounding issue. The lack of planning for mental health services and wait times for psychological appointments means that many survivors go without essential mental health support at a critically important time. For children, access to mental health support in the face of trauma is also imperative, which is well understood. Adding to the often psychological and emotional trauma, family and domestic violence is resulting in many needing to leave their homes. In 2023, Western Australia had the highest rate in the country of women who had experienced domestic violence approaching homelessness services. That astounding figure sits at around 55 per cent.

Despite assurances from this government to the public that it would work to increase police numbers by 950 on our streets by June 2024, nearly four years later, we are no safer. In two months, Labor will have failed to deliver on this promise and left our police force without the support it needs to dedicate resources to this area and tackle family and domestic violence issues.

I appreciate that I am running out of time but if the government truly wanted to address the scourge of family and domestic violence, it would have to work to address these compounding issues that grow worse for all Western Australians. We must continue to provide appropriate funding and support for these agencies, along with making housing available and obviously supporting our police force by stopping the exodus of police leaving to ensure that perpetrators are held to account. No person ever expects to find themselves on the receiving end of family and domestic violence, and they are vulnerable when that happens.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [5.06 pm]: I rise to briefly discuss the motion today, moved by the Leader of the Opposition, condemning —

... the Cook Labor government for its poor economic management, failure to deliver projects on time and on budget, and failure to deliver essential services when Western Australians are grappling with a cost-of-living crisis;

I think it is a well-worded motion and is something that strikes home with a lot of our constituents, especially in regional areas. Quite frankly, the people of regional Western Australia will not forget what this government has done to them over the last seven years and more. The feeling out there is quite palpable. We listen to people like I did on ABC great southern radio this morning. Tony from Cranbrook talked about having to euthanise his sheep. He was talking about how hard it is out there at the moment, the lack of state government support and the federal government's intervention into the live sheep market. When I heard the Premier's response today, I was appalled at the misunderstanding and lack of understanding that the Premier has on the live export market on how that flows on and provides a market to our sheep producers. Right now, their dams out there are going dry and they are running out of feed. The Premier stood here saying it has nothing to do with the government. He has no idea. It is upsetting to the people of regional Western Australia when they hear that attitude. I will be talking about that perhaps a little bit later in my contribution. I certainly want to emphasise the way people in regional Western Australia are feeling about the attack on farming, as I said; the attack on fisheries; and the attack on forestry. It is an attack on regional people who want to go out for some recreational fishing and commercial fishers, and on developing marine parks with a lack of consultation.

<032> R/3

They cannot believe it. Even though none of them are in the chamber at the moment, I feel sorry for the regional members. How are they going to defend the actions of this government? Nonetheless, I want to spend some time on education, so I am glad the Minister for Education is in here today. I am also glad that the member for Victoria Park will be responding. I thought we worked hard, member for Victoria Park, on the school bus review. We spent quite a bit of time in the regional areas. It worries me when we see an \$8 billion blowout in Metronet and we had to work through getting a few kids picked up at a bus stop by getting a bus run diverted to try to get some of those kids to school. It is very challenging when we see \$8 billion going adrift over here and how hard people like the member for Central Wheatbelt and myself have to work to get some equity for our regional students just to be delivered to school.

They are the challenges, along with the contractors who are working hard but finding conditions in the world of school buses very challenging. Those are the perceived injustices that our regional people feel when all they want to do is get their children delivered to school in a safe manner and picked up at the stop down the road or, for that matter, even drive 20 or 30 kilometres down the road to get them to a stop that then takes them another 70 or 80 kilometres to their school. Those are the challenges. We can see by the lighthearted response by the Treasurer, "Originally I think it was

around \$3.5 billion but, like-for-like, it has blown out by \$2 billion, but that's the way it is." Of course, we started at \$3 billion and we are now close to \$12 billion and rising. Those are the issues that our regional families face.

We looked at the *Facing the Facts* report, which I think is a very good document. It was a review led by Hon Carmen Lawrence, the former Labor Premier. I picked out a few of the issues that the report identified and some of the things that were identified about describing teaching currently. That includes schools being starved of real term funding and the recommendation that WA public schools be funded to 100 per cent of school resourcing standard. I will say to his credit, with the federal Minister for Education, the Minister for Education has come up with a solution. Perhaps that one has been sorted out. She also pointed out that significant and growing pressure has meant teachers have reached breaking point, chronic and growing teacher shortages, increased volumes and complexity of the teaching task, challenge of educating more disadvantaged students and students with increasingly complex needs. I think that is something the Minister for Education has identified. That is a real challenge for our teachers in the current system when they have classrooms with students with complex needs.

I congratulate our teachers in the system who handle those challenges to the best of their abilities. I also thank our education assistants. I would love to see our education assistants rewarded for the challenges they face in those classrooms right through from our primary system to the secondary system. I would love to see them rewarded in the state budget as well. That is an observation. Our education assistants do a great job; I would love to see them rewarded to a high level, especially with our government delivering billions of dollars in surpluses. There is low morale and increased burnout, and teachers feel undervalued and disrespected. Of course, smaller classes are needed, which is a challenge with our shortage of teachers, and rural appointments needing to change. Those are some of the elements that Hon Carmen Lawrence pointed out in the *Facing the Facts* review.

I move on to the child development service. In the past 10 years, referrals to child development service paediatricians have risen by 132 per cent. In May 2023, it was revealed in Parliament that wait times for children in primary years of schooling to access speech pathology, occupational therapy and physiotherapy could reach up to 193 days in the Kimberley, 165 days in the goldfields and 125 days in the great southern. As we know, the delay in assessment and treatment for allied health in schools is flowing through to our WA classrooms. It is creating challenges for teachers and education assistants. I thank Hon Donna Faragher for her good work over the last couple of years in her questioning and getting those figures about wait times for those paediatric appointments, which have blown out to anything from 18 months to two years, in some cases. Finding 3 in the interim report by the Select Committee into Child Development Services states —

Long waiting times for child development services can result in problems becoming more serious and difficult to address, not only for children but for their families, their schools and treating practitioners.

Students left unassessed and undiagnosed remain in the classroom with teachers grappling with not only classes, but also individual behaviour plans for each child, trying desperately to attract additional state government funding. It is an ongoing issue, and I hope the government will work hard on this. However, we have seen those wait times blowout, as we are in the health system. Recruitment of staff remains an issue and, as we have seen, there will be a strike next Tuesday. I understand it is the first strike since 2013. When I raised the issue today, the Premier did not seem to want to respond. He wants to talk about working through a good deal and having made another offer. It is a shame. It has been 11 years since the last strike. I can see that there will be challenges on Tuesday next week when some teachers who are in the union go on strike.

Several members interjected.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I will not be taking interjections from the minister today.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday):** Ministers, thank you.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am reporting on the state of the current education system. That is what I am talking about. I am talking about the frustration that our teachers are feeling and there is no doubt there is a sense of frustration. We are going to see, potentially, the first strike since 2013. The Premier did not seem that worried about it today, saying that the government had made a couple of good offers with its \$3.6 billion surplus, which it spends on Metronet.

<033> J/3

These teachers have had a rough time of it over the last few years. They have done a great job through the COVID years and many of them were health officers and the like. They have turned up and done the job. I congratulate them on that. It is a shame that it had to come to this. It is also a shame that when we pointed out some of the elements of the student assistance payment that were not readily advertised for people who cannot access the ServiceWA app or do not know how to use it, the minister had to resort to personal attacks on me. That is fine; we saw it in question time today.

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister, the member for Roe is not taking interjections.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am resilient. I am here on behalf of those multicultural families, those grandparents and grandcarers who have found it challenging. We welcome the payment; there is no problem with that. We are just trying to make it easier for people. That is where I am at.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Don't be a hypocrite.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am here on behalf of our students, teachers, parents and families.

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Point of order —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister.

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister! I am standing. I call you to order for the first time.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Hypocrite.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister, I call you to order for the second time.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday):** Minister, if you would like to withdraw your comments to the member for Roe, please.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Why?

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister, you need to withdraw calling the member for Roe a hypocrite. If you could do that, that would be greatly appreciated.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I just need to know the reason why. Is it unparliamentary?

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** It is unparliamentary. If you could, withdraw that with no further comment.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** As it is unparliamentary, I withdraw it.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I will be winding my comments up shortly. I am disappointed with the minister's attack today; nonetheless, I will rise above it.

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister, I call you to order for the third time. We are clear with comments—it is for the third time. The member for Roe is talking to me through the chair.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** As I said, I have nearly run out of time for my contribution, but I want to point out the frustration that the people of regional WA are facing, our teachers' frustration and the fact that they will potentially have to go on strike next Tuesday. That is a frustration. The Premier's effort today with his response about live exports was very frustrating. The sheep flock in WA is under threat. The critical mass of the sheep flock is at a delicate point. This government does not understand that we are on a precipice. We are looking at potentially losing a large part of the industry. The response from the Premier today was quite disturbing, to be honest. That is what I wanted to point out. They are just some of the frustrations that are out there. This government has a very large surplus. I hope that it uses it in the right areas, but I do not think that the \$8 billion blowout in Metronet is one of those when our teachers and students are looking for a better deal. I will leave my contribution at that.

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe)** [5.24 pm]: I rise to contribute to this important motion by the Leader of the Opposition on the poor management of this Labor government. I will start by discussing the matter of public interest debate that we had yesterday. This side raised serious concerns with the Minister for Transport; Treasurer about the mismanagement of the Metronet project and the complete failure to contain costs in transport. I have said in this place before that the minister is clearly a very capable person, yet her response was disappointing to say the least. The first part of the response was to conflate our concerns with somehow saying that we were criticising her because she is a woman and a woman could not hold two portfolios. Of course, that is completely false. Somehow or other she constructed this contention and proceeded to debate that with us. Let us be very clear, As the Leader of the Opposition said, we have no issue with the Minister for Transport holding another portfolio; however, when the minister responsible for the greatest cost blowout in the history of capital projects in Western Australia is also the Treasurer of the state, the person who is supposed to hold other ministers accountable for their excesses, that is an intrinsic conflict of interest. If the minister wishes to be Treasurer, which I suspect is her aspiration, she should hold some other portfolio that is not responsible for a cost blowout and hold the new Minister for Transport responsible for constraining some of those costs. That would be appropriate. That is what we have said is inappropriate. It is a direct conflict that the minister responsible for this massive multibillion dollar cost blowout is also the Treasurer. I am surprised that other ministers are so patient.

We all know that the Treasurer is a very strong character and clearly has the wood on her other cabinet colleagues because she continues to get vast sums of money when other critical priorities of the government are not being dealt with.

One of the worst characteristics of this government is that it is quite prepared to sacrifice various industries to suit its own political ideology and agenda, to the detriment of Western Australia. It has a cavalier attitude towards destroying businesses, jobs and whole industry sectors, sacrificing livelihoods and the things that people have worked their entire lives building with the stroke of a pen simply to appeal to the crowd and, in particular, the left. It should be noted that the target for that destruction is small business. We see the government trying to cosy up to the top end of town. We all know about the \$1 000-a-bottle wine tasting events with the property developer. We note the rubbing shoulders with the hoi polloi around town —

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** You have got the complete wrong meaning for hoi polloi; I suggest you look it up.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thanks, member. I have great respect for the member for Lansdale's understanding of the English language. Being a humble science student, I am happy to learn. Nevertheless, the top end of town—let me be more explicit.

**Mr D.A.E. Scaife:** It is Greek for “the many”.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** That is it. Thank you. In this place, I can tell members one thing: I am happy to learn. Members have hopefully discovered that.

Getting back to the serious issue at hand, the government is mixing with the top end of town and standing on stages with big industry at various things, but is happy to sacrifice small business to satisfy the crowd, to the detriment of those businesses and Western Australia.

<034> D/5

The government sees them as the political enemy and, therefore, expendable—sectors that it can do without. The government seems ignorant of the flow-on effects of its decisions. It makes a quick decision to appease a certain group and ignores the massive flow-on effect, and, invariably, the massive impact on regional communities that suffer from a closure, a loss of jobs and workers leaving small towns. This is a massive issue in regional Western Australia. Farming and stations in the north are being pushed out by new renewable industries such as those that involve wind turbines and solar panels that do not employ many people. With the consolidation of the agricultural industry in the south of the state, never has it been more important to have other industries in regional areas. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the government's indifference to small business when it closed Horizontal Falls. Recently, there was an awful accident at Horizontal Falls. There is no doubt whatsoever that improvements are needed at Horizontal Falls to protect the safety of people, but in a knee-jerk reaction to appease a small group, the government shut it down as an industry, destroying it as a tourist attraction. Those are not my words. People from the tourist industry are saying that this closure will substantially reduce one of the major activities that attracts tourists to the north of the state. They will not be able to actively participate in and enjoy that natural feature. It is not a feature created by humans; it is a feature created by natural forces. Apparently, we will no longer allow tourists to observe and delight in that.

**Ms D.G. D'Anna** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday):** Member for Cottesloe, are you taking interjections?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Madam Acting Speaker, I am sure the member will have ample opportunity to respond later if she wishes, but I have limited time and I want to give my colleagues an opportunity to speak.

It is not just the 15 licensed tourism operators and the 58 full-time jobs that will be directly impacted by that unreasonable and flawed decision because there will be wider impacts in that community. Typically for that sort of industry, the multiple in the community is three to four times. For every job that is not created directly, three to four jobs are lost in the broader community. That will have a massive negative impact on an area that is struggling because this government has failed to deal with the law and order issues in the north of the state. That is already a substantial challenge for tourism operators north of Geraldton. It is becoming a major issue. The word of mouth to people who are looking to travel to the north of the state—having spoken with someone from Melbourne, I know that this reputation is going outside our borders—is that the lack of law and order in the north of the state is a major problem that is affecting tourism. On top of that, there has been the closure of this wonderful and major tourist attraction.

Let us look at this government's decision to destroy the logging industry in the state of Western Australia. It is one of the most profoundly stupid and unjustified decisions that I have seen in my lifetime, and it was made on the pretext that it was going to help protect the environment by increasing carbon sequestration. The United Nations, at least the International Panel on Climate Change, stated unequivocally that the best way to increase carbon sequestration is active forestry harvesting and management. Members should look around this chamber. The honourable member for Lansdale may know the age of this chamber. I think it is around 100 years old.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** I am not that old, member!



**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I know that the member for Landsdale is not that old, but she has a good memory.

We can look around this chamber and say that it contains beautiful jarrah. We can also look around and say that it is stored carbon; that is what it is. It has been stored for many, many decades and it will be stored for another 200, 300, 400 years or more. Managed forestry increases carbon sequestration because we end up with net increases in storage. A forest that is left by itself and not harvested reaches a plateau and no longer stores carbon. It has a dynamic balance, and it simply sits where it sits. If a bushfire goes through, that stored carbon goes into the atmosphere. The government shut that down in a cavalier way. There was absolute dishonesty in the government's argument. Two-thirds of the state forest are completely banned from forestry; it cannot be touched. We are talking about one-third of the regenerating forest being harvested on a sustainable basis. It was the most sustainable industry in the state, but the government shut it down to appeal to a small crowd without any regard for the impact. We are seeing that impact on communities in the south west, and we will continue to see it more and more. Nevertheless, the government went ahead and destroyed another critical regional industry to appeal to a handful of people in metropolitan Perth. It is interesting because if we look at the areas that can never be touched under the existing forestry industry, we see that the area of forest is bigger in size than half of the world's nations. That is how much of our forest is locked up, never to be touched. Only one-third was to be harvested, but to make an ideological point, the government has destroyed probably the most sustainable industry in the state of Western Australia, an industry that literally could have carried on for centuries in the way that it was being managed. As a result of that decision, this government has launched into the importation of deforestation. We still need hardwood timber; we are now importing it from countries that do not have any of the strict environmental controls that we had. It is a worse outcome globally. The government's decision has resulted in more carbon emissions and it has destroyed thousands of jobs for a cheap grab in metropolitan Perth. It is an absolute disgrace.

We saw the same cavalier attitude towards the fishing industry. We have heard the major concerns of fishers around the state, particularly, as the member for Roe would know, in Esperance and surrounding areas. Again, it was a superbly managed sustainable industry, but to get another little grab, a headline, the government was happy to destroy it. That will have a massive negative impact on the town of Esperance and other fishing communities. We have already seen fishing shops shut down. It is very clear that part of that decision was directed by science; I accept what the minister said. Equally, a large part of what is happening to the reserves has nothing to do with sustainability whatsoever; it is purely to get a momentary grab and headline to the massive and ongoing detriment to those regional communities.

This government has disregard for the impact that its decisions have on local industries. I want to briefly touch on the more serious end of heavy industry. I think the government's colleagues in the federal sphere are on a bender here, but time will not allow me to go through all that.

<035> C/5

What have we seen happen with heavy industry under WA Labor? Under the WA Labor government—the McGowan and then the Cook Labor governments—we have seen the BP refinery, the largest refinery in Australia, shut down. Alcoa Kwinana has announced that it will shut down at Christmastime under this government. We also know that the nickel industry in this state is under massive threat. In all those cases, the state government has been lacking. Yes, its federal colleagues will have a role in this, but my greatest disappointment is that this government has not done the serious, hard work to keep those industries going. That would not mean ongoing subsidisation of those industries. In the case of the BP refinery, it had a major overhaul occurring. That was a high-cost overhaul. If it had had support with that high-cost overhaul, it would have kept that refinery going. Instead, it made the choice to get its oil from Singapore. The government then gave BP exclusive access to the main fuel importation jetty in this state, so there is no extra competition on fuel. We have seen massive increases in fuel prices as a result of that. I know the Alcoa Kwinana refinery intimately. The actions of this government in delaying the mine plan and its inaction in ensuring that Alcoa could have an adequate supply of gas were direct contributors to the pending closure of that refinery. I desperately hope that that can be reversed, because that is not some penny-ante show; it is a billion-dollar plus industry and major contributor to this state. Members on the other side get excited about climate change and the contributors to climate change, but Alcoa's alumina refineries in Western Australia are the lowest emission refineries in the world. Every tonne of alumina that is not made here will likely be made in China, where carbon emissions are double the level of carbon emissions from the refinery here. In fact, they are more than double the emissions from Alcoa's three refineries in the south west. If that refinery shuts down, it will not only destroy jobs in Western Australia, but also lead to a direct increase in global carbon emissions. If members opposite are concerned about carbon emissions, they should be much more concerned about supporting those industries.

I do not have time to go on as I want to give other members time to make their contributions. This government is taking the boom for granted. It is living off record revenue that it had no impact on in terms of delivering, but, because of that, it is not keeping its eye on the ball and properly managing industry in this state.

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central)** [5.42 pm]: I rise to support this motion that condemns the Cook Labor government for its poor management by blowing the boom, failing to deliver key services and compounding the stress on Western Australian households. I will focus on the area north of Geraldton. A lot of what has been said today is relevant, but as I have said before—regional members will support this—the further north we go, the more difficult and challenging it gets. We all respect and understand that. The liveability of those regions is becoming increasingly

difficult. The government has had large budgets, but a lot of people have said to me things like, “They’re getting a footbridge with lighting on it across the Swan River. I have no problem with that, but when our hospital is falling down and we are struggling to actually keep people safe and healthy, there is a mismatch and a problem. There is no equity.” That is what people are starting to reiterate to me.

The member for Cottesloe touched on the issue of small businesses. As others will attest to, the cost of doing business rises as we go further north. There are freight costs, fuel costs and power costs. The cost of doing business is enormous. Unfortunately, we will see businesses drop off. There is a fear that businesses will not be able to remain sustainable. The Minister for Water is not here, but I will use an example. I was in Shark Bay last week and businesses there pay \$15 to \$16 a kilolitre for water. Further north, some towns pay \$9 a kilolitre for water, when in Perth they pay under \$3 a kilolitre. Businesses in those areas pay nearly three to four times the price of water that the same businesses in the metro area pay, just to keep their business open. There is no alternative water source for them. It is becoming increasingly difficult for businesses to remain competitive. The shires that are dealing with these issues have very small rate bases and it is really hard for them to provide the infrastructure and level of services that are needed. That impacts growth and development, so it is becoming increasingly hard to retain people in these areas.

A key focus of this motion is the failure of the government to deliver key services. Those key services are really important in the regions. They are the services that people who live south of Geraldton—probably more in the metro area—take for granted every day. Some regional managers are now located in Perth. They are hundreds or thousands of kilometres from where they need to be—that is, the regions they are trying to manage. Staff on the ground have relayed to me that it is becoming increasingly difficult for them as they have to contact someone who does not even live in the same town or region to get guidance. There is a total disconnect in that those managers do not understand what is happening in those areas.

As the member for Cottesloe touched on with small businesses, there has been a big impact on tourism businesses in the north. I think Tourism Western Australia has done an amazing job in promoting its Drive the Dream campaign and some of its other promotions, but we do not have the infrastructure in parts of the north west to support them. We can drive tourists to the north and through all these small towns, but it will be disastrous for our reputation if things are closed when people get there. Giralia station, just north of Exmouth, is a prime example. Access to the stromatolites has been closed for a long time as they are under repair. All this has an enormous impact on regional businesses and the tourism reputation of our state. These things need to happen. Parts of the region are being locked up in national parks and people are struggling to get into some of those areas. Giralia is an example of something that has not worked well in terms of the government’s decision to take that on. It has not managed it well at all.

Another issue that the member for Cottesloe touched on—I think everyone has—is regional crime. Violent crime is escalating. Just this week, the security company in Carnarvon contacted me to say that three security guards had been attacked in the supermarket. After the last incident on the weekend, the security guard ended up in hospital to get stitches. It is becoming increasingly apparent that there is a lack of consequences and no accountability, and that crime is escalating. A lot of it is youth crime. I was told on the weekend that the burglary rate in the north is up. I say all the time that the police are doing an incredible and amazing job, often with not a lot of resources. We need more people to provide wraparound services, such as drug and alcohol services, particularly for the police. As I have said in this place before, everyone understands that it is an incredibly complex issue and that there is no silver bullet coming over the hill, but the police cannot continue to manage these situations without additional help and support. The situation is becoming dire. En masse stealing from shops is happening all the time. The offenders abuse staff and people are too afraid to intervene. When security guards are getting hurt, it shows that it is a massive problem. We need to look at that.

That dysfunction flows through to education. The issue we have in some smaller towns is that there is only one school. It is really difficult for this to be handled when there is only one school. Some of these kids have not been to school for years and it is creating issues for the kids who want to be at school. We need to look at the whole education model in terms of some of these specific issues in the north. There is a high turnover of staff, as teachers feel that there is a lack of support. I know that children can be expelled or suspended and that suspensions happen a lot, but there is no alternative for those kids to get any other form of schooling. That is not an ideal situation for them. Every day across the state, many people feel the full force of lawlessness. It is having an impact across our region on community members, the police, hospital workers, school employees and small business operators.

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It is actually driving people to question how they can sustain that in these small towns and communities when they are actually contributing significant amounts to the bottom line for the state and the country. They are not getting the reward back for their effort in the regions. If we talk about health, there is Tom Price Hospital, Meekatharra Hospital and the issue of a lack of maternity services in Carnarvon. All these things are exacerbating the situation. The government needs to look closely at how it is going to carve up the budget and address some of these issues.

In terms of crime, the banned drinkers register was called for by the opposition for a long time. It has been put in place, and, to a degree, it has worked. Contrary to what has been hammered at me, I was in full support of the banned drinkers register, and I still am. However, the unintended consequences of that need to be looked at. If this register is rolled out

across other towns or in other suburbs, it will have a massive impact on businesses and tourism. It has already had an impact on certain towns in the north. To counter that, we need to provide wraparound services. The banned drinkers register is just one lever that needs to be used in liquor restrictions. We have had liquor restrictions in the north forever that I can remember. They are just two tools that we can use. In the towns that I visit, I have seen a remarkable increase in drug use on the street. We need to really try to nail these services such as drug and alcohol centres. We need to look getting a safe house, which I have asked to be considered for a long time in this place. We need to look at housing for the men who have nowhere to go. We need to look at transitional housing. The women's refuge in Carnarvon is full again. It has done a big circle. It was all right for a while, but we are back to where we were. The police are clearly struggling. The more names they put on the BDR, the more they have to police it, and if they do not have the resources, it becomes incredibly difficult for them to do that. I do appreciate that. However, youth crime is a completely separate issue and we need to find a circuit breaker for that situation because it is becoming untenable for many people. This links into housing as well, which we need to revisit. For many kids, their mother will be taken out of a situation and put into a refuge, and if they are boys and teenagers, they cannot go to that refuge, so the mothers will not leave them. We need to make sure that we address this issue of child protection, which I come onto now. I am racing through this. I am sorry, but other members from our team need to speak.

We all recognise the incredibly difficult job that our dedicated child protection workers undertake. According to the people I have spoken with, they have massive case loads. In 2007, the Prudence Ford review recommended that child protection should be a standalone department, which was implemented. However, in 2017, it was changed to become one large department with other portfolios. The feedback I get is that that is actually difficult. The Department of Communities' annual report states that there are five ministers across 11 portfolios, which is an enormous workload, as we can see from youth crime. I see another cohort of children all the time who are clearly not getting the care they need. For example, the guys that bring the Centurion truck in to fill up the shelves in Woolworths with produce—when they have produce to bring—say that kids are there at five o'clock in the morning asking if they have food. I do not think that is right. It is a difficult problem to resolve, but we need to find a way to get these kids off the street and into safe spaces. Without safe houses, it will be impossible to do that because these children really are racing around, going from place to place, and some of them do not live at home for four or five days at a time.

I will finish up on health services and the patient assisted travel scheme. I have had numerous calls all weekend from people in trouble. On Friday, a lady was flown to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. She was discharged from hospital on Saturday and was left to find her own way home. She did not have the money, so she borrowed it and got on the first flight home on Monday. She then had to use food vouchers when she got home to survive until her next pay cheque. The government needs to look at processes of refining this. If health services are not provided in these towns, we need to find a way to make this easier for people. I had another message while I was sitting here just now. A lady needs to come to Perth. She cannot find her way through the process to get any help, and financially she needs it. These are really important things. The minister has said to me that there has been some uplift in PATS accommodation and fuel prices, but with the cost of living right now, it is not satisfactory and it really needs to be looked at. A large cohort of people in the north are struggling to get help, medication and meet their medical appointments. The Royal Flying Doctor Service's *Best for the bush: Rural and remote health base line 2022* report released in 2023 outlined the biggest problems that rural and remote primary health care are facing, including a lack of services in each of the regional towns and campuses. The report showed a rapidly growing number of aeromedical retrievals in recent years. People in need of urgent surgery have said to me that they have had to wait in hospital for two days, in pain. According to that report, the RFDS conducted 36 937 aeromedical retrievals in 2022–23, which is equivalent to 101 retrievals per day—or four an hour. It is unsustainable, and, according to the RFDS report, it is a major issue because a high number of rural and remote people have died from potentially preventable deaths because they do not seek treatment sooner and because it is difficult to get. I raise this in an effort to highlight the difficulties because I know that it is an issue that people who do not live with this day in, day out feel disconnected from and find hard to understand. With the money that the government currently has in surplus, it is time to look at these basic services for regional towns and spaces because they are deteriorating at a rapid rate. I will leave it there and let the member for Central Wheatbelt speak.

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt)** [5.57 pm]: I rise to contribute to this debate. The Minister for Regional Development posted me copies of the *WA regional development framework*. I received a whole packet of them in my office today.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** They are to distribute to your community.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** We are very thoughtful on this side.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It was a little light on, I have to say. There is not much to it. The package was heavy, but I am not sure about the content in the document. I want to reflect on some comments from the minister at the beginning of this debate and take members back to the point of the motion—the government's failures around economic development and diversity, and the challenges that so many of our communities are facing under this government.

There is much talk about diversification, new industries, technology and infrastructure. I am very supportive of diversifying our state's economy, but I am equally as passionate about holding onto and building on the standing industries and sectors that we already have. From a wheatbelt perspective—I am wearing my member for Central Wheatbelt hat—the agricultural sector is, without doubt, the underpinning driver of that local economy. The member for Roe spoke earlier about some comments from the Premier during question time today. Time and again, this government has failed to understand or even try to understand how our agricultural sector works, how it can actually support the sector instead of undermining it and why it is important to our state's economy. It is very easy say that we support farmers and farm businesses, but the actual rubber that hits the road fails when it comes to this government. I could talk about the many conversations I have had in this Parliament on the views of those in the industry who feel constantly under attack by their own government, whether it be at a state or a federal level.

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This diversification of economy and commitment to making sure that we have a fantastic place to live and work for generations to come are sentiments shared by both sides of Parliament. I just think that we on this side of Parliament do not see what needs to be delivered being delivered. Members opposite should not just take our word for it. The results of a 2023 Ray Morgan survey on the agricultural sector came out at the end of last year. It is Australia wide but it drills down into states. It showed that the greatest challenge for 41 per cent of surveyed farmers in Western Australia was government policy, which was up from seven per cent in 2022. I have a suspicion that that is strongly linked to the absolute debacle of the government's efforts around the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021. A number of other layers have come into play, particularly surrounding live export, which is uniquely Western Australia when it comes to the sheep industry. These farmers were concerned about the impact of government policy. That has doubled nationally but in Western Australia, it has increased almost six times. That is an indictment on this government. This is a proud industry that contributes significantly and is the lifeblood of the communities in the part of the state that I represent. We now see them in real trouble because we have had a sustained period of dryness in the community. It is broader than just the wheatbelt. It has been brewing for a while. The member for Roe and I, the Leader of the Opposition and other members of our party have continually tried to prosecute in this chamber and to those on the government benches who will listen why the live export industry is so important during periods like this.

During the Labor Party's period of government, it has not been through a prolonged dry season. It was the mark of our government. We experienced some of the worst years in this state around 2010. We dealt with ongoing dry seasons. I am passionate about this because it impacts our community so very deeply. It does not take long for that sentiment of optimism, when there should be absolute passionate confidence in our future from the agricultural sector, to be whittled away. When we hear the statistics from the Roy Morgan survey about farmers being concerned about the impact of government policy, doubling nationally but increasing six times in Western Australia, I have great concerns about what is being announced by this government and its failure to understand what part the livestock industry, particularly sheep, has to play in responding to this.

The minister has only just established the 2024 Dry Season Taskforce. I was not full of confidence when I read her comments on what might be made available. Some farmers and farm businesses have been carting water for some time at their own cost. Some farmers are facing severe fodder shortages and need to pay for freight to get fodder to their property. There will be a requirement to agist animals if farmers can find anywhere that has feed, and that will require funding and support.

In a news item posted on the ABC Great Southern website on Monday, the journalist's interpretation of the minister read as follows —

Ms Jarvis said the WDC taskforce would look at access to feed and fodder in affected areas, but downplayed providing any new subsidies or financial support.

...

“Tens of millions of dollars since 2021 have been rolled out across our farming regions to provide the support but also for the research and extension activities to actually teach farmers what they need to do differently in the face of a drying climate.”

Honestly, if only I was there when the minister made those comments! It was extraordinarily offensive for her to say “teach farmers what they need to do differently in the face of a drying climate”. Our farmers are incredibly aware that they live in the driest corner of the driest state of the driest nation. They are some of the best dryland farmers. They are most efficient. But we cannot make it rain and we cannot conjure water up from nowhere. Sometimes there is nowhere to send these sheep. I can tell members that there are about 300 000 sheep—I am happy to be corrected on the numbers; this figure was written on the back of an envelope, so it may be more or it may be less—that need to get off farm now. There is no feed and water. That is why the livestock industry and sector in Western Australia is significantly important. The Premier showed his ignorance today when he said there was no link between dry seasons and live export. This is what we do. We as farmers manage our businesses so that the taxpayer does not have to foot the bill. The Labor government has taken away one of those avenues. Yes, the industry will turn up and say that it needs assistance now because when there is no access to water there are limited options. I will talk about why there has been limited

opportunity for farmers under this government to improve their own self-sufficiency: it is because it cut that funding as well, so there is a heavier reliance on scheme water, which is expensive and it is also delivered at the cost of the taxpayer. These farmers will come to the government and say, “We are in a difficult position right now and we have limited options.”

I am not confident that the Dry Season Taskforce or the experience within this government will deliver a satisfactory outcome. Going by the way it has treated the agricultural industry up until now, I think we can expect more of the same. That is incredibly disappointing because it is a very valuable part of our state’s economy. It has dealt with challenges that were wrought by this government as a result of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act. We are dealing with live export changes and a loss of confidence. There is a lack of domestic processing opportunities in our state at the moment. It is already difficult to get those sheep into domestic processing. Unfortunately, we are left with a very unsavoury option, which is to destroy the animals ourselves, which can cause mental health issues, which is already happening in our community. There you go, government! We have a really difficult time ahead. The government will discover very quickly that the sentiment in those communities, where there was a fair bit of resilience, give and take and patience, dries up pretty quickly when people start to see their livelihoods and their communities suffer. It needs somebody who has a degree of experience and some sensitivity to what is happening in those communities to get this right on their behalf.

I want to move to one of the other elements that I was asked to speak about. I return to the Minister for Regional Development’s strategic framework. It refers to regional liveability and making regions good places to live. Part of that must be a housing strategy. There is a significant lack of housing in our communities. I listened to the Minister for Housing talking about the government pulling every lever that it has to deliver housing. I have just finished touring the eastern and north-eastern part of my electorate. People in every single shire said to me that they have challenges in land assembly and development, access to land through Landgate, serviced blocks or the ability to engage with the government to access funding to assist in building houses essentially for state government entities. Government Regional Officers’ Housing is coming to our local governments with very small rate bases and asking them to dip into their funds to deliver houses for nurses, police, teachers and the like. In some cases, they will do it because they know that they will not have staff in their towns without doing that. But it is not their responsibility. For every dollar that they spend on building a house for a government employee, which should be provided by the state government, they are not doing something in their community that they are responsible for. That is the challenge. I can tell members that in Koorda, access to land is an issue. Communities have been unable to find and deliver serviced blocks. These communities are the developers of last resort because no residential or commercial developer will go out to Koorda or Mukinbudin. They will get no return on building a house on a block. The block and the servicing of the block will cost almost twice the value of the house at the end of the day.

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It is always left to local governments in my part of the world, which is why they are heavily reliant on the government actually delivering some of these outcomes.

Westonia managed to develop a block. It took two years to connect the green dome so that it had power, and then it got charged \$25 000 for the pleasure. That is \$25 000 on top of developing the block with water and actually delivering the house. I think this government is going out of its way to make things difficult. A conversation with Western Power about the length of connection times and the cost of delivering those houses needs to be had. If the state government wants the local governments in these regional areas to do the job that it should be doing, it should be pulling out all the stops with the agencies that it has control of—that is, Western Power and the Water Corporation. They have big budgets. I know how they work; they can shift and shuffle things around if they need to according to government priorities.

The government also has a significant budget surplus, so how about we actually see some real commitment being delivered, as opposed to the headworks fund that was announced, which is a little bit like spreading vegemite across the entire state, so that these communities can assist in delivering the houses that are necessary? When I spoke to one of my towns, I was told that a couple of young single teachers, probably in their first or second year, were being accommodated in the pub because there was no other accommodation. Some people might find that to be an adventure. If someone is not from the community and it is their first foray into regional Western Australia, which it quite often is, they would not know their neighbours and there would be itinerant travellers and probably tradies working for Main Roads or the Water Corporation coming through. It might be fun and an adventure for some, but I can tell members that the feedback from those two young teachers was that that was not the ideal outcome. They come back to Perth, or wherever they have come from, and they talk. Then they do not want to be part of the flying squad that goes out to provide relief when schools need them, so it becomes very difficult to attract teachers. As a consequence, one of my high schools has not had any teachers for a couple of classes, which means that it merges all the classes together, and there has been a similar outcome with primary school teachers. When a town cannot get a relief teacher, what happens, particularly in Mukinbudin, is that the primary school merges its classes, which makes it very difficult to deliver the curriculum across a number of years. It is a far from positive outcome when a town has teachers but cannot house them.

I was told another story. We had a fantastic deputy principal who wanted to bring his family out to the region. He was living in a small unit in the town. He was told that if he wanted to stay and take on that role and bring his family and

be a part of the community, he would have to find his own accommodation. That was it; he was out because there was no accommodation. We have a constant rotation of leadership of principals, deputy principals and teachers in our schools. Most of the accommodation for the police is reasonable. There are probably outliers, but I am talking about the wheatbelt. It is very difficult. When I go to my zone meetings, the constant theme is that land assembly and housing is very challenging.

This is pretty simple stuff. It is bread and butter for the state government to be involved when there is market failure. I see that as the government's responsibility when there is market failure. I do not want to spend taxpayers' dollars when there are opportunities for the private sector to deliver these outcomes, but we all know that it just does not operate in these small and very thin markets. For me, housing is a fail for this government. When we cannot get essential workers into these communities to educate our kids or get nurses at the hospital, we are really starting to talk about a serious fail. Sadly, that is where we have come to.

Member for Roe, one of the last things that I want to raise is School Bus Services. I appreciate that the Minister for Transport allows us to have conversations with the Department of Transport and School Bus Services in particular, because they are very localised issues, but it is very challenging for me when they work stringently to a policy without flexibility, even though the priority, as the member for Roe has said, should just be to get our kids to school. In one of my towns, there are about six families who are just within the five-kilometre mark of the town boundary, so they do not qualify for the school bus. All the parents work; the families have a dual income. They are going to have to change how they get their kids to school. Members might say that they are only 4.3 kays from school, so they could ride their bike or they could car pool.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** They are not options. It a 90-kay-an-hour freight route, with trucks barrelling along the road. These parents are not going to allow their year 2 kid to walk along the side of the road to get to school. They are now no longer able to get on the school bus. I genuinely think that the budget for School Bus Services needs to be increased so that we have flexibility to make sure that the kids are put at the centre of all this and we can get as many kids to school as possible. It makes it difficult when a lack of flexibility in applying the policy means that a flood of parents and others are impacted. I am talking about one community, but I can tell members that we had a meeting with School Bus Services and I have been following up on seven families in my electorate. It is a constant challenge in my electorate.

These are basic things to make sure that we are underpinning the economic development of our state. Sadly, the government is failing on these basic things—to deliver power and housing and to make sure that we have essential workers in the places we need them.

I round back to the thing that I talked about at the beginning. Our agricultural sector is under pressure. Whether people are in the central wheatbelt, the south-west corner or in the north-west of the state, these are challenging times. I have no confidence in this minister or this government navigating these difficult times.

**MS H.M. BEAZLEY (Victoria Park — Minister for Local Government) [6.15 pm]:** I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this motion today. I am always a little bit staggered by the wording of the motions during private members' business, because they tend to be really easy to pull apart and prove to be demonstrably baseless. The words used include "poor economic management", "failure to deliver projects", "failure to deliver essential services", "cost-of-living crisis" and "special inquiry", and I will very much go through all those terms one by one. Given the track record of the previous government, it is quite a remarkable statement to make.

Arguably, our biggest infrastructure project over our two terms has been Metronet. It is a once-in-a-lifetime investment for our state and it is an important investment in generations not yet alive. The scope and number of rail projects currently underway is unprecedented. We have delivered seven projects so far, including the airport line, Lakelands station, the Bellevue railcar facility, the Denny Avenue level crossing removal, the Caledonian Avenue level crossing removal, the Mandurah station multi-deck car park and the new Bayswater station. Most recently, we have delivered the C-series railcars, the first railcars made in WA in decades.

A government member: Hear, hear!

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes. I was very pleased to be on the inaugural trip as the train left Perth Stadium station in the Town of Victoria Park.

The Cook Labor government is righting a wrong after the Liberals and Nationals closed the Midland Workshops, giving away Western Australian jobs—yet they talk about mismanagement! This is an exciting time to be a fan of Metronet, which I very much am. There is still more to come. Let us go through it.

Bayswater station is now complete, with all the platforms and track work done and ready for the Morley–Ellenbrook line. The station looks fantastic, with expressions of interest currently being assessed for the shops underneath. The future is incredibly bright for that town centre. We will be celebrating the mammoth effort this weekend with a street festival. I encourage anyone to come down for the free face painting. The member for Moore may be able to turn that frown upside down and paint on a smile.

The Yanchep station is yet to come. It will be open a little later this year, with an announcement expected in weeks. I know the community will be as impressed as the minister is with these stations. I believe that the artwork is incredible. I also believe the minister was fortunate enough to ride with me—I know she was because I was there!—and the Attorney General, and they are both raring to go. The Morley–Ellenbrook line is also on track to be open this year. Ellenbrook station is complete, with the other four stations in the final stages of completion. In my neck of the woods, the Victoria Park–Canning level crossing removal has made significant progress following the Armadale line shutdown late last year.

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Significant piling works have been completed. Many columns, headstocks and L-beams are already installed, including over Oats Street and, as of last weekend, Mint and Archer Streets as well. Early station works have started at this end of the project. Our bright red gantry cranes, Victor, Becky, Yira and Kediny, are now local celebrities. I know my local community is proud of having such a huge achievement in their area and to have it done in a relatively short space of time. I particularly thank them for their continued patience during the shutdown and the associated works. There are works for the Thornlie–Cockburn Link at both Nicholson Road and Ranford Road stations. They are progressing well and in time for the reopening of the Armadale line next year. This comes after the relocation of the freight rail was completed last year. The Byford rail extension is also progressing well. Piling works are complete with precast sections of elevated rail expected to start to go up in Armadale in the coming weeks. Major progress has also been made on the Byford station itself.

I cast everyone's minds to how this compares with what was happening under the previous government. There were broken promises on MAX light rail and broken promises on the Ellenbrook rail line—a bus to Ellenbrook until 2050! Broken promises on the Yanchep rail—maybe, but not until 2031. The Byford rail extension would not have been delivered until 2050. Their record in government is they closed the Midland Workshops, which is something I have spoken about many times. They closed the Fremantle line. They sold off Westrail freight. They privatised the rail network. They closed tier 3. Now, they oppose Metronet.

As well as Metronet and its major level crossing removal project in my electorate of Victoria Park, we are also delivering another major project, which literally has its footing in Victoria Park—our new Causeway pedestrian and cycling bridges. The bridges will completely separate users from traffic. Two connected bridges are being built alongside the Causeway to provide a six-metre-wide segregated path connecting the Victoria Park foreshore with Heirisson Island or Matagarup and on to Perth or Boorloo's CBD at Point Fraser. An important milestone has been reached on the Causeway bridges project, with the first bridge module now lifted into place. The remaining 15 modules range from 22 to 42 metres in length and will be lifted into place by the middle of the year. This project is running on time. To construct the bridges, we will be using some of the biggest cranes in Australia to do the heavy lifting needed for such an iconic structure. There is a huge crawler crane online as of last week. It is one of the biggest in Australia. I took my boys down to McCallum Park over the weekend to show them and they were in awe. It is a pretty impressive site, especially if you cast your eye down the project to the other cranes operating along the site, and then see the cranes in Perth and across the river in the distance. This is evidence of economic investment everywhere. Some statistics for this particular crane that blew my boys' minds included that it took a convoy of over 100 trucks to transport all the parts to McCallum Park, and it took two weeks to put together. Now fully assembled, it weighs over 1 500 tonnes. To put that in perspective, it is about the weight of 14 blue whales or 100 buses! The crane will be handling loads ranging from 45 to 125 tonnes and uses over 600 tonnes of counterweight to do so. The counterweight itself is a sight to see. Concepts for the new lighting and visual design, including static and moving messages and images, will be displayed, which will transform the bridges into unique works of art. I have a few ideas in this space that I hope the minister may take into consideration!

As well as Metronet, one of our other top priorities—there are a few—is undoubtedly our number one priority of housing. Members opposite have spoken about the need for housing and that is not something we have denied. If members opposite are questioning our priorities within this motion and they know our priority is housing, it concerns me that that may mean they do not agree with that. The Cook government takes seriously the need to provide housing for the most vulnerable members of our community. That is why, as the Minister for Housing, Homelessness consistently says, we are using every lever available to boost housing in Western Australia. Our government has made a record investment of \$2.6 billion into social housing and homelessness measures, which will see the delivery of 4 000 homes. We have achieved a lot, and nobody thinks there is not a lot more to do, but some of the things we have achieved so far include the following. We have invested a record \$2.6 billion in housing and homelessness, which has already delivered more than 2 000 social homes with more than 1 000 under contract or construction. We are accelerating social and affordable housing supply by investing \$150 million in grants for community housing across the state and initiatives like the Subiaco East and Smith Street housing developments. We are supporting regional renewal and workers' accommodation via the \$80 million infrastructure development fund and unlocking lazy land. We are not ignoring the regions. We have made major planning reforms to cut red tape and boost housing supply. We are subsidising apprenticeships and supporting businesses to bring in skilled workers to boost our construction workforce and get more homes built.

Those are probably our top five achievements in this space, but we are also doing the following. We are investing \$225 million to support homelessness initiatives, supporting more than 130 organisations to deliver critical services. We have established a number of alternative and flexible housing supply programs to bolster the supply of social housing across Western Australia, including timber frame, modular and pre-fabricated construction, as well as spot purchasing of homes. We have made procurement easier and more streamlined by creating established builder panels where builders are pre-approved to deliver housing. We introduced tax reforms to incentivise the development and uptake of apartments, including a 50 per cent land tax concession on build-to-rent developments, stamp duty concessions for off-the-plan and under construction apartments and a new Keystart product aimed at high-density living. We boosted housing affordability through changes to Keystart such as increasing income eligibility and property price caps as well as reducing the Keystart interest rate setting, providing cost-of-living relief. We are unlocking lazy government land in key locations through the pilot housing diversity pipeline to encourage new developments and create diverse housing choices. We have added over 155 crisis accommodation places for those most in need. We opened Boorloo Bidee Mia—low-barrier supported accommodation for rough sleepers, which has now been successfully operating for over two years. We acquired the Murray Hotel or Wandjoo Bidi and provided 30 extra beds for rough sleepers with low-barrier supported accommodation. We are delivering on our commitment of 100 homes through the Djuripiny Mia program, providing a supported landlord model that accommodates vulnerable and complex individuals. Nearly \$100 million has also been delivered for two Common Ground homelessness facilities with East Perth now under construction and Mandurah in the design phase.

Much is also going on in the regions specifically. Our government understands the need to diversify the way we deliver housing to combat the challenges in the regions. We recognise the importance of growing our commercial regional centres and we are investing to unlock more residential and commercial land to facilitate the development of regional communities. We are investing heavily in GROH, Government Regional Officers' Housing—around \$234 million across the next four years to deliver critical housing in regional towns. This ensures our regions get the teachers, police officers and other state government workers they need to service their town, as has been identified by members opposite. We are investing \$49 million through the 2024–25 budget for a pilot program to partner with community housing organisations to provide 100 homes as part of a supportive landlord model for people experiencing rough sleeping in regional Western Australia. To do this, we have focused on reforms such as the modular build program that provides an alternative and faster pathway to deliver social housing, particularly in the regions. We have contracted more than 200 modular homes to be delivered across regional Western Australia, with around one-third already delivered. Our government is also releasing land through the \$166 million regional land booster program. This program has already seen 626 lots released to the market and subsequently sold or under contract across 89 projects in 78 regional towns.

To directly help all renters across metropolitan and regional Western Australia, in November last year, we announced the state's first WA rent relief program to help Western Australians at risk of eviction and experiencing mental stress to stay in their rental properties. This program has already delivered more than \$1.7 million in support and help to over 400 Western Australians to keep their lease and a roof over their head.

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As well as housing, providing cost-of-living relief is another top priority. The one thing I agree with the motion on is that Western Australians are grappling with rising costs of living. The difference is that our community knows that this government has their back. The proof is in the pudding. We have a new student assistance payment—a direct cost of living measure. Families are eligible to receive payments of \$250 for every secondary school student, and \$150 for every primary school and kindergarten student. This is part of our \$103.5 million package to reduce the pressure of school expenses on parents as part of our 2023–24 budget. Applications for payments via the ServiceWA app or online and by other methods opened this week. As the Minister for Education pointed out today, more than 70 000 households have already applied. That means that more than 100 000 students have already been captured by the scheme. This program will assist parents and carers with the cost of school essentials, which I know very well: books, IT equipment, sport and music costs, stationery, school shoes, uniforms, excursions and camps. There are also the extra costs that families with school-aged children endure, including extra food and groceries. Like I said, every parent in this place will know those expenses well. Eligibility is validated through the student's unique WA student number. If parents or caregivers have not already done so, I encourage them to download the app and apply for this measure.

In addition, we recently announced free public transport for school student travel, and also for the entire community every Sunday. That is estimated to save families with two children up to \$560 a year, which is nothing to be sneezed at. This comes on top of the free public transport we provided from Christmas Eve 2023 to January 2024. I have already mentioned our \$24.4 million rental relief program that supports at-risk renters, and we are also providing fee-free TAFE places with the commonwealth government, which equates to 22 200 fee-free places over 2024, 2025 and 2026. This is an investment of \$44.5 million. We provided back-to-school payments for foster and grand carers, valued at \$3.6 million and we have doubled KidSport vouchers from \$150 to \$300 for the next two years.

On top of previous years' measures, we have committed \$715 million towards cost-of-living measures in the 2023–24 budget. The government delivered its second electricity credit of \$200 to Western Australian households in late December. Additional assistance continues to be provided for those most in need of support, with around 350 000



households that are eligible for the indexed energy assistance payment to receive total support of \$826, including a \$500 household electricity credit split over two payments, in addition to the \$326 EAP paid over the financial year. The seniors' cost of living rebate will be increased in line with inflation over the next four years, boosting the 2023–24 rebate to \$104 for singles and \$156 for couples. Hardship utilities grant scheme payments, for those who are in financial hardship and require assistance to pay their utilities bills, will be increased by 10 per cent to \$640 per household, or \$1 060 for households above the 26th parallel. There is \$20.7 million for the regional airfare zone cap scheme to support affordable flights for regional residents, following the scheme's introduction in July 2022. In total, the WA Labor government has now spent nearly \$3 billion over the last five years to deliver cost-of-living support. If members opposite do not think that that is a priority we should be dealing with, they might want to reword their motion.

In comparison, under the previous Liberal–National government, household fees and charges rose by almost \$2 100 in nominal terms during its eight years in government. In today's dollars that would be much higher. The previous government did not manage in any year to contain household fees and charges to inflation over its two terms in government. Household electricity prices rose by an average of 8.4 per cent per annum over the eight years of the previous government—a 90 per cent increase over its two terms. Household water prices increased by an average of almost seven per cent per annum. To top it off, the Liberal–National government left us with a budget predicated on seven per cent rises in electricity and six per cent rises in water, on top of net debt on a path to \$44 billion. If lower increases in fees and charge were assumed, this would have made the state's finances look even worse.

On that note, in terms of comparison and performance, I turn to the second point of the motion, which calls for a special inquiry into this government's economic track record. It is amazing to me that members opposite keep calling for special inquiries. It is lazy. I wonder what members opposite think their job is as an opposition. I always thought it was holding the government of the day to account. After sitting through three years of question time, I can assert that members opposite are failing to meet that essential KPI, but that does not mean that they get to outsource their job to public servants and third parties. We know that they are fans of outsourcing and not having skills and expertise in-house, but this is just ridiculous. I will save members opposite time, and WA taxpayers millions of dollars, and go through our track record.

Western Australia is the economic powerhouse of the nation. Keeping our economy strong and creating jobs for Western Australians has always been one of our highest priorities since coming to government in 2017. WA consistently punches above its weight, contributing almost double our population share of the national economy. Our domestic economy grew by more than double the pace of national growth in 2023, and was once again the strongest in the nation with growth of 4.7 per cent compared with 2.3 per cent nationally. Our strong growth was underpinned by strong growth in business investment, which grew by a massive 10.7 per cent in annual terms—the highest in 7 years; our government's record investment in infrastructure to continue to grow our economy and meet the needs of a growing population, up by a massive 18 per cent in 2023; and the resilience of household consumption, which grew by 2.7 per cent, the strongest in the nation. Western Australia accounted for nearly half of the nation's goods exports, generating a massive \$260 billion in wealth for the nation in 2023, underpinned by our strong resources sector. This provides a massive contribution to the national economy, the commonwealth, and other state and territory finances.

Our government is very proud to have created more than 300 000 jobs since coming to office in 2017. We have record levels of employment for both men and women, and we have smashed our target of creating 125 000 jobs during this term of government, with more than 210 000 jobs created. Unemployment in WA is the second lowest of all the states, and WA's workforce participation rate remains well above other states. I take issue with the member for Moore's assertion that the thousands of employees working in the public sector are dysfunctional and chaotic, and under poor leadership. The member can hold the government to task, but to throw our hardworking public sector employees and their professional leaders under the bus is beyond the pale. Our public sector is not political; they are the workers the opposition will depend on if it is ever gets back into government. I would not recommend such a strategy. In respect of directors general dealing with more than one minister, there is benefit in having more than one voice at the cabinet table that is well-informed and pushing the same cart.

I turn now to the member for Moore's opening point about net debt. Net debt is forecast to be \$27.2 billion at 30 June 2024—\$16 billion lower than the level of debt projected under the previous government. Over the time in office of the previous Liberal–National government, net debt rose almost eightfold, on a path from \$5.6 billion to a projected \$43.7 billion. It is of concern that more than 80 per cent of that rise was in general government sector debt, which went from a \$2.1 billion net asset position in June 2008 to a projected \$29 billion in debt by 2019–20. We have kept debt manageable, unlike the previous government's out-of-control debt growth.

Under this government, a sixth consecutive operating surplus of \$3.7 billion is forecast for 2023–24, after record deficits under the previous Liberal–National government.

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This builds on a \$5.1 billion operating surplus recorded in 2022–23, and a record \$6 billion surplus in 2021–22. Operating surpluses are expected to be maintained in the remainder of the forward estimates, despite conservative iron ore price forecasts. Our operating surplus will enable a record \$43.9 billion investment over the next four years in

critical infrastructure for our hospitals, schools, Metronet, regional roads and decarbonisation projects while not burdening future generations with unsustainable levels of debt.

Public sector net debt as a share of the state economy is a very valuable tool of comparison, and it is much lower in our state than in any other jurisdiction, rising to just 10 per cent by 2026–27. That is about a quarter of Victoria's, and a fifth of New South Wales'. Queensland and South Australia also have a higher share of net debt to gross state product ratio. We manage the budget well throughout every single policy and portfolio area. It is not just the job of the Treasurer. Even in my local government portfolio, the Cook Labor government has delivered significant reforms for the benefit of all Western Australians. We continue to work closely with local government sector stakeholders to deliver important reforms that benefit residents, ratepayers, small businesses, community groups, local government employees and tourist operators across WA.

As we should all know, local government is critically important for our state's economy. It delivers many services that are essential for economic growth and productivity. For instance, small business owners depend on local governments to provide support services and timely approvals. Mum and dad landowners depend on local governments when they build or improve their homes. Every Western Australian depends on the services and infrastructure delivered by local government. The local government sector employs around 23 000 Western Australians to deliver those critical services. They are a major employer in our state. That is why our local government reform agenda is focused on supporting local governments to deliver that work. We are delivering the most significant changes to local government legislation and operations in more than 25 years, including a range of measures to cut red tape and standardise and streamline typical government processes.

Last year we passed landmark legislation to deliver a range of reforms, including reforms to local government elections. Many positive changes were then implemented in the October 2023 ordinary elections, including new measures to backfill vacancies. Our new laws have worked to reduce costs and prevent disruption for local governments by greatly reducing the need for extraordinary elections. For example, I understand that these new laws have already filled a vacancy on at least five occasions, and the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries estimates that the cost of holding an extraordinary election at the City of Gosnells, which now did not need one, would have been in the vicinity of \$250 000. Our reforms just saved those ratepayers a quarter of a million dollars. We are also working to simplify council meetings to make local democracy accessible and efficient. It is critical that every member of our community has the opportunity to engage in council meetings. Standardising meeting procedures will also simplify the way meetings are run, which will reduce costs and make it easier for local governments to train and share staff, representing another saving.

Just this morning I announced that the Cook Labor government has made new Local Government (Long Service Leave) Regulations. Importantly, these new regulations will improve the operation of local government long service leave portability schemes. They will also deliver administrative improvements to streamline the transfer of entitlements when an employee moves from one local government to another. This stands to benefit thousands of women and all employees of the local government sector, and will improve the money that they will be able to call on later when they take long service leave. We have also delivered a range of reforms to improve local government financial reporting, such as the new model financial statements. All of this streamlining frees up resources in each local government that would usually work on such things to instead work on areas of high priority for their communities.

As I have outlined, the Cook Labor government has a strong track record for delivering local government reform. This is in comparison to the botched forced amalgamations by the Barnett government, when so many local governments ground to a halt under the uncertainty of those forced measures. The utter disappointment about the then coalition government's complete mismanagement of this issue continues to be talked about in the sector today. Compare that with our reform record. We are delivering positive changes, working with the sector to support local governments to deliver critical services for our communities.

I could speak for quite a bit longer about our cost-of-living relief, and I particularly wanted to talk about fee free TAFE courses, but I know that other members want to talk about this in their local area. I will leave my comments there and hand over to the incredibly capable member for Kimberley.

**MS D.G. D'ANNA (Kimberley — Parliamentary Secretary)** [6.45 pm]: I am going to talk fast, too. I have all these pages and limited time. I rise today to address the motion raised by the Leader of the Opposition, which unjustly criticises the economic management of the Cook Labor government. The motion not only overlooks the significant achievements of our government, but also misrepresents the reality faced by Western Australians, particularly in the regions and the Kimberley. First and foremost, I will talk about the tangible achievements that everyone is aware of, such as the Fitzroy River Bridge. This project stands as a testament to the effectiveness and responsiveness of our government after the devastating floods last year. We acted swiftly. The result, the new Fitzroy River Bridge, was completed six months ahead of schedule, just 11 months after the original was destroyed. This was not merely a construction project; it was a lifeline reestablishing the connection between the East and West Kimberley, enhancing regional connectivity and providing substantial economic opportunities through local employment and business engagement. Over 250 local Aboriginal workers were involved, with nearly \$34 million spent on Aboriginal-owned businesses. This project alone illustrates our commitment to timely and impactful project delivery.

Another section I will talk about is how the opposition criticises our handling of the cost of living without acknowledging the comprehensive measures that this government has implemented to mitigate some of these pressures. These include substantial electricity credits to households, caps on essential service fees and direct rental support for tenants. These measures are directly beneficial to people, especially up in the north. As the member for North West Central said, the further north you go, the bigger impact you feel. While people down here are saying they are such small contributions, they are felt quite largely up where we come from. Furthermore, I acknowledge some of this government's recent announcements about how we are stimulating our tourism industry, including the recent announcement of the season pass; regional capped airfares for not only tourists, but also residential people to access the same opportunities for people up there to come down here; ongoing investments in regional tourism infrastructure; and significant upgrades to TAFE facilities in the Kimberley, with fee free courses in hospitality and tourism. These demonstrate our proactive approach to bolstering the local economy and enhancing our educational outcomes.

On a note about tourism, I quickly take this opportunity to clear up a mistruth or not clear fact about the recent decision regarding Horizontal Falls. It does not mean that you cannot observe that area, as the member for Cottesloe said. I want that on the record. This decision does not mean people cannot observe special areas such as Horizontal Falls.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Will tourist operators be allowed?

**Ms D.G. D'ANNA:** Tourist operators are allowed, and discussions are going forward. The correct terms are "negotiations are happening to diversify the tourism product", which means that you can still go there, experience the ambience of the natural order that is there, as well as be culturally, geographically and environmentally educated on what is there, but it is about traversing the falls, which is one section. The Kimberley is not a one-trick pony.

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Horizontal Falls is not the only thing up there. If the member for Cottesloe comes for a visit, I will show him what else is beautiful in the Kimberley.

In the area of social and community welfare—I am running out of time—this government has a strong record of delivering meaningful reforms and substantial funding across the sectors of health, education and housing. Our efforts in expanding the availability of social housing, enhancing local healthcare services and supporting local industry through grants and development programs are clear indications of a government that prioritises the wellbeing of its people.

In light of these facts, it is clear that the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition lacks substance and fails to recognise the extensive and positive impacts made by our government. The evidence speaks for itself. Through dedicated effort and strategic planning, this government has delivered some awesome infrastructure. This government is about offering solutions, not excuses. Therefore, I urge my fellow members to reject this motion and recognise it as a political manoeuvre rather than a constructive critique. Let us continue to support a government that is truly making a difference in the lives of Western Australians across the state.

**MS R.S. STEPHENS (Albany)** [6.50 pm]: I echo all the comments of my fellow regional member, the member for Kimberley, the honourable and amazing Divina D'Anna.

**Ms S.E. Winton:** Honourable?

**Ms R.S. STEPHENS:** She is honourable!

I want to acknowledge Minister Beazley for going to our regional communities. She understands what is out in the regions and what is important to people in the regions.

The member for Central Wheatbelt talked about some of the work around housing. I want to bring to the attention of the house and the Minister for Regional Development, Hon Don Punch, that the Great Southern Development Commission is working on a strategy, with upcoming sessions on working with local governments to address challenges faced by regional businesses attracting and accommodating workers. We are doing amazing things in the regions. I acknowledge that the development commissions play a pivotal role in being the glue in the inception of some of these projects.

The Albany ring-road is partly open. Upon completion, the project will establish an 11-kilometre free-flowing road. This \$250 million investment in the City of Albany will help local shires and regional areas and will assist in taking our grain and trucks to the port in a much safer environment. The project has injected so much money into our community and economy, especially in the great southern. It has employed local contractors and created a significant number of jobs. We are moving on to the next section of the road, which is a \$37 million flyover at the intersection of Menang Drive and Chester Pass Road. That work will continue and hopefully complete the project later this year. It is an incredible project in our community.

The government is investing in TAFEs and training. It has invested \$22 million in a trade training centre at South Regional TAFE, which is due to open shortly. The building is incredible. The local contractors working on that project have done a fantastic job.

People are still looking to open businesses in the regions. There is a thriving economy. Zambrero will open a restaurant in Albany in April. My kids are pretty excited about that, but I cannot say that I have visited a Zambrero restaurant before. Businesses are investing in daycares, which is critical for people in the regions who want to return to their employment. One such business did not need a handout from the government; rather, it is proactively investing in regional communities. It is committed to building a brand new daycare centre in Bayonet Head called the Bayonet Head early learning centre.

The other day I met with representatives from Commodity Ag—the member for Roe is no longer in the chamber—which is an incredible business in Gnowangerup. It employs more than 56 people from the small town of Gnowangerup. It builds trays for trucks but is starting to diversify its business to have lots of different avenues. I think it is incredible that it employs that many people, including apprentices and quite a lot of Indigenous people. The minister touched on the wage subsidy for apprentices. Business owners have come to me and said, “How amazing is this?” Small businesses can receive up to \$134 000 to employ an apprentice in the building and construction industry. One of my lovely constituents has employed 22 apprentices. He was blown away to learn that he can continue to employ apprentices in his glass supply business. This money will help him take on his next apprentice and increase employment in his business.

A few months ago, we proudly brought road maintenance contracts back in-house under Main Roads. They had been outsourced in 1990 by the Liberal–National government. It was an incredible day. A total of 39 new people now live in the great southern and are employed by Main Roads. I was there the day they started. They had on shiny new tops and boots. They were so proud. These people know that they have a solid job. After going to work, they volunteer and give back to the community. It was such an amazing day. Member for Collie–Preston, I know that another 61 jobs are going into the south west, which is just incredible.

Recently, the Cook government invested \$30 million over four years in regional fire management through the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions’ Parks and Wildlife Services. This will create five new full-time positions in the great southern, with an additional two trucks and a dedicated bulldozer. I am yet to see the bulldozer, but I look forward to it being based in Albany and deployed around the great southern.

I know that fabulous other members would like to make a contribution. It is significant to show that we have good economic management. I am proud to be a part of the Cook Labor government.

**MR K.J.J. MICHEL (Pilbara)** [6.56 pm]: I thank all members for their contributions, especially the government members who promoted their electorates and showed what a wonderful job the Cook Labor government is doing. I rise today to give a contribution to the ridiculous motion moved by the opposition. I put on the record that I do not support the motion.

I take this opportunity to update the house on the pipeline of projects in the Pilbara. I cannot understand the opposition’s gall to move a motion like this without looking in its own backyard. Let me remind the opposition of some of the commitments it made in the past that never got off the ground. Opposition members should not forget the more than \$40 billion debt that the former government left us when we came to power. The former Liberal–National government left us a more than \$40 billion debt, yet it says that we are not delivering. The former Liberal–National government put the state in debt and did not deliver any of its election commitments. Let us start with Spoilbank Marina, which was one of my election commitments. I have been told by locals that it was promised in 2008 but no-one talked to them about what was happening. Only the Cook Labor government will deliver the marina. I had the opportunity to open the boat ramp and parking area. I also went down the boat ramp with the Minister for Ports, Hon David Michael, to look at the wonderful job that the Pilbara Ports Authority has done and that the contractors are doing. It will be an amazing marina once it is completed. I say to everyone in this chamber, watch this space!

Another project that is close to my heart, which was also another of my election commitments, is Newman Hospital. Once again, construction of the hospital was promised by the former Liberal–National government. I have been told by locals that it was promised in 2008. Once again, it was not delivered. Only the Cook Labor government is committed to delivering its election commitments. The Cook Labor government is working hard to deliver road projects in the Pilbara. Last week, I had the privilege to welcome our Premier, Roger Cook; the Deputy Premier, Hon Rita Saffioti; and the Minister for Road Safety, Hon David Michael, to open the \$112 million Hedland Road and Rail Safety Improvements project.

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In the past, people and businesses in Hedland faced challenges with the Great Northern Highway. There was a constant clash between road and rail, causing disruptions for local vehicles and freight transport. To address this, we invested in several key projects—the \$76 million Port Hedland airport deviation and the \$32 million Buttsweld Bridge and road realignment, along with the closure of Powell Road. Those projects aimed to remove conflicts between road and rail. The Buttsweld Bridge and Powell Road project started in October 2021 and finished in November 2022.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

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