

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 2 June on the following motion moved by Hon Pierre Yang —

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

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

HON AYOR MAKUR CHUOT (North Metropolitan) [12.30 pm]: Thank you, President. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners on the land on which we meet, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, their elders past and present. I am grateful and proud to call Australia my home, having come from another country to establish my life here in 2005. Having been born in Africa, I recognise the impacts of colonisation on people's welfare. I acknowledge all the hard work of the many Aboriginal elders, leaders and activists who have worked for reconciliation in this country and their advocacy to have Aboriginal voices heard, understood, recognised and respected. I also appreciate living in a country of peace, where the laws, safety and government structure made living in Australia sought after for myself and my family, and a part of Australian history is its diverse migrant and British commonwealth heritage. I want to thank this country for giving me and my family a chance to come here and the honour of me becoming a member of Parliament in Western Australia.

I congratulate you, President, on your appointment. Thank you for the welcome and encouragement you have shown me as a new member of Parliament. It was great to hear in your acceptance speech your intention to make Parliament understandable for the new members. As I am a hard worker and a quick learner, I know that you will assist me in understanding my new role in the Legislative Council, representing the people of the North Metropolitan Region. The North Metropolitan Region stretches from the electorates of Butler, across to Wanneroo, down to Perth and across to Cottesloe. According to the 2016 census, there are a greater number of overseas born residents in the region, with the dominant migrant group being English born. Impressively, over 70 per cent of the North Metro Region reported performing voluntary work, compared with some 18 per cent over the whole of Perth. This is a connection for me given my volunteer work with young women. I am thankful and I acknowledge the people of North Metro Region for placing their trust in me. I congratulate all members on your election or re-election to this place. I thank the Leader of the House, Hon Sue Ellery, for her warm welcome and understanding of the challenges that I face in learning this new role, in addition to the other great new job I have as a mum. I look forward to us working together with the President to make positive changes so that I can perform both my roles in this chamber, as a mother, nourishing and caring for my infant son; and as a member of Parliament, fulfilling my promise to the people of Western Australia to serve them well.

I am very excited to be part of the most successful government in WA history and joining the team of the most popular Premier ever. I am grateful for the support given to me by the entire Labor team. I considered naming my son after the Premier, but that did not fit with the South Sudanese tradition of giving him his grandad's name. I expect that the newspapers in future years will show that Mark is the most popular boys name of new babies in WA. A hot tip from me is that South Sudanese babies are also often given a Christian name—I was baptised as Sarah—so you never know; it still is possible.

I would like to thank my North Metro Region colleagues Hon Martin Pritchard, Hon Pierre Yang and Hon Dan Caddy, who have all been a great support to me before and since my election. A special thank you goes to Hon Pierre Yang for taking his time to answer my questions and continuing his support after the election. I am settling in well today because of people like brother Pierre. Thank you. Thanks to Hon Alannah MacTiernan, the outgoing MLC for North Metro Region. The people of the south west will be honoured to have her represent them as I know the residents of the North Metro Region were. Alannah is a great role model, is hardworking but still finds time to help people, such as myself. Thanks to the parliamentary staff for being so welcoming, particularly Rebecca Burton in helping me care for my newborn baby and include my family in this historic occasion of being the first woman of African heritage elected to the Legislative Council in WA. This is a great honour and I thank the South Sudanese community for their support in the lead-up to the election. In particular, Akuot Achiek has been a very special person to me, and it is with pride that I am the first Australian of Southern Sudanese heritage elected in any Parliament in Australia.

Recently, the Leader of the House celebrated 20 years since being elected. That had me thinking: 20 years ago I was 12 years of age and had been living in a refugee camp since 1997. I was born in a refugee camp in Payindo, Ethiopia, but because I was not a citizen of Ethiopia, my refugee papers recorded the birthplace as South Sudan. My parents returned to South Sudan when I was two, but the 22-year conflict for independence saw us flee to Kakuma after my father was killed in the war. The Kakuma refugee camp sits in Kenya. As it was already in a poor area of the

country, it was a struggle for survival in the camp, but our basic needs were met through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I believe in the importance of organisations such as the UNHCR in guaranteeing that the human rights of people throughout the world are respected and should be supported by our governments.

My memory of the camp was as a home, but it was basic. We had all the things to survive, and we appreciated our safety the most. It was not until I came to Australia, arriving at Perth Airport sharing a carry-on bag with my sister holding all our belongings, that we could see the difficulties and hardship that we had at the camp. My early life before Australia was precious due to our rich culture and the sense of belonging to the community and surrounding families. I think most of my humble beginnings started from the community that I was born in, and considering all the challenges we faced, everyone had a smile on their faces. As the eldest girl in my family, my responsibility was to stay home and look after my siblings. My older brothers were sent to boarding school. My mother had a small business, a restaurant, so the responsibility for cooking, caring and helping in the restaurant fell to me. My mum's business meant that we had some independence from UNHCR food rationing. As a South Sudanese girl there was an expectation that I was born to marry and have children, so I had very little education. I am grateful to my mother for her commitment of bringing me to Australia where I could get an education, establish my life and thrive to make choices about how I want to live. I understand that access to education is a powerful pathway for a successful and fulfilling life and I am proud that the WA Labor government is committed to quality public education.

Living in the camp the only way for us to come to Australia was to have a sponsor for our visas. Thankfully, our uncle John Mayor Machar started the process and filled in the forms. Then, through another contact in WA, uncle Eli Magok Manyol supported us to finalise our visa, then connected us with another contact who gave us a no-interest loan to pay for the travel expenses to Australia. I would also like to thank aunty Aki Noyoo who worked for the Catholic Migrant and Centrecare, who assisted my mother to understand and settle down in Perth in 2005.

I want to note and thank many people who helped me come to Australia and settle in here. I thank Uncle John Mayor Machar, Eli Mango, Brother Geoff, Pastor Rex, Pastor Paul and Lindsay Bunn. Special thanks to Edmund Rice Centre and Christina Ward—Mamma Chris, my Australian mum—who always looked out for us, for me and my family, always wanted the best for us and ensured that we had as much opportunity as possible to succeed in our new country.

When I came to Perth, I did not speak much English. My brothers were speaking for us initially. My first impression when I landed in Australia was that these people did not speak through their mouths but their nose, so this funny English was going to be more difficult than I thought! Another cultural shock was the relationship with our neighbours. In Africa, when you move into a new neighbourhood, the neighbours will immediately come and greet you and make you feel welcome. So, when we moved to our first home in Alexander Heights, we felt like the neighbours mistrusted us because they did not greet us in an African way. Now I know that it is a cultural thing and in Australia people do not intrude on others' privacy; they wait until people have settled in before introducing themselves. I also felt that other kids, Australian kids, were reluctant to talk to us and did not include us in their activities. It felt odd, and at first we thought their actions were because we were African and based on their assumptions, but as time went on, I realised that there is a lack of cultural awareness.

I now have many friends from all different backgrounds and know that acceptance of cultural difference recognises that we all want to succeed and live a happy and healthy life. I know from my sister who lives in Melbourne, many people exploit fear to gain popularity, and she experienced unkindness. Once she was refused service in a restaurant because of her South Sudanese heritage. My sister is an amazing AFL woman footballer. She is a role model for many in our community and works in leadership programs with young people. The negative comments that are made about South Sudanese people are unfair. Many of the Australians from South Sudan have proved our worth through our work, studies and businesses.

Here in Western Australia, the work of the WA police with the African community has been very important and good relationships have been set up with the leaders and youth. Pretty much at most African community events we will see Inspector Don Emanuel-Smith and other WA Police Force members such as Umile Gwakuba. They are making the WA police accessible and their knowledge is helpful in assisting our community to thrive. Unfortunately, this cultural awareness is not across all areas of policing. However, I believe that the Western Australian government and Minister for Police, Hon Paul Papalia, are committed to increasing diversity and the training that will give our community further confidence in our police. Although I champion the strength of the South Sudanese community, it is not without knowing that we could do better to develop our young people, encourage and give respect to our women.

I realise that one of my roles will be to bring a greater understanding of inclusion into Parliament and government. Understanding the importance of diversity in our community is important so that we can enjoy the strength that each cultural heritage offers for a thriving future. I can do this as best I can, knowing and respecting who I am as not only a role model, but also somebody who is thoughtful and values inclusion in how we meet these challenges. Although I came to Australia as a refugee, I am now a citizen and I define myself as an Australian with a refugee background. Although it is significant, a refugee past does not define who we are as Australians; we work to thrive

and contribute like so many Australians—those born here and those who came here from other countries and now call Australia their home.

I acknowledge the WA government for its vision for a society —

... where everyone has a strong sense of belonging, can participate fully and can achieve their goals

My focus over the next four years will include upholding the government’s commitment to the multicultural framework and this vision. As an accountant, I am used to clear guidelines and task-oriented goals. The *WA multicultural policy framework* sets out actions that should be taken and sets out a specific implementation path for the WA public sector to assist agencies to develop their own multicultural plans to improve cultural diversity in the workforce and decision-making bodies. I have been committed to encouraging diversity throughout my working life. At 17 years of age, I left Aranmore Catholic College. My challenges were to raise my son and establish my future. While studying at TAFE, I was approached by an agency who wanted me to become a model. At first I said no, but my mum encouraged me to take the challenge. I ended up modelling internationally; I did New York Fashion Week and I worked in London, South Africa and New Zealand, and all around Australia. Working in the fashion industry broadened my understanding of so many things in my life, but I was disappointed by an industry that did not embrace the diverse range of modelling talent available, preferring to have only one African model on their books.

It was that lack of opportunity for other young women in the community that made me set up Face of South Sudan. I used my skills in modelling and mentored young women to gain confidence and self-belief. Growing up, we girls were often hidden from society and it was not culturally accepted to make eye contact when we talked to someone. Modelling gave me a sense of confidence. In addition to Face of South Sudan, I wanted to create more prospects for young women to get paid for modelling jobs. I established an agency using my profile to actively sponsor them. Coming as a migrant to Australia, there are many issues with getting skills and experience and establishing a career. People in a refugee camp do not get the opportunity to become equipped for the Australian workforce, and this has been a great challenge for me and many who come here as refugees.

I want to use my career success to make sure that the government focuses on jobs that assist refugees and migrants to gain important experience and contacts that will result in meaningful employment. That is a priority for me. I am not asking that we create this from nothing. Many successful programs are running in Victoria and New South Wales to enable new migrants and those disadvantaged in the workforce to participate in traineeships and work experience programs. For example, the Opening Doors program with the Australian Taxation Office is a 12-month paid and supported employment program for refugee and humanitarian job-seekers in Melbourne and Sydney. This program is run through Jesuit Social Services, which also partners with the National Australia Bank on its award-winning African inclusion program. It has other exciting hands-on paid learning experiences with the local water authority. I feel there is a great exciting opportunity for us to pursue something similar with our own public practice.

I had firsthand experience of how hard it is to get experience. Around 2013, I commenced studying my degree to become an accountant, after I had completed my diploma in business management. During this time, I started a small business, a South Sudanese restaurant, as I love cooking and wanted to share my love for food so that the western community could have a great taste of South Sudanese food. It was really hard to juggle family, work and studies, but the hardest thing was to find a job as an accountant. How do we get experience? Without a job, we cannot get experience. Thankfully, Edith Cowan University gave me a finance officer job and from there I went into working at Emmanuel Christian Community School with responsibility for the accounts and, most importantly, its payroll. I want to acknowledge Tony Wilson and Edwin Reyes for the opportunity they gave me. Anyone in business or a government department will tell us that paying correctly is vital to the happiness of employees. My commitment to my career saw me recently enrol to become a certified practising accountant. Obviously, now I have put that on hold, but I think this shows my interest in finance.

I am grateful to have joined the WA Labor team, who understand the importance of good financial management. The first four years of the WA Labor government saw it deliver on its promise to the WA people to bring the budget back into surplus. It is impressive that such excellent budget management could arise while it has been battling a global pandemic and keeping us healthy and safe. I look forward to a further four years of stable economic management. I believe that my life experience of seeing a failing health system in South Sudan allows me to praise our excellent quality health system. I acknowledge the work of health minister Roger Cook. I am proud that this government accepts the responsibility of looking after its citizens and is committed to continually improving a health system that is focused on patient health and wellbeing.

In closing, I want to thank the WA Labor Party, particularly secretary Tim Picton and assistant secretary Ellie Whiteaker, for having faith in me to represent the people of Western Australia and the North Metropolitan Region. Although I have been a member of the Labor Party for many years and active in campaigns, my work had been in the

community. To have been recognised for that work and to be endorsed to run for a winnable seat has been rewarding, and I am thankful for that.

Many people have welcomed me and set me on a path to what I hope will be a long career in politics. I have mentioned many people throughout my speech, but I thank in particular the Premier and his staff, including Mark Reed and Alysha Anderson. I would also like to thank Hon Stephen Dawson; Dr Anne Aly, federal member for Cowan; Terry Healy, member for Southern River; and Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson for their kindness and guidance.

To my North Metropolitan Region Legislative Assembly colleagues, you are great. Thanks especially to Margaret Quirk, the member for Landsdale, for your advice; the member for Wanneroo, Sabine Winton; the member for Kingsley, Jessica Stojkovski; the member for Hillarys, Caitlin Collins; the member for Joondalup, Emily Hamilton; the member for Scarborough, Stuart Aubrey; and the member for Churchlands, Christine Tonkin. It was great campaigning and winning with you all—thank you.

To my staff Alan, Nyat, Belinda and Linda, thank you for all you do and I look forward to a bright future. Special thanks to Jann McFarlane, former federal member for Stirling; and to my Mirrabooka mates Meredith Hammat, Sue, Donata and Hiba.

I would also like to give special thanks to my dearest friend Ms Janine Freeman. Her trust in me got me here today and I cannot find the words to describe my gratitude. I wish Janine many more blessings and a career beyond politics. I look forward to her guidance and wisdom.

One of my past jobs was as a patient care assistant at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, where I joined the union that was known as the Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union. The support shown to me then and now by that union—now proudly called United Voice—is greatly appreciated, especially from Carolyn Smith and Dom Rose.

To all my friends around the world, my community and all African communities, including past and present leaders such as Joe Tuazama and Casta Tungaraza, thank you. To Martha Adu, Carol Davis, Mathew Mading, Majok, Anju, Maria Pia, Tom and Thembi, Joe Moniodis, Busi Oyewopo, Yar Matur, Saada, Ayen Nyariel, Ajang Alaak, Eva Mwakichako, Nyibol Maker, Dylan Teng, Laurice and Dave Jallah—special thanks for allowing me the grace to speak to people about my aspiration to become a member of Parliament.

Big thanks to my family here and back home. I can only mention a few of the many who have contributed a lot to my life: Uncle Ciengkueu Mading, Uncle Chep Chuot, Nyanawut Azuma, Ambrose Nhial, my mother-in-law Amuor Manyok, Ajak Makuie, Ayen Chuot, Alom Chuot, Nyakuta Marin, Yom Chuot, Puor Makur Chuot, my two grandmothers Ajak Mading and Jockdit Bouth, my grandfather Chierac Ayol, Auntie Achol Aguek and Uncle Taban Aguek.

I have spoken often about my mum today and in the media. My mum Helena Yar Enock inspired me to be who I am today. She also gave me the love of family. I would like to give a very special thanks to the best humans in my life, my brothers and sisters for always having my back: Mangar, Chep, Matur, Akech, Sabur, Bush and Areji. Thank you my siblings for all your support.

In my immediate family, God has blessed me with my two lovely sons, Thokbeny and Achol, and, of course, the man of the house, Deng Achol, whose love and support I really value. Thank you Wun Achol for all you do for our family.

To anyone I have forgotten to mention, thank you. I am a new mum and, after all, forgetful—and I am tired!

Finally, I want to thank God for giving me the opportunity to be in this beautiful land. Thank you.

[Applause.]

The PRESIDENT: Thank you and congratulations, honourable member. I wish you all the very best for your time in this place.

Hon SUE ELLERY: President, noting the time, I ask that you to leave the chair until the ringing of the bells.

Sitting suspended from 12.57 pm to 2.00 pm

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan) [2.01 pm]: I am pleased to be able to make a brief contribution to the Address-in-Reply. I first acknowledge the election of Hon Alanna Clohesy, my parliamentary colleague in the East Metropolitan Region, on her election as President of this house and to you, Mr Deputy President, as the Deputy President and Chair of Committees. I know that you will do a sterling job in both those positions. I also want to congratulate everyone in this house for either their election or re-election to this place. In doing so, I want to recognise the significant service of a number of members of this place who recently retired on 21 May. Most particularly on this side of the house, I want to acknowledge Hon Simon O'Brien, Hon Michael Mischin, Hon Jim Chown and Hon Ken Baston. Hon Ken Baston entered this place on the same day as Hon Peter Collier and I back in 2005. I will certainly miss, as I think the house will, the wit and wisdom of Hon Simon O'Brien. Maybe not the Leader of

the House, but the sparring between her and Hon Michael Mischin has provided entertainment for all of us on occasions, albeit I know that she will not feel quite alone knowing that Hon Nick Goiran is still with us.

Hon Sue Ellery: He makes up for it.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: It continues for us.

Hon Sue Ellery: In so many ways.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Indeed. I would also like to recognise Hon Alison Xamon. Obviously, on a number of occasions we had different views and perspectives on issues, but she and I became very good friends in this place. I wish her very well. I am not sure whether we are all at the point of missing her member's statements just yet, but it was certainly a regular occurrence. We all thought there was something wrong when she did not stand up. Members who were in the chamber may recall that she expressed some regret—she raised it with me and Hon Matt Swinbourn on the last sitting day—that she would not be able to co-convene the parliamentary friends of people with rare and undiagnosed diseases. She talked to me and Hon Matt Swinbourn that night. I am pleased that I will be the co-convenor with Hon Matt Swinbourn of that parliamentary friends group. That is a very good thing.

Coming to the recent election, I sincerely wish to thank the community of the East Metropolitan Region for re-electing me as one of its local representatives. As I have said many times in this place, the East Metropolitan Region is incredibly diverse. It traverses a very large area. It is the largest of the three upper house seats and extends very much from the very inner-city parts of Perth, a little past Beaufort Street and Walcott Street, through to the semirural to rural communities, which are very much the outskirts of the metropolitan area. The fact that we have the Inglewood night markets on a Monday night and the Gidgegannup small farm field day just last weekend demonstrates the wide variety of communities that we have across this region. It is a privilege to serve these communities in this Parliament and to support them in their various endeavours. This includes individuals, community groups, schools and many other organisations. We do that here in this Parliament and we do it directly in advocacy to government as well.

Speaking of the election, I also want to very much extend my thanks to all the Liberal candidates who stood in Legislative Assembly districts within the East Metropolitan Region and for their significant contributions. I particularly recognise Hon Alyssa Hayden, who was not successful in retaining the seat of Darling Range. Alyssa and I were colleagues in the East Metropolitan Region for eight years in this place, and then she was the member for Darling Range for just over two years. I also want to acknowledge Liam Staltari, George Tilbury, Joe Cicchini, Kevin McDonald, Rod Henderson, Charlotte Butler, Aaron Sawmadal, Mahesh Arumugam, Suzanne Migdale, Felicia Adeniyi, Justin Iemma, Jim Seth and Dave Nesbit.

I also wish to place on record my sincere thanks to those members of the East Metropolitan Region Legislative Council team. Irrespective of which party we represent in this place, we would all agree that, quite appropriately, there is always a particular focus on Legislative Assembly candidates because, at the end of the day, that is where government is formed. However, I do not think we should ever diminish the role that Legislative Council members and candidates play in election campaigns and supporting Legislative Assembly candidates and their campaign teams. I want to acknowledge Phil Twiss, Greg Halls, Daniel Newman and Jeremy Quinn, who did a great deal to support the local campaigns right across the East Metropolitan Region and me as the sole Liberal member across the region. There is no doubt that the last election was a tough one, but each of these candidates put everything into their campaigns from the moment they were endorsed right up until six o'clock on 13 March. They and their campaign teams, their families and friends gave it their all. I want to thank each and every one of them for the commitment that they made.

Before I go on to a couple of other issues, I wish to raise a matter relating to the election period going forward. Some comments have already been made by other members about the length of pre-poll. On a personal level, I think it is too long. If, however, going forward, we are going to see a change in how elections are run and the length of time for a pre-poll, then that is a discussion that we should all have. I was intrigued to hear the Electoral Commissioner on election day being interviewed on radio, either ABC or 6PR. I happened to be in my car travelling from one polling booth to another. The question was put to him along the lines of, "How do you think this whole idea of pre-poll so many weeks before has gone?" I am paraphrasing, but essentially he said, "The community have voted with their feet, and people like it. Rather than an election day, I think we are now going to see an election period." That may be suitable for some, but I think if we are going to have a reasonable discussion about that, it should not be a decision made by one; it should be a discussion that is had within the Parliament and the broader community. If it is ultimately decided that we like the idea of an election period rather than an election day, we will need to get better at how we deal with pre-polls.

Challenges related to the pre-poll were certainly reflected to me by members of the community, other members in this place and the other place, and party volunteers of all political persuasions. Some of the pre-poll locations were not appropriate. I accept that the Western Australian Electoral Commission probably needed to identify locations where they could get a very short lease—I get that. However, I visited, as I am sure other members did, multiple pre-poll locations. The Belmont pre-poll —

Hon Samantha Rowe: It was like being on the surface of the sun!

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: There we go. It was our decision, obviously, to be there, but voters had to stand and sometimes wait for long periods in the queue in 40-degree heat, and there was no shade. There were examples of limited parking options for people to park their cars. That is okay for some, but for people with disability and the elderly, that needs to be taken into account.

In a couple of cases, certainly in East Metro—I am not sure about any other regions—a couple of pre-poll stations were in shopping centres. Centre management decided that party volunteers were not able to be in there. I appreciate that not everyone likes to be handed a how-to-vote card and asked, “Are you here to vote? Do you want to vote Liberal, Labor or whomever else?” There were a lot of parties this time around—I get that. However, many people who come to us when we are standing outside a polling booth want information. They do want to know about the candidate and what their policy may be or whatever, or simply just some advice on how to vote. Many people voted for the first time. I appreciate there are staff within the Electoral Commission who can assist them with that, but before they get to that point, they may have questions they want to ask.

As I said, it is not for everybody, but if we are to have pre-polling at multiple locations, there needs to be some better planning. We know when the election will be; it will be in four years’ time. I would also add that in some locations, pre-polling severely impacted local businesses in the surrounding area. In some cases, it impacted on people being able to park their car before going into their business or even being able to enter their premises, because there would be a long, long line and people would have to push their way through to walk in the door. I accept that it is not a perfect science. I have also seen it happen at the federal level. During the federal election, there was a pre-poll station on Russell Street in Morley, which was horrendous. I do not know how many times we nearly saw an accident occur in the parking area. That severely impacted on the local businesses right next door to that pre-poll. I really wanted to get that off my chest. If we are going to consider having an election period rather than an election day, these sorts of things need to be looked at.

In turning to the next four years, I obviously acknowledge that the election result was a resounding victory for the Labor Party. I would also say, particularly for new members: do not expect it to remain like that for too long. Cracks have already started to emerge in this government. The health system is absolutely right up there in terms of those cracks starting to emerge. Day in, day out, we are now hearing stories about the challenges within our health system. There will always be challenges within the health system—I accept that; I think we all do. We are all reasonable in that regard. However, there are now significant issues in this prosperous state that need fixing, whether it is ambulance ramping or, as we heard yesterday, elective surgery. We have heard about issues at a range of hospitals. This all needs to be fixed.

In the case of the East Metropolitan Region, it includes what we heard last week about Midland hospital. It is quite clear that a funding shortfall at Midland hospital was intended from 1 July. Midland hospital is the major hospital in the Swan region and it is a major hospital in the East Metropolitan Region, because I also include Armadale. In answer to a question that I asked last week, there are about—give or take—33 000 patient separations each year at that hospital. It is a very busy hospital. What happened? A couple of weeks ago—I believe it was last Saturday—we read in various news reports that there was to be a cut. There were direct quotes by representatives from St John of God and others confirming it. I refer firstly to an online ABC news article titled “St John of God Midland Hospital doctors warn patients will die due to budget cut worth millions”. A direct quote states —

“St John of God Midland Public and Private Hospitals can confirm it has established a project to identify cost savings to minimise the impact from the advised anticipated funding reduction due to commence from 1 July 2021,” St John of God said.

“Although we will aim to minimise the impact on our staff, labour costs represent our largest expenditure.”

A *WAtoday* article titled “Midland hospital to axe frontline staff after multi-million dollar budget cut” stated —

In an internal email seen by *WAtoday*, hospital chief executive Michael Hogan told staff a number of frontline workers would be made redundant despite efforts from management to keep costs down after the state government reduced the facility’s funding for the 2022 financial year.

“Our executive team, managers, and heads of department have all been working on developing and considering a range of initiatives to improve our financial sustainability,” he wrote.

“A redundancy is always a last resort option and we will be undertaking appropriate consultation with impacted caregivers and exploring all options, including any possible redeployment.”

A source familiar with the matter who wished to remain anonymous said hospital executives were being pressured by the Department of Health to find about \$10 million worth of savings.

The hospital received almost \$292 million in funding from the state government to operate the facility in 2020 and just over \$270 million the year prior, publicly available annual reports show.

Mr Hogan offered free counseling to affected staff through an assistance provider and said the hospital would implement a raft of measures to reduce expenditure, including using agency workers and making changes to the management of leave and overtime.

East Metropolitan Health Services refused to reveal the extent of the cuts but a spokeswoman confirmed increased cost-saving had led to a reduction in funding for St John of God Midland Hospital.

What happened after that? The minister, as is his wont, sought to shift blame to the former government. I was asked to comment about this. The reality is that the government has now been in power for more than four years, so that argument is starting to wear thin. If more resources and funding are required, they should be provided. Clearly, in response to this media attention and some follow-up questions in this house, there was a very quick reversal. That is a very good thing. Quite obviously, I support the government for that funding reversal. It is interesting how it happened though. On Tuesday last week, I asked a question of the minister. I asked —

- (1) Can the minister confirm the hospital's budget will be reduced from 1 July 2021; and, if so, by how much?

That was a reasonable question —

- (2) How many patient separations have there been at the hospital in each of the following financial years —

I then listed them. The response I got was —

I have been advised that further time is required to answer this question. The information will be provided to the ... member by 27 May ...

Most members know that I tend to be fairly reasonable, so I felt it was a reasonable proposition, given I was asking for details of patient separations, that the information might not be able to be provided on the day. I accepted that. However, I took note of the question that was then asked about Midland hospital by Hon Dr Brian Walker the following day. He might have submitted the question on the Tuesday, but he asked it on the Wednesday. His questions were essentially along the same lines, but they could have been answered with either a yes or no. I hope Hon Dr Brian Walker does not mind. His questions were —

- (1) Is it true that St John of God Midland Public Hospital's budget is to be slashed by more than \$10 million for the 12 months from 1 July 2021?

Either it is or is not —

- (2) If yes to (1), did the East Metropolitan Health Service consult with the minister or any of his senior advisers ahead of making this decision?

A yes or no would have been an answer —

- (3) Given that the proposed cuts are almost certain to lead to redundancies and fewer doctors and nurses being rostered on each shift, will the minister call this decision in for immediate review; and, if not, why not?

They were fairly reasonable questions. Hon Dr Brian Walker was not asking for extensive detail about patient separations or anything like that; simple yes or no answers were required. The response he got was —

I have been advised that further time is required to answer this question.

I again got a similar response on Tuesday this week when I asked a similar question, which I must admit I was a little unhappy about. The response I got was that I again had to wait until the end of today, so let us see what answer I get. I appreciate that the Minister for Health is under the pump at the moment, but he can answer these sorts of questions. There is no reason that he could not have answered these questions. I know why he did not want to answer the questions. Quite clearly, they were trying to resolve the issue and he did not want his representative in this place to tell us that, yes, we were going to see a funding shortfall. I am very happy if the issue has now been rectified, but it should not take media attention, internal emails being released to the press and questions then being asked in here for a reversal to be made, but that is what happened. I look forward to the answer that will be provided to me today, which hopefully will confirm that the additional funding is to be provided.

I will go on to a couple of other issues. I am very pleased to be the new shadow minister for early childhood education. Members in this place who know me will know that over a long time I have taken a very strong interest in the early years. As we know, the early years have long been identified as a critical period in a child's life, marked by rapid changes in their physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Early investment in those years, pretty much from birth to five years of age and beyond, is absolutely critical, and supports the notion that children's future success can be enhanced greatly. I remain firmly of the view that in providing that support and encouragement in the early years, the identification of learning difficulties or disabilities early on is equally as important.

An example of that is speech. Research consistently shows that there is a very strong relationship between literacy development and oral language skills. Speech pathologists have specialist knowledge in a range of areas, including vocabulary development, phonemic awareness and various comprehension and other writing skills. Speech pathologists can complement evidence-based literacy programs delivered by teachers in the classroom setting. Access to speech pathology, as well as other therapeutic services, can attract lengthy waiting periods, and private sessions can be particularly costly for many families. I asked a question about that in this place a week or so ago, seeking information about the current median wait times in the most recent quarter, January to March 2021, for primary school-aged children accessing child and development services, particularly speech pathology. In that quarter, which is a recent quarter, the wait time was 7.9 months. Members might say that 7.9 months is okay, but for a child who is four years of age, waiting nearly eight months to access their first speech pathology appointment is a long time in their life. We put forward at the last election that we should introduce speech pathology services directly into our schools. Some schools provide that service, but at the moment they essentially use their own resources and budgets to access a speech pathologist for a certain time. Some schools have relationships with Curtin University, for example, and students come into schools. The department has, I think, five language development centres that also provide an outreach service, but that outreach service does not provide one-on-one support to students or teachers. Whilst the Minister for Education and Training is in the house at the moment, I submit—I will continue to focus on this—that the government should look at this and seriously consider introducing that service to schools. Other states already provide such a service, and it would be incredibly beneficial.

The other area of education I would like to reflect upon, and one I look forward to seeing in the budget, is initiatives involving student mental health and wellbeing. There is absolutely no doubt—I am sure all members would agree—that as we visit schools and meet with people involved in the education system, student mental health and wellbeing is a significant issue. One cannot go into a school without it being raised. I would say that on this particular issue, in fact, the Liberal Party and the Labor Party were at one. Obviously, this is back in the election period, but my recollection is that we announced a commitment of 100 new school psychologists into the government system; I think the government followed that commitment a couple of days later. Then the government announced funding to enable all schools to have a school chaplain if they so choose, and we followed a couple of days after that. It was very much a unity ticket in that regard, and I think that is a very, very good thing. The support provided by school psychologists within the school system is absolutely critical.

I think that there was one difference, and the minister will advise me if I am wrong here, but perhaps one slight addition that we had in our school psychology announcement was that we indicated that we would provide additional support to the non-government sector. Members may be aware that the government provides some support through the budget for the non-government school sector.

Hon Sue Ellery: Will you take an interjection?

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Yes.

Hon Sue Ellery: Yes; we said the same. They're funded on a grant, so we increased their grant. The proportion of increase in psychs they will be able to employ is the same proportion as the increase to public sector psychs.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: You are going to increase it?

Hon Sue Ellery: Yes.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Is that for both the Catholic sector and —

Hon Sue Ellery: Yes.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: That is excellent news, minister. I must say, I did not see that as part of the government's announcement. I think it is incredibly important. Sometimes we have debates on financial support for government schools versus non-government schools. That argument will always be there. However, I think that when it comes to matters of student health and wellbeing, it should not matter which school a child happens to go to. If they need support, they need support. If there is the capacity for the government to provide additional support to boost the services provided in the non-government sector, then I think that should be done. I know that when we were having our conversations about school psychology services, certainly with Catholic education, I think its focus was going to be on schools in both regional and remote parts of the state. I think I saw nodding.

Hon Sue Ellery: Up north.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Yes; Hon Sue Ellery is nodding, indicating that she had the same discussion as well. I am pleased, minister, that that has occurred.

I am very pleased that YouthCARE will also receive that additional support, which will enable all schools that choose to have a chaplain to have the funds to be able to do so. I think that most members would agree that the school chaplaincy service is incredibly important. The support provided by school chaplains within schools is unique in

many ways. Whenever we go to a school we are told how wonderful the school chaplain is. Often, they want them there every day. We see the impact they have on not only individual students, but also, increasingly, teachers and principals as well. I am very supportive of that commitment that was made; it aligns with a similar commitment that we made.

There are, of course, other issues that I will be following keenly, not only those that relate to my electorate or my shadow portfolios, but also areas in which I have a particular longstanding interest. One of those areas is my keenness to ensure that the government delivers on its commitment to construct a new maternity hospital to replace King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women. I raise this now—I have raised it before in this place and I will continue to do so—because this government has unfortunately made false promises before about a new hospital. Towards the end of last year, I spoke at some length about what one might say was an interesting way to announce the removal of funding support for a new hospital back in March of last year. Those members who were not in Parliament back then may or may not be aware that back in, I think, June 2019, the government had received a settlement, as such, if I can put it that way, with BHP relating to royalties. The government received around \$250 million and, at the time, around \$230 million was set aside for the start of the works on the construction of a new maternity hospital. At the time that that announcement was made, I was very supportive of the government on that. I have a personal connection to the hospital. I will say a little bit more on that in a moment in the context of something else, but my son was born there, and I have to say that the care and support provided by those who work within that hospital was outstanding. It has to be remembered that the staff, whether obstetricians, clinical professionals, nurses or support staff right across the board, are regularly dealing with very stressful situations. They are often dealing with high-risk pregnancies, which are difficult and extremely challenging, and they are dealing with all the stress that goes with that, not only within the health system itself, but also at a much more personal level with the parents and family members who are going through that challenging time. For those reasons, I have always supported and will always support, as I am sure will everyone in this house, the incredible work that those people do on a daily basis. I must admit, when I was in the hospital, and I was there a number of times, before, during and after my son's birth, it was always calm. When someone goes to hospital, sometimes there is a lot of busyness and a lot of things going on. At the hospital, it was incredibly busy, there was a lot going on, but I felt a sense of calmness. I think that is what people need when they are going through difficulties.

Despite all that, I think we would all agree that the hospital needs work, and the only way it can work really at this point is to build a new hospital. For those reasons, I was very supportive of it. But I was not supportive of the way on 26 March the government decided to kind of tell us that it had actually put the new hospital on hold. It put out a press statement titled “Administrative changes to support COVID-19 response”—fair enough. The government wanted to raise a number of matters that it was going to either bring in or defer because of the COVID pandemic. I accept that; that is fine. But on the second page—blink and you will miss it—not even in one of its dot points at the top of the press statement, the statement reads —

In addition, BHP have agreed to release the \$230 million that was allocated towards the construction of a new women's and maternity hospital, as part of a royalties settlement reached last year. This funding will now go towards the State's COVID-19 response.

I raised this at the time and I do not intend to go on about it, but that really made me cross. I appreciate that the government was dealing with a lot of things back in March. Quite understandably, a number of matters needed to be put on hold or introduced or whatever it might have been, but it should have been up-front. If the government was going to do that, it should not have been in a press statement titled “Administrative changes to support COVID-19 response”. Last time I checked, making a decision about a new maternity hospital is not an administrative change. That is the problem with this government; it cannot tell it as it is. It blames someone else or uses a sleight of hand and hopes that no-one will notice. People did notice. I was pleased to see its announcement in the *Government mid-year financial projections statement* back in December that it will now fully fund the new maternity hospital. According to its press release, only the McGowan government will be able to deliver on this. That is good, and I am going to watch what happens. I do not want to see another press statement like this, because it is not good enough. The government either delivers on it or it does not, and if it does not deliver, it should not put it out in a press release like “Administrative changes to support COVID-19 response”.

I now want to talk on a bit more positive note about the hospital. I want to say something about an announcement that was made in the federal government's recent budget. I appreciate that we are the state, but members will come to understand why I raise this matter now. The announcement was about funding that would be provided to the Women and Infants Research Foundation in this state. I appreciate that Hon Stephen Pratt is out of the chamber on urgent parliamentary business at the moment, but he referred in his inaugural speech to the foundation and indicated his very strong support for its work. In his absence, Hon Stephen Pratt should know that he will have colleagues on all sides of this house who equally believe in the importance of the work undertaken by this foundation and others. For those who may not know, preterm birth remains the single greatest cause of death and disability in children under five years of age in not only Australia, but also globally. I looked back on some of the work that the foundation has done, and the

following figures are from a couple of years ago, but I hope that they remain the same in the context of what I am about to say. The figures were that one in 12 Western Australian babies are born too early, and the proportion is one in seven for Aboriginal people. The funding provided by the federal government to the foundation is \$13.7 million. This will allow it to expand its significant work to reduce the rate of preterm birth in Western Australia to the rest of the country.

When we were in government in 2014, I had some involvement with the initial support from the government for this initiative. Back then I was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, and I was encouraging, perhaps persistently, and persuading the then Minister for Health, Hon Dr Kim Hames, that he needed to hear more about the preterm birth prevention initiative that was being put forward by Professor John Newnham and others, and their request for funding for the preterm birth prevention clinic at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women, which was part of this broader initiative to reduce the rate of preterm birth in this state. It was a little personal for me to push that. I do not intend to talk about my personal life, but there are members in this place who know that around 15 weeks into my second pregnancy, I had a premature rupture of the membrane around my baby. At the time, the chance of my baby surviving was around 15 per cent. The likelihood of preterm birth was very, very real, and the likelihood of my baby's survival was very, very slim. It was pretty hard to take knowing that that was the case. Amazing support and care was provided to me by my obstetrician, and then the specialist obstetrician to whom I was referred, and by nurses and other health professionals. I did everything that I needed to do and was asked to do, which included me not being in this chamber for around six months. The maximum time I was able to stand was about an hour and a half to two hours—that was pretty much it—and I had to drink three litres of water a day, which is hard work for someone who does not drink a lot of water. I did everything that I needed to do—and despite all those challenges, Harry was born.

Hon Sue Ellery: And survived to say that he didn't want to attend an afternoon tea to celebrate his mother's success.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: He did not want to attend the swearing-in. He had recess, which was very important. I will admit that today he did not want to dress up as a pirate—it was pirate day today—but I did get a bandanna around his head, so I got there in the end! He is a beautiful little boy.

My personal circumstance really demonstrated to me the incredible work done by those who seek to reduce the number of preterm births. As Western Australians, we should be incredibly proud of the work that this foundation does in this state, and we should be incredibly proud to know that the initiative that was started in this state is going national. I hope that we will see a significant reduction over time in the number of preterm births in this country. In the 18 months that the initiative was operating in this state, and through the various work that the foundation has been doing around the broader initiatives, as well as in the clinic, the number of preterm births in the state has reduced by eight per cent, and I think it has been lowered by 20 per cent within the Perth region. That is significant. I raise this matter today because it is probably the best time for me to raise it, and to simply say that this is a great organisation that deserves everyone's support. I am very pleased that it has received commonwealth support to enable its work to go Australia-wide.

Finally, this government is very pleased with itself, but I remind members again that things can turn very, very quickly. Many Western Australians are hurting at the moment and many issues have not been addressed. I certainly look forward to working in my community of the East Metropolitan Region over the next four years and to continue to hold this government, who can no longer blame the Liberal Party for everything, to account.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Colin de Grussa**.