

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

HOMELESSNESS

Motion

HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan) [1.05 pm]: I move —

That this house acknowledges that it is Homelessness Week and the theme for 2023 is “It’s time to end homelessness” and calls on the Cook government to —

- (a) fund housing and homeless services in a manner that will end functional homelessness in Western Australia; and
- (b) adopt all of the recommendations of the inquiry by the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations into the funding of homelessness services in Western Australia.

It is a real honour to stand here during Homelessness Week to discuss something that I think we would all like to see in this state, which is not only the management but also actually the ending of homelessness. By that, I mean the ending of functional homelessness, which is, in many ways, at the heart of the key strategies we are talking about in this state. We want to see no more people going into homelessness than the number of people who are leaving it, and we want to actually solve homelessness here in Western Australia. In doing so, we have an opportunity to reflect upon the work of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, which spent over 18 months conducting a very detailed inquiry into the funding of homelessness services in Western Australia. That inquiry came up with a very substantial report of over 300 pages, including 57 recommendations and 29 findings. It is important to note that these findings received largely tripartisan support from Liberal, Australian Labor Party and Green members of that committee. Only one member submitted a minority report. We have a substantive report from a committee that heard from an impressive array of experts and people with lived experience. They gave us advice on how we can do far better in the homelessness space than we are currently doing.

I was really pleased that when that report came down, importantly, the sector also got behind its recommendations. With the launch of Homelessness Week just a couple of days ago, Shelter’s CEO, Kath Snell, confirmed something that I have seen before in writing. She said that, ultimately, Shelter broadly supports the recommendations in this report. I think that Shelter published quite a detailed response on its website that goes through each of the findings and recommendations and details how they align with the feedback from the sector and from Shelter. There is a really important synergy between the two, because this report has tried to find the very best knowledge and information that we have and looks at how we can apply it. On the back of that, at the start of Homelessness Week Kath Snell, the CEO of Shelter WA, said that the sector really has two key asks. The first is for a boost in funding for homelessness services going forward, and I think she is absolutely right. The second, which is a bit beyond the scope of this motion—but I also agree with it and might return to it if there is time—is that ultimately, if we are serious about addressing housing and homelessness, we are going to need to address rent relief. That is probably a slightly bigger issue, but I will come back to it at the end if there is time.

The key point of this motion is that, ultimately, we need to seriously and substantially boost funding for housing and homelessness services if we are to end functional homelessness. I appreciate that this government has put extra resources into housing and homelessness, and I want to acknowledge that. I think some good things have been happening in this space. I refer to Minister Carey’s media statement in which he talked about the Cook government investing a record \$2.6 billion into housing and homelessness measures over four years, which has already added more than 1 300 social homes, with more under construction. That is good, and I want to acknowledge it, but it is not on the scale or at the speed or happening with the urgency we need if we are not going to just tread water but are actually going to end homelessness.

Just to put that into context, those 1 300 houses will pretty much only get us back to where we were in 2017. Between 2017 and 2021 more than 1 100 houses were demolished and taken out of the social housing sector; we have now added 1 300 back in, so even if we were feeling pretty generous about that, and if no further houses have been demolished since then, we might be 100 or 150 houses up from where we were in 2017. That is not where we need to be, of course, because over that period we have also seen the social housing waiting list blow out. There are now 19 000 applications for social housing, representing more than 34 000 people on that waiting list, and it is a waiting list that has continued to grow. Importantly, the priority waiting list has continued to grow as well.

I can already imagine that the government’s response to this motion might be to list all the things it is doing. I want to jump in front of that and say, “Yeah, good, but let’s be clear: it’s not enough.” The Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations’ homelessness report and all of the rest of the sector are also saying that good things are happening, but that it is nowhere near enough. Over the next little while I want to talk about some of the key findings in that report and what else needs to happen. I think I could summarise it by saying that we have an amazing strategy and a really good plan in All Paths Lead to a Home, which is Western Australia’s 10-year strategy to end homelessness. That plan is fantastic; it has really good buy-in and support from the sector, and that was one of the key findings of the report. At its heart is the Housing First Homelessness Initiative, which again is

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really good, but it is a good plan and strategy that is not being realised. It is frustrating when we have a really good plan but we are just not funding it in the way that it needs to be funded. Some serious things need to happen if we are to get there.

Obviously I appreciate that the last few years, with COVID and the like, have been tough in the construction sector. With the benefit of hindsight, I think we would all recognise that it is a shame that in the first term of this government, in the years before COVID, we did not get on and build serious amounts of social housing, because that would have been a real opportunity to get in front of the issue rather than going backwards, which is what actually happened during the government's first four years or so.

Housing First is one of the key initiatives that everyone agrees needs to happen. For those members who are unfamiliar with it, Housing First is pretty simple, really: the best way to solve homelessness in a sustainable, ongoing way is to put someone in a house without barriers to entry and to give them the wraparound services they need to actually keep that house. It is a really important philosophy, and one on which I am pleased to say there is tripartisan agreement that it is the right philosophy. Interestingly, however, one of the key findings of the report is that despite that, it is not what we are actually funding. The report acknowledges that we are actually, unfortunately, funding a previous strategy from more than a decade ago. The report found that many of the contracts for homelessness services have been in place since 2012—more than a decade ago—and that more than half of the homelessness services funded by the Department of Communities are funded under contracts dating from between 2009 and 2011, which is pretty extraordinary when we think about it. Since then, we have had a whole new strategy and a whole new way of thinking about solving homelessness, but we are still funding services from before that time. They are often funded on contracts that are just rolled over, year-on-year, which creates a whole bunch of other problems for the sector. The sector often cannot actually keep staff because they are on these rolling contracts, so it cannot transition to Housing First.

What are the key takeaways as we understand it? To recap, we all agree that the Housing First Homelessness Initiative needs to happen, but we are largely funding housing and homelessness services from a decade ago. We actually need a major new stream of funding and capacity for the sector to move away from the old funding model and into a new funding model. I acknowledge that many of the things the government is funding through contracts that date back more than a decade ago are still important, and that we need to enable that to happen. But to get into a much more sustainable model around Housing First, we need to fund the sector upfront so that it is able to transition. That would be a really important investment, and I really want to frame this new funding as an investment.

Another of the report's key findings was that if the state government were to invest in Housing First and in getting people off the streets and into secure, long-term housing, it would ultimately save the government money. It is a false economy to not invest in these things. When people are living on the streets and, as a result, have to access our emergency departments and interact with the police and the courts—all the things that happen as a result of people being forced to live on the street—it ultimately costs our state more money. It is cheaper to get people into housing with wraparound services. The evidence for that is absolutely compelling, but I need to repeat: we are not providing enough funding to enable that transition to happen. In fact, we are, unfortunately, treading water, if not going backwards, on many of these issues. Despite having a target to end rough sleeping by 2025, we are nowhere near that goal in any way at all.

That brings me to another key point to come out of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations' report. We have seen lots of really good innovation, and I again want to acknowledge and congratulate the sector, the Department of Communities and many other bodies from which we have seen some really good innovation in the housing and homelessness sector. They have delivered some successful pilot programs that we know work. Recommendation six on page 56 of the *Funding of homelessness services in Western Australia* report actually says that. It states —

The Department of Communities provide ongoing funding for successful pilot programs that have proven to be effective.

However—strangely—we mostly have not done that. I will provide an example. There was a program I was involved with when I was mayor of Fremantle called 20 Homes 20 Lives, which was a subset of a broader program, 50 Homes 50 Lives. That, again, was based on the Housing First model. In fact, the program we ran in Fremantle very clearly targeted 20 long-term rough sleepers to get them off the streets and into secure, long-term housing with wraparound services as a means of solving that long-term problem. It completely aligned with the strategy. It was really good stuff. I am proud to say that that pilot program, which was largely funded by philanthropy, with contributions from both the City of Fremantle and the state government, was very successful. We had long-term retention rates well in excess of 80 per cent. That applied to both the 20 Lives 20 Homes program in Fremantle and the 50 Lives 50 Homes program that was run across broader Perth. They are really successful examples. We have proved those up. We have shown that it works; if we get people into housing, they will stay there, and that will

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ultimately solve homelessness for those people. The bit that is really frustrating for me is what has happened to those programs. Why are we not seeing that scaled up? We all know it works. Why are we not seeing that now become 500 Lives 500 Homes or 1 000 Lives 1 000 Homes? That is what we should be doing, remembering that recently Perth was given the unenviable tag of being the rough sleeping capital of Australia. We have the highest percentage of people who are homeless rough sleeping, and that number has increased since the last census. We know what we need to do to get people off the streets. It just needs to be funded.

I acknowledge that there have been some good learnings that have incorporated some of these things. The supportive landlord model has now been rolled out, and I think the minister put something out about it this week. There are 58 properties to support 55 individuals, and that model is doing a bit of that. It is aimed to ramp up to 100 homes across the metropolitan area and in Bunbury in coming years. It is good to see that, but it is not really matching the scale of the problem. Again, this comes back to why are we so timid. We know the solutions and we have the budget, but we are not investing in what needs to happen to deal with the scale of the problem.

I just noticed the time and realised that I am about to run out very quickly; 20 minutes flies! Let me skip forward on that basis.

Crisis accommodation is a similar thing. A key finding of the report is that crisis accommodation is in crisis, because ultimately they cannot get people into long-term housing, despite some really good initiatives. Again, I note that the Murray Hotel and those other things are good options, but we are not seeing enough of that. Today is the second anniversary of the opening of Boorloo Bidee Mia, which is a really good operation, but it has been capped at 65 people. We need several of those. We need to scale this up quickly if we are serious about solving the crisis. We have a great plan; we are just not funding it properly, and we can see many examples of this. This came through really strongly to the committee, and I want to thank the people with lived experience and expertise who spoke to us about how to solve this. The consensus and agreement across the sector and the committee on some of those key things was fantastic.

In my last couple of minutes, I want to talk briefly about the minority report put out by Hon Dan Caddy. Interestingly, I agree with the other recommendations that are highlighted there, and I suspect that my other committee members would also agree with them. The committee had overwhelming agreement—about 99 per cent—on what was ultimately put in the report. I have no problem with the extra three recommendations that are highlighted there and would have happily seen those incorporated into the majority report.

Almost two years ago, on 8 September 2021, I moved a motion in this house on a very similar issue—housing and homelessness. The government did not support my motion that we acknowledge that Western Australia is facing a housing and homelessness crisis because, as was said in the chamber at the time, the government does not support the use of the word “crisis”. I wonder whether, 23 months on, when we have seen what I think can only be described as a crisis, those in government would now say that they agree that it should not be called a crisis. I hope this motion can be supported. I hope we can acknowledge that good things are happening, but that we need to rapidly and substantially scale up what we are doing in line with this very good report that has buy-in from across the sector and largely across this chamber.

As I said, the 2021 census shows that 2 300 people were sleeping in improvised dwellings or tents or sleeping out. That is a 114 per cent increase since 2016. We do not want to be the rough sleeping capital of Australia. We do not need to be. We are a rich state. We are a state that can get on and solve this. I really do hope that this time we can back in the recommendations of what is largely a tripartisan report, the core recommendation of which is that if we are serious about ending functional homelessness, we have to get on, up the funding and do the range of things that need to happen, because solving homelessness can be done. Homelessness has got worse over recent years as a result of policy choices. As we saw this week during Homelessness Week, the key message that came out is that solving it is also about policy choices, and we can do that. I commend the motion to the house.

HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [1.26 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to the debate on this excellent motion moved by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt in what of course is Homelessness Week. Earlier this week, I attended the launch of Homelessness Week, which was hosted by Shelter WA, with the Minister for Housing; Homelessness, John Carey. We were welcomed by the CEO of Shelter WA, Kath Snell, and the chair, Kieran Wong. It was an excellent function. If people wanted to see a room full of dedicated, selfless individuals, they were at that launch. Some wonderful people are doing some outstanding work in this sector, and I want to start my contribution by paying tribute to all of them—the government officials and particularly the not-for-profits and the volunteers who do an enormous amount of work to combat this issue.

I will start by talking about the theme of ending homelessness. In a previous role, I sat on the Road Safety Council. More than a decade ago, we had a policy called Towards Zero, which effectively meant that there would be no deaths on Western Australian roads. As members can imagine, we spent endless hours debating that policy—whether it was, first of all, achievable and whether that should be the public messaging of our organisation. We were led by a very wise chair at that time, Professor D’Arcy Holman, who pushed and cajoled and steered us towards adopting

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the Towards Zero policy. Even if it was not achievable—I am not sure that ending homelessness is achievable—the Towards Zero message reflected how we acted and behaved with the policies we put in place. The goal was important. We did everything we could to reduce the death toll to achieve Towards Zero. I think that is important in the homelessness story as well. I applaud Shelter WA and the national body for having that as their goal.

I will digress slightly from the wording of the motion. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt has mentioned the theme “It’s time to end homelessness”. There was a second part to that from Shelter WA: “It’s time to end homelessness: A spotlight on the regions”, and that is where I will direct most of my contribution. As a regional member, what is happening in the regions is obviously very important to me.

Hon Shelley Payne: The report should have had more about the regions in it.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: It is a very long document; we did our best to keep it at encyclopedia length. I think the regions are well covered in the report, but I will get to that; that was a good point, Hon Shelley Payne.

We understand that housing and homelessness is tough in the metropolitan area. It is much tougher in the regions. Evidence of that is presented in this excellent report from the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations. We heard over and over from people in the regions about how tough it is. I want to talk to that. I will start with some statistics to put in context the scale of the situation in Western Australia. There is a wonderful thing called the by-name list, which is effectively how we measure homelessness in Western Australia. It is one step removed from government for all sorts of reasons. The WA Alliance to End Homelessness runs that set of data called the by-name list. Sadly, it is not used everywhere, coming back to the point raised by Hon Shelley Payne. It is not used in parts of regional Western Australia, but it is the best metric we have on the scale of the problem. I checked some recent numbers. In June 2022, 772 people were homeless, of whom 299 were sleeping rough and 473 were temporarily sheltered. Only 32 per cent of the rough sleepers had a caseworker, which was another issue raised over and over in the evidence given to the committee. Of those 772 people, 119 were over the age of 55, which is an interesting number. In June 2023—a year later—the total number of homeless people had gone from 772 to 1 093, with 603 sleeping rough and 490 temporarily sheltered. Similarly, 33 per cent of rough sleepers had a case manager. We can imagine that the pathway out of that situation would be made harder by the fact that they do not have a case manager. Again, 149 of those people are over 55—a significant proportion. It is not captured in the data, but anecdotally we are hearing that older single women are sadly a rapidly growing cohort. Of the 1 093 homeless people, 17 were placed in permanent housing in June 2023. The report contains some census data and states —

The number of people experiencing homelessness is difficult to quantify. The 2021 Census estimated that, on Census night, over 9,700 people were homeless in Western Australia, including people sleeping rough, living in supported homelessness accommodation, staying temporarily with other households, or living in boarding houses, other temporary accommodation or severely overcrowded dwellings.

That is a large number.

I turn to the regional focus of Homelessness Week and some of the work that we uncovered in the report. We heard evidence from various people and organisations. Shelter WA and the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness stated —

There are not enough regional homelessness services to meet demand and there are acute accommodation shortages in most areas. Shelter WA members have expressed concern that government responses are often metro-centric. Expansion of By-Name List to some regions is welcomed, although lack of housing remains the underlying impediment to Housing First responses in the regions as well as the metropolitan area.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt talked about Housing First, which is the key plank of the government’s response to homelessness. The name says it all—housing first. It is obvious that people need a home, but the solution to providing housing first is not obvious. I will summarise the evidence presented by a Housing First provider in Geraldton that has wraparound services but does not have any homes. It said that it could do a wonderful job in providing those wraparound services—it was ready to go—but it simply did not have the homes. That was some of the evidence that we heard from the regions.

We also heard from the Salvation Army, which does a wonderful job right across Western Australia. Its submission states —

- In Karratha, our staff are reporting a **five-year wait for housing**. The Salvation Army’s family and domestic violence service in Karratha is a short-term crisis service, but because of the housing crisis **women who should only be staying for 6–8 weeks are now staying for 6–12 months** and are sometimes living in hotel-sized rooms with 2–4 children.
- The Geraldton EARSS which provides crisis accommodation, now has **clients remaining there for 12–18 months** when the service is only supposed to house them for three months.

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 9 August 2023]

p3482a-3497a

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That is the common story right across the crisis accommodation provider sector—they are full. That is having an enormous impact on the ability to reduce the number of people who are homeless, with more than 1 000 people homeless in June 2023.

Interestingly, among the audience at the launch of the platform on Monday morning was a person with lived experience of homelessness. I think they are possibly on the streets now. That person asked what the government and the sector are doing to provide more temporary accommodation. That is the really crunchy bit. That is the hard bit right now—helping those people who are often not able to sustain themselves in private accommodation or even social housing. They need a halfway step, if members like, which is crisis accommodation, but all those facilities are full. Facilities in the regions, where they exist—they do not in a lot of places—are full. Places like Beacon, which do a wonderful job, are overflowing. The system is blocked. The minister told a fairly compelling story at the launch about a gentleman who had been housed at Boorloo Bidee Mia, which is an absolutely outstanding facility. That money was well spent; it is doing a wonderful job. The minister spoke about the impact that being at Boorloo had had on that gentleman's life. He had been removed from hell. Sadly, Boorloo has only 65 beds. It was promoted as a 100-bed facility, but 65 is about right according to the people who run it; that is about the scale it can accommodate. The interesting number with Boorloo is not the number of beds, although that needs to be replicated right across Western Australia and in the suburbs, but the number of people who are transitioning out of Boorloo Bidee Mia. When we last checked, it was doing a wonderful job for the people who had moved in, but they were not moving on and making room at that crisis, transitional or emergency level for people who are still on the streets. As wonderful a job as Boorloo is doing, it is not making a dent anymore because those 65 people are virtually stuck there.

Another measure that the government has talked about for many years is the Common Ground facilities, which still have not been built. I believe there has been some movement on East Perth; the tender process is now occurring. Hopefully, that will be constructed before the end of next year and will make a dent. When the Common Ground policy was announced, it included East Perth and Mandurah—both a metropolitan and a regional response. I do not know how the facility in Mandurah is going. There does not appear to be anything happening in Mandurah. That is disappointing. That again goes to the metro-centric response of the government to this issue, as mentioned by someone who gave evidence to our inquiry. I understand that the CBD is the public face of homelessness in Western Australia, but we were told over and over during the inquiry that people are begging for housing right across Western Australia. Regional members will attest that they get calls and emails about that. I welcome the developments with the Common Ground East Perth facility and I hope that it is built as quickly as possible, but do not forget about Mandurah. We need those services rolled out right across Western Australia.

I spoke briefly about the lived experience and the person who turned up at the launch of Shelter WA's Homelessness Week on Monday morning. That was some of the most compelling evidence I encountered during the 18 months to two years of the committee process. We heard from a number of people who had lived on the streets and were living on the streets. Their evidence brought into stark focus the impact that this issue has on a person's life. Homelessness disrupts families; families are split up, with kids taken away from their mothers. Regional people who moved to the city for health care or other purposes could not get back. The evidence was heart wrenching and brought into great focus the need for, as Hon Dr Brad Pettitt states in paragraph (a) of his motion, more funding. Clearly, the Minister for Homelessness is throwing a lot of money to address homelessness—\$2.6 billion is the latest count, which is a lot of money. The risk is that we will fund homelessness as a normal thing; that is, we fund all those services doing a wonderful job without taking the leap to reduce the number of homeless people. It is an interesting time for this report to be tabled because we are almost at the start of the commissioning process that will determine what this task looks like in coming years. If we keep rolling over those contracts, with a bit of uptick for inflation, cost-of-living pressures, wages, security and those other small things, we will get exactly what we have now, but with slightly more funding. That is the risk. I hope the government provides something new on the homelessness front that looks different. As I said, if it is more of the same, 1 000-odd people will remain on the by-name list, which will be very disappointing.

It was a shock for me to learn—it probably should not have been—that if the not-for-profit sector and volunteers backed away from the provision of services tomorrow, we would be in serious trouble. I pay credit to the Salvos, Vinnies and all those wonderful organisations that care for people right across Western Australia. They do so with government support, obviously. Some receive a little bit of government support while others receive not much at all. They do a wonderful job in this space, including outreach. I recently tagged along—I am sure most members have done something similar—with a church-based group that goes to the CBD on Friday nights rain, hail or shine. They virtually do a lap of the CBD. They go up both malls and along the river on Friday nights between 6.00 pm and 8.00 pm to check on people. I said that I “tagged along” because homeless people know a familiar face and the last thing they would want to see is a tall bloke they did not know sticking something in their hand. I remained off to the side and observed. These people are volunteers and money for supplies comes from their church or public donations. They hand out hot food. They carry a container that keeps food warm. They provide water, Gatorade and other drinks,

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and clothes such as socks, beanies and underpants. They knew when someone was not where they were supposed to be. They know the 20 or 30 people they see every Friday night and they check in and ask how they are going. They have a conversation for a short while with someone who is desperate for a chat. These wonderful people gradually work their way around the city on Friday nights. As members would imagine, there are issues in the city on Friday nights; indeed, parts of the CBD can be less than friendly. These guys have been doing this for a long time, and they know how to handle people who have substance abuse issues or mental health issues. They are very empathetic and considerate. They are workman-like and efficient, and provide as much help as they can in a short time.

I conclude my remarks by thanking them on our behalf and the government's behalf. I will not talk about paragraph (b) of the motion that refers to the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations because I know that the process requires the government to respond to the 57 recommendations. We will see what that response looks like. We can have a closer look at the report during consideration of committee reports. I urge members to read it. A lot of good work has been done by my colleagues and the excellent staff from the committee office. The report offers some solutions to tackling homelessness. The government is working towards a fair few of those recommendations, and I nudge it to have a closer look at the other recommendations. I thank Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for moving this motion. Homelessness is an important issue. Let us do everything we can to get the number of people sleeping rough as close to zero as possible.

HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral) [1.45 pm]: I, too, rise to support this excellent motion. I thank Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for moving it. With respect to paragraph (b) of the motion, I also acknowledge the hard work of the members of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations in producing the report and the staff members who contributed to it, because, let us be honest, the staff members do more of the heavy lifting than members. If I had to give it a percentage, I would say that it is an 80–20 split in effort. They certainly need acknowledgement as well.

The report is not a casual Sunday night read. It is comprehensive in its size and the gravity of its content. The committee attempted to tackle the very serious and important issue of homelessness in the report. A comprehensive, detailed and thorough report such as this deserves a detailed, comprehensive and, hopefully, well-funded government response.

Homelessness in this country, certainly in WA, is sometimes a dirty word. It is often not acknowledged and many people think it is better left out of sight, certainly out of mind. The reality is that the society in which we all play a role and enjoy is not a classless society. Some people certainly have a lot; there are some classic cases of this in Western Australia. On the flip side, there are those who do not have much or have nothing at all. It is a sad reality and a by-product of this capitalist society that we all love to varying degrees. If we as a society want to eradicate homelessness, we first need to understand the gravity and scale of the issue. That is why the eighty-eighth report of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations is important; it highlights the full extent of the issue in Western Australia and tries to move the needle to raise awareness and elicit government action in this space.

I would like to share an anecdote with you, President, and I promise it is relevant to the issue of homelessness. An Israeli friend of mine, Alex, who is on the spectrum tells it like it is. He cuts through the BS, and I certainly love him all the more for it. He has lived in Perth for a number of years. He spent time in the Perth CBD and noticed an increasing number of rough sleepers. At the same time, he would go to Mosman Park, which overlooks the beautiful Derbarl Yerrigan river, where he noticed an increasing number of luxury high-end yachts on the river. Alex said to me, “Wilson, there is a problem in society when the number of expensive yachts is increasing as fast as the number of homeless people on the streets.” This speaks to a concentration of wealth at the top that is not trickling down proportionately to the people at the bottom. Perth has the highest concentration of self-made millionaires in the world, which is an astounding fact. I do not think it is something that we should be ashamed about; we should be proud of that. It speaks to the wealth and the opportunities that we enjoy in WA. However, I think we should be ashamed if it is not being shared equally, and the wealth and opportunities are not being directed to the most vulnerable members of our community. Also, politics have acknowledged that homelessness is an issue. It is something that we all strive to fix and achieves cross-party support. I suspect it has broad community support as well, which is fantastic. When we talk about cross-party support and broad public support for this issue, we must try to have an adequate response, and find an appropriate response.

I think one thing that we suffer from when we talk about eradicating homelessness is not understanding the full scale of the issue. Right now, at this point at time in this point of history—with a Labor government at the helm, no less—given the resources and wealth of WA, we are in a position to eradicate homelessness not just temporarily, but completely. The question I ask is not rhetorical or accusing, but from a level of curiosity. I am curious if the government has done any modelling to fully understand the costs in real dollar terms to eliminate homelessness in Western Australia. I suspect that figure is not as lofty or unattainable as we would expect, certainly in the face of subsequent budget surpluses. I also suspect if we had that figure and it was publicised and well known, the public would be onside with the government fully funding that commitment towards eliminating homelessness. If it were in the hundreds of billions—it is a big number—but if we have that number, then we could certainly start putting money towards understanding the

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commitment that the government is making at the time proportionally to the total investment that is required to eliminate homelessness. Right now, it is a bit of a shot in the dark. We see investments and goodwill towards this, but we do not fully understand the true value or number of what it takes to eradicate homelessness. If that is not the case, then somebody from the other side can fill me in, but I do not think that information is available.

Another point I make on measuring this cost is that in recent budgets we have seen a shift away, certainly at the federal level, from the indicators and KPIs measuring the health of our economy and some of the wellness metrics. We heard the term “the wellness budget”. I believe there is a move to include some climate impact targets as well. I ask the government if it would consider putting something towards homelessness KPIs. We heard from Hon Dr Brad Pettitt about the cost to the government from the ongoing issue of homelessness. If there were homelessness KPIs or a measurement in the budget, I think it would keep this and subsequent governments honest when it comes to the total investment in the space of homelessness.

I am not going to go into all the recommendations of the report; I will leave that to more qualified members. However, one trend I liked and thought was a sensible approach was looking at measurement and trying to quantify the issue of homelessness in Western Australia. Just relying on the Australian Bureau of Statistics data that comes out every five years is a bit of a moving target when we talk about the numbers of people who are homeless in this state. This is an area in which I think the government can step up and take some ownership and have some more—not quite real-time—data, but something that is a little more live as opposed to relying on five-year old data from the ABS. I thought focusing on the measurements and data was a sensible approach. Once we can measure and quantify the issue, then we can start trying to fix it.

The last point I make is I imagine that there is an opportunity for our new Premier, Roger Cook, to leave a legacy as the Premier who eradicates homelessness in WA. I think this is a good opportunity for our new Premier to step out from under the shadow of his predecessor, who did constantly side with the bigger end of town. I believe that Hon Roger Cook’s heart is in the right place and that he is sympathetic to the issue of homelessness. He certainly has the cheque book, resources and the means to eradicate homelessness, so I implore the Premier to do some soul-searching, and to dig deep, consider this report, and hopefully back all of the recommendations in full and provide a well-funded response to this very well thought out report.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [1.56 pm]: I have no doubt that everyone in this chamber is of the opinion that homelessness is a scourge and ought to be removed. I think that would be a founding principle of every member of this chamber. The question that remains is: how? That is sensibly debated with the excellent recommendations from the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations. I do not regard this as bed-time reading, but as something to be seriously studied and looked at. This and the minority report are eminently acceptable to anyone who thinks with passion about the wellness of those in society.

I rise to speak from a slightly different perspective, that of a medical practitioner who treats people who are suffering from homelessness. As anyone here knows, there is a variety of shades of homelessness. There are those who are couch-surfing temporarily while they are between homes and those who have absolutely nothing, who are standing in one set of clothes on a street corner, with nothing in their pockets and no place to go. However, let me speak as a doctor who treats someone who comes into my clinic suffering from problems. Everyone who is homeless is at risk from increased susceptibility to a wide range of illnesses. For example, the simple problem of having to withstand the horrible weather we had last week, with those gale-force winds, the lashing rain and the flooding. Imagine living on the street and not being able to access the shelter available in well-prepared areas. What does a person do when they have nowhere to stay? They have to find a bridge under which they can lie, or shelter in a doorway, or a place where they are out of that horrible, freezing wind and the lashing rain. They sit there, trying to stay sheltered and warm. Maybe, if they are lucky, they have a blanket to wrap around themselves. However, a few days later, they discover they have a hacking cough and are producing green phlegm. That is not helped, of course, by the fact that they assuage some of their stress by smoking tobacco, which is absolutely without recommendation. They come to a doctor and say, “I have this terrible cough. I feel ill, I have fever, I have chills. What am I going to do?”

If I were to listen to their chest, I might find it is actually bronchitis—maybe heading towards bronchopneumonia. I might give antibiotics at that time and something for the pain if that person can afford to fill the prescription, because, bear in mind, they may have no money in their pocket. However, assuming they have the necessary money to afford the script in the first place, they are now out of my reach, with antibiotics in their pocket and maybe some painkillers for the aches and pains. They will now have to survive over the next few days, aching with pain and experiencing rigours, chills and muscle pains. If it were you or I, we would take to our beds with some hot lemon tea, but they are under a tree somewhere, trying to exist. That is a very simple case, but what will happen then? The chances are that their illness could progress to bronchopneumonia. Then, of course, if a good thing happens, they might get accepted into hospital if they can find someone to take them there, and they might be admitted for a few days and given intravenous antibiotics. They will also get food, and will have a warm bed to lie in. When they feel better, two days

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 9 August 2023]

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Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

later perhaps, they will be discharged with a pocketful of antibiotics, only to find themselves under a tree, unable to find or afford food. That situation is not acceptable for anyone in our society. But this is just a very minor case.

Let us assume that someone with psychiatric problems comes to me, as many do, and their perception of the world is greatly altered and they feel that everyone is against them. They have a paranoia that does not allow them to seek help because they believe everyone is a threat. They can find themselves in the direst of straits. Not only are they without any possessions or a place to say, they have no-one they can trust or speak to. The medication they need to ease their paranoia might be unaffordable, and when it is affordable, they do not take it because they do not know whether it will poison them, and no-one will even help them to take the medication or give them a helping hand. They are entirely alone. This situation is not acceptable for anyone in our society. People who are in these conditions have shorter lifespans, and before their days end prematurely, they will have affected other people in a wide variety of ways. Those are the knock-on effects on our economy. These people are a loss to our economy. They are a drain on the economy. They may be observed by many people who are themselves able to find a home as: “They are someone I do not want to be associated with. They are not part of my problem. I go home to my place. I have my own troubles. You look after yourself.”

Hon Steve Martin mentioned the wonderful volunteers who help to assuage the problems that these people have that other people would simply walk by. We, as politicians, are obliged to assist and find ways to remove the problem of homelessness. We might say that the person is perhaps the cause of their own misfortune—if we are heartless enough to think that. If we are inhumane enough to point fingers and ascribe blame without offering any help—if we are happy to do that, we must also be aware of the pure monetary fact that preventing homelessness will cost less than treating the effects of homelessness. Any sensible mind would think that this is unacceptable and we must invest in preventing homelessness because of the end savings in both the returns to GDP and our very humanity. We, as caring human beings, will suffer if we do not help to reduce this intolerable burden on our community.

I believe this motion will resonate with everyone here. I trust very much so that it will. I fully support this excellent motion, and I expect everyone here also will. I very much look forward to the government’s response, bearing in mind that I assume that all of us here are humans who care about the wellbeing of everyone in our society.

HON JACKIE JARVIS (South West — Minister for Agriculture and Food) [2.03 pm]: I would like to thank Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for bringing this motion to the house and for acknowledging that it is indeed Homelessness Week. This is an important motion, and it is an important conversation to have. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt made a number of points, and I acknowledge that although we support the theme of the motion, I will move an amendment to it towards the end of my comments.

I want to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations who led the funding into homeless services in Western Australia. As members in this place will know, I was on that committee for at least the first 12 months of this inquiry. I want to acknowledge the hard work of Hon Peter Collier, Hon Steve Martin, Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and Hon Dan Caddy.

I also want to reflect on Hon Steve Martin’s words and at the dedicated selflessness of the individuals we met as part of that committee. I accompanied the committee on many trips where we saw both paid professionals and volunteers, and we met many people with lived experience of homelessness. It was incredibly eye-opening for me, and I think it was incredibly eye-opening for everyone on that committee. Therefore, I want to acknowledge the hard work that was done. I, of course, left the committee before the real hard work was done, which was the writing of the reports. I want to thank my colleague Hon Dan Caddy for his extra bit of work and providing some additional recommendations.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt spoke about a number of matters. I will reflect on the comment that a lot of homelessness was caused by COVID and the like. I think it is worthwhile that we acknowledge that COVID fundamentally changed our housing market here in Western Australia, and across Australia. It created an extraordinary set of circumstances. It is easy to say, “Perhaps if we had just bought more houses before the COVID pandemic, we might not be in this situation.” However, it is worth noting that, as I said, COVID fundamentally changed our private rental market. When the private rental market is tight, it leads to social housing issues, and when social housing waitlist numbers increase, that leads to homelessness. Therefore, before we can do anything, we need to acknowledge that COVID fundamentally changed the private rental market.

I have some comments here from Peter Martin, who is a fellow at the Crawford School of Public Policy at Australian National University. Peter Martin looked at some Reserve Bank research that showed that the average number of people per household had declined since COVID. I have a quote from his research —

The change doesn’t sound big ... but applied to millions of households it meant about 140,000 more houses and apartments were needed than would have been.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

That is, than there would have been post-COVID. That means that we know that COVID radically changed the rental market, so we cannot just dismiss it as “COVID and the like”. It has fundamentally changed our housing situation.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt spoke about 50 Lives 50 Homes, and there was some commentary—I do not know the exact wording—that the state government did not continue to support it or should have provided more support for it.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt: Ongoing funding.

Hon JACKIE JARVIS: It should have provided ongoing funding. I point out that 50 Lives 50 Homes was a small evidence-based pilot program that provided the evidence for the Housing First Homelessness Initiative. It has been scaled up and expanded to more than \$30 million across a number of communities, including Perth metropolitan and regional areas—we heard about regional communities—Geraldton and Bunbury. The state government continued to invest in the pilot, with \$34.5 million, and it is currently supporting 170 people across Western Australia. A number of services deliver homelessness services, and \$2.6 million has been invested into housing and homelessness services.

The Housing First Homelessness Initiative was discussed. It is indeed an evidence-based model that provides long-term tangible outcomes for people. The state government is progressing the Housing First approach. I acknowledge and appreciate that the initiative has not happening as fast as people would like; the building and construction sector has a number of pressures, as we know. For those people who are not aware, Housing First provides rough sleepers with a home and intensive wraparound services. It also supports the underlying causes of homelessness. It is very labour intensive. It creates a whole support network around people. Last year, the state government announced a \$24.2 million homelessness reform package, which included 100 homes to be delivered specifically for rough sleepers. This project is being delivered across the Perth, Peel and Bunbury areas. In addition, housing choices provide property and tenancy management for 100 social dwellings, and are a supportive landlord model. We have gone out to the private market to help landlords to assist us with the Housing First philosophy. The state government spot purchased an additional 50 properties, and these will be prioritised for people who have experienced prolonged homelessness.

This program builds on a landmark pilot in Bunbury. Again, we have talked about regional support services. People will remember that there was a homelessness crisis in Bunbury when I was first elected to Parliament. I am obviously a member for the south west, and I certainly remember. The pilot program in Bunbury was to support highly complex individuals who were rough sleeping in the Bunbury area. A total of 58 properties were secured for the project, which has supported 55 people to date.

I acknowledge that it is indeed Homelessness Week. The Cook government sees this as a priority. Minister Carey is not sitting on his hands; he is doing everything he can to address the situation. We want to see every Western Australian in safe, secure and sustainable housing. I acknowledge that Hon Wilson Tucker said that he believes the Western Australian public would support perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on this or that it could take that much, but we also have priorities in our hospitals, schools and other services. It is a balance. It is complex, and it intersects with many other deep social, health and economic issues, such as trauma, family and domestic violence, mental health conditions, and drug and alcohol dependence.

I want to acknowledge that the Cook government has established homelessness as a standalone ministerial portfolio—I think it might be the first time ever—to support that. The Department of Communities has the first dedicated Office of Homelessness, which is identifying areas to improve collaboration and opportunities, and improving the coordination of homelessness services. A number of members acknowledged the good work that has been done in creating the *All paths lead to a home: Western Australia’s 10-year strategy on homelessness 2020–2030*.

I have heard Minister Carey say this many times, and I want to make it clear: we are using every lever we can to improve social housing and homelessness. This is backed up by a record \$2.6 billion over four years. We need to improve the quality and accessibility of homelessness services, and we want to deliver 4 000 social homes into the system.

Everyone knows that it is a heated construction market. We have talked about projects going to tender. I have been informed that nobody has tendered for a number of projects, so there are significant challenges. We are doing all we can and using every lever we can. This is not just a WA issue; this is an Australia-wide issue. It is an Australia-wide issue because rental markets are tight, social housing markets are tight and the construction industry is overheated. There are supply-chain issues; we know that already. We know that there have been supply-chain issues. Anyone who has built a house in the last two years will tell you that, but we have delivered record investment, and we are seeing significant growth.

I want to point out a few things we are investing in. We have delivered over 1 300 social housing homes and approximately 1 000 more are under contract or construction, which is a phenomenal achievement in the current market. We are investing in the community housing sector; \$78 million in grants were given out for the delivery of

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

320 new homes across WA. This investment increases our social housing stock, and it also creates regional jobs. That is the other thing: we are providing these services in regional areas.

We are delivering social housing as soon as possible. There are the new statewide modular and housing panels. The panels encourage small and medium businesses to be part of a streamlined procurement process. As the Minister for Small Business, I am thrilled that the statewide panel includes nearly 100 businesses, and amongst those, a range of small mum-and-dad businesses and Indigenous-owned businesses will be able to benefit from this record investment. I want to congratulate Minister Carey for the work he is doing in that regard.

I will talk about a few other projects that we are delivering. Hon Steve Martin mentioned Boorloo Bidee Mia and the old chestnut that it was built for 100 people but only houses 60 people. Certainly, my understanding when I was there was that it was always designed to have about 60 residents with the wraparound services. Perhaps we misunderstood or we have a different viewpoint. For those who are not aware, Boorloo Bidee Mia is the transitional accommodation facility on Wellington Street, Perth. It is run by an Aboriginal corporation. I visited the premises with the committee when I was on the committee. It provides low-barrier culturally appropriate accommodation. It is a fantastic facility and has had huge success. Again, this is not a quick fix. People do not just go in there for a week or two; people stay there for the long term. It is about complete wraparound services and is consistent with the Housing First approach. It provides stable accommodation and wraparound support services, and it is about getting people to transition to the next stage.

In addition, the state government has recently acquired the former Murray Hotel to create a low-barrier supported accommodation facility. This will boost the low-barrier accommodation in the Perth metropolitan area, and it will have the ability to support about 35 people at one time. Remember that these are people with quite diverse and high levels of need for case management. As was recently announced, St Vincent de Paul Society has been selected to operate the facility, and St Vincent de Paul has done a great job running Tom Fisher House, which the committee members also visited. It is another service that offers that low-barrier entry, which means that people who are suffering from drug and alcohol issues still have somewhere to go where they can be safe and where they can get wraparound support services.

There is an additional crisis and support service package of \$2.3 million, in partnership with St Bart's, to expand the capacity of St Bart's new 18-bed facility. Again, the committee visited St Bart's. The investment in St Bart's is included in the state government's 155 additional accommodation places across the state.

There are also homeless service contracts, which include brokerage funding that allows service providers the discretion to provide crisis accommodation. Sometimes, we hear about people being put into motels, and that is through this brokerage service. That is where additional funding is provided to the hardworking not-for-profits and volunteers to get people into crisis accommodation. There has been a boost in crisis accommodation and brokerage funding to support that.

I will speak quickly about some of the regional aspects of what we are doing. As a regional member, I am keen to highlight some of the great work done there. We have done a number of renewal projects. This is where we have moved away from the model of high-density localised social housing and looked to integrate social housing across our communities so we have a better chance of success. We have renewal programs coming online in the metro area, but we also have renewal programs in Withers in Bunbury, where the Cook government has spent \$55 million on revitalisation. Spalding in Geraldton was a major achievement of \$9 million. In addition to that renewal program for social housing, we developed a pilot program supporting rough sleepers with wraparound services in Spencer Park in Albany with another \$4 million.

I highlight that, as part of the committee, we went to the regions and looked at some Aboriginal short-stay accommodation facilities in Kalgoorlie. Aboriginal short-stay accommodation facilities provide safe and culturally appropriate short-term accommodation for Aboriginal people who travel to a regional centre. When we were in Kalgoorlie, we saw that Kalgoorlie is a hub for people coming in from the lands. They might be coming in during school holidays or when it is particularly hot, or they move to Kalgoorlie to be closer to family or to access support services. The Department of Communities currently operates three Aboriginal short-stay accommodation facilities in Kalgoorlie–Boulder, Derby and Broome. In August 2020, the government announced the establishment of two new Aboriginal short-stay accommodation facilities in Geraldton and Kununurra, and committed to deliver one in Perth.

Acting President, I am running out time, so I will speak to the amended motion. As I said to Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, we are not worlds apart on the motion, but the government cannot support the specific wording. I think Hon Steve Martin summed it up when he said that he is not sure whether the ending of homelessness is achievable. I also want to thank Hon Steve Martin for acknowledging that there is a process when governments receive a report like this, and there is a process to work through what that looks like.

Amendment to Motion

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

Hon JACKIE JARVIS: I move —

To delete all words after “homelessness” and”, and insert —
notes that —

- (a) the Cook government is currently working with the sector on homelessness commissioning and is investing a record \$2.6 billion investment into housing and homeless services; and
- (b) the Cook government will provide a fulsome response to the inquiry by the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations into funding of homelessness services in Western Australia, with regard to a number of homelessness reforms already underway.

Hon Steve Martin: On a point of clarification, which homelessness? The amendment states “delete all words after “homelessness””.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot): It states, “delete all words after “homelessness” and”. If that is clear to everybody, the question is that the words to be deleted be deleted.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [2.21 pm]: This is an interesting amendment moved by the government. I guess I understand why the minister is doing it, although I think it is a careful use of Parliament. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt has called for, in a fairly non-confrontational way, some things that are probably difficult to deliver. It would be reasonable for the government to vote against the motion as presented because, as the minister said, it is difficult to fund homelessness to a level that will end functional homelessness and it is difficult for the government to adopt all the recommendations of the standing committee, I guess. But we now have a substantive change to the motion before the house. We have shifted from a call for action on homelessness, including adopting all the recommendations, to effectively an acknowledgement of how wonderful the Cook government is and a statement that it will provide a report to the committee, which it is obliged to do.

The only question in the debate before the house is the use of the word “fulsome”. When the amendment says “the Cook government will provide a fulsome response”, I guess we could debate before the house whether the Cook government will provide a fulsome response as opposed to simply a response. I ask questions all the time in this chamber and I get answers; I do not necessarily get fulsome answers. I do not necessarily get information, but I get an answer. As various Presidents from both sides of Parliament have said over many years, “You may not like or agree with the answer, but that is the answer you are going to get.” I guess we could debate the amendment before the house and whether the definition of “fulsome” covers all areas of the report, but I think it is a significant watering down of the intent of Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. I am interested to hear his response before we put this amendment to a vote, because I would have thought that it is a dramatic weakening of his position. I would be a little surprised if he decides to meekly go along with it, as the government seems to think that he might. It is not quite a motion congratulating the Cook government, noting —

... the Cook government is currently working with the sector on homelessness commissioning and is investing a record \$2.6 billion investment into housing and homeless services ...

Members on the other side would probably have shifted that to “congratulate the government” for these things, because a few members like to see the words “congratulate the government” in these motions more frequently.

Hon Donna Faragher: That is tomorrow’s motion.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes. Perhaps we might see one tomorrow congratulating the government.

Hon Stephen Dawson: So cynical!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Tomorrow is a Thursday; it is the day for cynicism.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Be very careful, Hon Darren West. We might have to ask him some questions this week.

The amendment before the house is not a direct negation of the intent of Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and his original motion, otherwise I think it would be worth us asking for a ruling on it. I suspect it is a more subtle undermining of the intent of Hon Dr Brad Pettitt’s motion, and I hope he notices that and takes it on board. His good will—I listened to his speech and he did not spend any time attacking the government on its performance, although he probably had the opportunity to do so. He was quite modest in his presentation, and, frankly, I am not convinced that this motion deserves the treatment that the government has given it. If anything in the last week, or the weekend of backflips—more backflips than when Sam Kerr scores a goal—we would have thought that perhaps a little humility might have crept through to the government. I am just too optimistic.

HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan) [2.26 pm]: I start by expressing that this amendment greatly misses the point of the original motion. Frankly, it misses the point of the government’s own strategy. I will start

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

by reading the highlighted words in the minister's foreword. I take issue with Hon Jackie Jarvis saying that this cannot be achieved.

Hon Jackie Jarvis interjected.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: She said —

Hon Jackie Jarvis: I know; I quoted Hon Steve Martin.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: She agreed. Let me read the minister's foreword. It says —

“Ending homelessness requires us to find new approaches that focus on the needs of the individual.”

We can do this together if we collaborate. That is what it says; that is the government's own strategy. Now, all of a sudden, we find that the government is backing away from that and watering it down to such an extent that it seems to have given up on its own strategy and the very findings of the report we have gone into. I want to be clear: the motion says “ending functional homelessness”. That does not mean that all of a sudden homelessness disappears. It means that we make sure that the number of people coming into homelessness is no greater than the number of people we are getting out of homelessness into long-term housing, using the Housing First model of wraparound services. The idea that we will instead congratulate the government on business as usual is, frankly, not taking us forward in ending homelessness. It will instead see us tread water as a state labelled the rough sleeping capital of Australia. That is what we are doing. We are not solving the problem, because we are not putting resources into it.

This amendment does the complete opposite of what my motion intended we do, which is to make sure that we understand that if we are serious about the strategy in the minister's foreword, which I have just quoted, and if we are serious about the very good report that the estimates committee has done, it requires us do something different, rather than how I read this amendment, as just simply doubling-down on business as usual. It says, “That's all right; we promise to spend \$2.6 billion over four years.” The government has now said that many times over the last couple of years. Apparently that is enough. Look at the evidence; it is not enough. We are not ending homelessness. During Homelessness Week can we just acknowledge that to take the issue seriously, we need to do something different.

As Hon Dr Steve Thomas said, I tried to be extremely constructive in my initial comments. The report is largely tripartisan, with the first part of the motion noting that it is the government's own policy, but it still cannot support it. I am not going to support these alternative wordings; it makes absolutely no sense. In fact, during Homelessness Week, this government is failing to acknowledge the gravity of what needs to be done. Plenty more can be done and it requires funding. I come back Hon Steve Martin's comments and the key things that are highlighted in this report. For example, only a third of homeless people have caseworkers. There are simple things we can do. They require us not only doing the same as usual and business as usual, which seems to be the stance of the people across from me. I do not understand why. If we are serious about it —

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I support that.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Why don't your colleagues support it?

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I support more money going into it. What we are debating here today—I know that Hon Stephen Dawson is trying to distract us by talking about the federal Parliament—is this Parliament, this budget and what we can do to end functional homelessness. During Homelessness Week all of us should be getting up and supporting that and not walking away from it. On that basis, I will not be supporting the alternative recommendation.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [2.30 pm]: I was not going to talk on the motion because I was going to leave my comments until we dealt with the actual report during the consideration of committee reports. But I cannot believe that the government is trying to amend this motion. What happened to three days ago when we were all going to be humble now? We are going to be a much more humble government. It was “we are going to be humble” one day and the next day it is “we are going to stay humble”. I have something for you guys. You were never humble so I do not know how you are going to stay humble. This is a completely and absolutely inoffensive motion. Simply nothing in this motion whatsoever should be of remote concern to members opposite.

Hon Pierre Yang: What did you guys do when you were in government?

Hon PETER COLLIER: You can have a say in a minute, Hon Pierre Yang.

Hon Pierre Yang interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: You are going to take off in a minute, you are so full of hot air!

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members! I remind you it is not Thursday yet. Hon Peter Collier, address your comments to me and you will have fewer interjections.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

Hon PETER COLLIER: Thank you, Acting President. I will and I have been. This yet again reinforces this ethos from the members opposite that it is their way or the highway. They cannot possibly consider the thought that just perhaps members opposite could also have a thought. When a member of the crossbench, a member of the Greens, has put a very, very thoughtful and very moderate motion, the members opposite cannot bring themselves to say, “Fair enough. There is nothing offensive about that. Let us give that a tick and move on to committee reports.” No, not on your life. The government has to put that dagger in yet again to show that it is dominant. I do not know when the humility is going to come through because it certainly has not emerged over the last week.

I did not hear one word from the member opposite about why we need to amend this motion. Why do we need to amend this motion? Once again, it is just a slap on the back, pat on the back, self-congratulations, on what it is doing.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Excuse me, Acting President, I am speaking to you.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Minister! Steady.

Hon PETER COLLIER: There is nothing offensive about the motion is my point.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is commonplace for opposition members or government members to amend motions when an offensive motion is moved. For example, when we were in opposition, as I remind members constantly, a member in the opposition stood and moved 11 motions of condemnation of the government. Of course, we moved amendments to such motions. But this is a completely inoffensive motion. It is an altruistic motion on the part of Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. I hope that when we get to the point at which we debate this report—I hope members have all read this report because a lot of work went into it and it provides some really good advice for government so it probably will not. It has 57 recommendations. The government will say, “No, no, no, because we’re the government. We’re going to show you guys.” The report is from a non-government dominated committee. That is how it will be portrayed, yet again. I did not intend to speak on this amendment, but yet again this reinforces the notion that the government is arrogant.

Hon Pierre Yang interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Sorry, Acting President. I am not —

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members, I think the message from the member on his feet is that he is not eager to take interjections so let us see whether we can get through the final 38 seconds.

Hon PETER COLLIER: The issue here is that in some circumstances, yes, in a political strategy the government might move an amendment to a motion. This is not one of them. This is an instance in which the motion has been moved in good faith. Homelessness here is a real issue. I have sat for two years and listened to the issues with homelessness and I had no idea how bad it was.

Hon Pierre Yang: Your government did nothing.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Do you mind? Are you going to just continue to ignore the rulings of the Presiding Officer?
[Member’s time expired.]

HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [2.36 pm]: I also was not going to contribute to the amendment debate. We can talk about whether it is a valid amendment to Hon Dr Brad Pettitt’s motion. I will tell members what—it is disappointing—that is what it is—in Homelessness Week. I have heard 75 times it is a record \$2.6 billion investment. It is also a record budget. Budgets go up every year because governments raise more tax every year. That is nice. The record \$2.6 billion has the government exactly back to around where it was six years ago with the amount of social homes in this state, by the way. The government knocked them down and sold them off and it is just about back to where it started from.

Hon Dan Caddy: Are you talking to the motion or the amendment?

Hon STEVE MARTIN: Thank you, Hon Dan Caddy, for that interjection. I am talking to the amendment. It is disappointing. That is exactly what it is. I made a contribution, as did Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, to the original motion. I thought we were extremely even-handed in that contribution. It is Homelessness Week, people. We were highlighting the plight of the most vulnerable people in our society. This has not been done on the fly. It has been prepared well in advance after reading the motion, I certainly will not be supporting the amendment. It is very disappointing.

HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral) [2.37 pm]: I will make a few quick remarks. I cannot support the motion as it is presented. It is a severe watering-down, as we have heard, and it does not do anything than just acknowledge what has already been acknowledged.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Member, excuse me. Can I be clear that you are speaking on the amendment? The question is that the words to be deleted be deleted.

Hon WILSON TUCKER: Yes, correct. I cannot support the amendments to the motion. I would like to say that I can see some of the concern by the government about paragraph (b) of the motion in its original form and adopting all the recommendations of the report in question because that would supersede the process of the government going through and looking at all these individual recommendations. I can certainly see some of the hesitation in that point. Regarding the original point that Hon Dr Brad Pettitt made in paragraph (a) around funding housing and homelessness services and ending functional homelessness, I can certainly see some concern in that point. It goes to the point that I raised originally around understanding the true extent of the cost involved in ending functional homelessness. If the government does not know that figure, I can certainly see some objection to committing to that point and, therefore, amending that motion.

Just in response to the minister's comments about this \$100 billion figure that I threw out, I was using that as an example, minister. If we understand the cost of ending functional homelessness—I used the figure of \$100 billion for example—and we know that cost, which I am sure will be much lower, we can publicise that and put funding proportional to the total investment required to end it. We see figures being thrown about. In the first year of its term, the government made an \$850 million commitment to social housing. That is absolutely a big figure, but it could potentially be just a drop in the ocean in terms of the total cost required to end functional homelessness. I implore the government to do some modelling on the total cost around ending functional homelessness and to share that modelling. If it did that, there potentially would not be such apathy or concern about the commitment raised by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt in his motion.

Division

Amendment (deletion of words) put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (18)

Hon Klara Andric	Hon Lorna Harper	Hon Stephen Pratt	Hon Darren West
Hon Dan Caddy	Hon Jackie Jarvis	Hon Martin Pritchard	Hon Pierre Yang
Hon Stephen Dawson	Hon Ayor Makur Chuot	Hon Samantha Rowe	Hon Peter Foster (<i>Teller</i>)
Hon Kate Doust	Hon Kyle McGinn	Hon Matthew Swinbourn	
Hon Sue Ellery	Hon Shelley Payne	Hon Dr Sally Talbot	

Noes (12)

Hon Martin Aldridge	Hon James Hayward	Hon Tjorn Sibma	Hon Wilson Tucker
Hon Peter Collier	Hon Steve Martin	Hon Dr Steve Thomas	Hon Dr Brian Walker
Hon Donna Faragher	Hon Sophia Moermond	Hon Neil Thomson	Hon Dr Brad Pettitt (<i>Teller</i>)

Pairs

Hon Rosie Sahanna	Hon Nick Goiran
Hon Sandra Carr	Hon Colin de Grussa

Amendment thus passed.

Amendment (insertion of words) put and passed.

Motion, as Amended

HON DAN CADDY (North Metropolitan) [2.44 pm]: I did not speak to the amendment, but I will say quickly that the spirit of the amended motion is not completely dissimilar to the spirit of the original motion. For all the hyperbole from those opposite, I do not see the word “congratulate” anywhere in the amended motion as was alleged. It is an honest and workmanlike statement that we are working forwards and towards an outcome. I will briefly reflect on what has been said, but if I get time, I also want to get to an issue that I want to see addressed—that is, the hijacking of the homelessness issue for political gain.

Withdrawal of Remark

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I heard Hon Neil Thomson say that Hon Dan Caddy lied.

Hon Neil Thomson: I did not.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is what I heard. If the member used that word or said that Hon Dan Caddy was lying, I ask that he retract it.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot): I did not hear that myself, minister. If offence has been caused, I might ask the member whether he would like to withdraw.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: I did not say that. I used the word “blind”.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Thank you, member. That being the case, there is no point of order. I give the call back to Hon Dan Caddy.

Debate Resumed

Hon DAN CADDY: If I have time, I want to address the hijacking of this issue. We should all be on the same page. As Hon Peter Collier said, homelessness is a real issue, and I absolutely concur.

Hon Steve Martin named a few organisations that do incredible work. I am not going to name any particular organisation because I might omit others that probably ought to be named. I want to give a shout-out to all organisations in the homelessness sector that do incredible work. All the government partners and all the service providers—everyone out there—deserve our thanks. Most local governments also deserve recognition for what they are doing. Obviously, the City of Perth is a bit of a conundrum; its actions are sometimes in complete contrast to its rhetoric.

Hon Steve Martin said a couple of times that more money is needed. I do not think that any social issue would not welcome more money, but that is not all it is and it is never the simple answer. The fact is that this government has been putting significant resources into improving the way in which homelessness services are delivered and into understanding homelessness. All of that is on top of a record investment. I want to quickly pick up on something that Hon Wilson Tucker said. A phrase he used was that we need to keep the government honest when it comes to spending on homelessness. I generally concur with what Hon Wilson Tucker says, but I do not understand what he meant by that. It is an honest spend. The budget papers are tabled and the spend is recorded. As I have said, it is an unprecedented, record spend. We are also putting a serious amount of work into how we will do that.

I was not going to talk to the report but I want to pick up a couple of things that have not yet been raised. These are pretty important things to mention and it will not take long. I will briefly look at what has happened with bailiff evictions since the McGowan government, now the Cook government, came to office. If we look at the table in the report, we see that in the last year of the Liberal–National government, there were 315 bailiff evictions. At the moment, the number of bailiff evictions is nowhere near that. This is what I mean about doing things better. This is a compassionate government. In fact, if we add up the number of bailiff convictions over the last four years, we still do not reach the number that occurred in the last year of the Liberal–National government.

Another thing I want to touch on quickly is vacancy rates. I make this point so that it is in *Hansard*. As at 2022—this is in my report—the proportion of occupied public housing dwellings in WA was 96.4 per cent, which was above the rate in Victoria, South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. When we came to government in 2017, Western Australia was 2.2 per cent below the national average and now we are slightly below it at 0.2 per cent. A real improvement has been made.

I remind the house that the reason I chose to speak on this motion was because I was obviously part of the inquiry. I thank the other members of the inquiry. It was a long, drawn-out and intense inquiry. I recognise the work done by the chair and the advisers. As many members would know, I was an adviser in this space going back some time. Acting President, is there a right of reply for this motion?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Brian Walker): I confirm that there is.

Hon DAN CADDY: Thank you.

I want to recognise Hon Dr Brad Pettitt’s road to Damascus moment in which he acknowledged the government’s spend on the issue of homelessness, the unprecedented amount of money allocated in the budget. The honourable member mentioned two things. He talked a little about his time as mayor and about this crisis. I will come back to that. I said earlier on that I wanted to talk about an issue I see in this space; that is, the interest of some people in gaining political mileage, which is not a new thing. I am not necessarily talking about members opposite. Members opposite have come a long way since the actions of the former member for Carine, which were widely circulated in the media. There has not been a lot of change. One of the issues I have with the way that this issue is being prosecuted by some members is the close and interesting—“clandestine” was the word used by Fremantle police—relationship between some members and serial protester Jesse Noakes. The former Premier referred to him as a serial pest—or perhaps that was Clive Palmer, I am not sure. He has been a useful tool for members opposite, and it is really important to point that out. I note that despite the relationship he has with Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and Hon Steve Martin, neither of them referred to him or the work he does in their contribution. That is hardly surprising given the most recent media about the shocking events we saw play out at the residence of Meg O’Neill. As all members know, he was involved in that; indeed, he was not just at her home, he planned it. Over the last 18 months, I have found it difficult watching members of this place align themselves with an individual whose actions, quite frankly, have been appalling. I know that Hon Dr Brad Pettitt’s history with him goes back a long way to his time

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

in Fremantle. If I get time, I will be happy to look at that. I want to put on the record some of the issues that Jesse Noakes has been involved in. It is important to realise that although he became involved in homelessness some time ago, that is not his core business. His core business is being a professional activist or a professional anarchist. Obviously, he was a forestry activist. As shadow Minister for Forestry, Hon Steve Martin has had something to do with him. Jesse Noakes has been involved with Extinction Rebellion and the most recent disgraceful behaviour in City Beach. It is interesting that Gareth Parker, a journalist whom I respect—he is probably one of the most respected voices in WA media—summed it up well on Twitter when he wrote —

Veteran WA media operators know to treat Jesse Noakes with extreme scepticism.

This is why it is important to put on the record how this issue can be hijacked. When Hon Dr Brad Pettitt from the Greens, two Liberal Party members and I from the Labor Party came together on the committee, we did not agree on everything, but it was a good inquiry that produced a substantial and decent report. As much as anything that I may say now, I agreed with a lot of Hon Dr Brad Pettitt's thoughts during the inquiry. If we look at Jesse Noakes and the issue of homelessness, we see that he approached the Department of Communities' homelessness team as an advocate in a case. A week later, now as a reporter/journalist, he contacted Communities' media team asking questions relating to the same case in which he claimed to be an advocate one week earlier. The department, rightfully so, raised concerns with his editor. This is Jesse the journalist now, not Jesse the advocate, the anarchist or whatever he was being. The editor agreed that it was inappropriate conduct on his behalf and strongly suggested that they were not aware that he had been working as an advocate in cases that he was trying to cover as a journalist or reporter. Every member who spoke before me has covered the important issue of homelessness and the important work being done by great organisations, as I did at the start of my contribution. Given that that has been covered, it is really important to outline what is happening at some level and put on the record the experience of this individual. I am not sure whether any of the organisations that he represents or is involved with receive government funding, but I would hope that if they do receive government funding, they will realise exactly what sort of individual they are dealing with and disassociate themselves from this person. I wanted to go into the detail of other actions that Jesse Oakes has taken to demonstrate how the issue of homelessness can be hijacked but I will not have time to do that.

In my final couple of minutes, I will reflect—I mentioned it earlier—on the homelessness inquiry without going into too much detail, because we will obviously have a chance to talk about it when the report is tabled. The group came together and, as Hon Jackie Jarvis pointed out, it travelled fairly widely around the state and heard a lot of stories. One of the things that came through loud and clear from people who have had experience, but especially from the majority of service providers, is that the state strategy was absolutely the best way forward. They are all on board with it. Most of them recognise the incredible amount of consultation that went into creating this strategy. I hear Hon Dr Brad Pettitt when he says he would like it to be implemented more quickly and would like things to move along. I think we all would. There is an economic reality at the moment though, and the current economic environment makes it very difficult to push forward on some areas of the strategy. That has been acknowledged by journalists; it has been acknowledged by experts in the homelessness area. I have even had conversations with Hon Dr Brad Pettitt with other people where we recognised there are some quite substantial extenuating factors around —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Brian Walker): Order! It is time for the right of reply. I give the call to Hon Dr Brad Pettitt.

Hon Peter Collier: Forty seconds.

HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan) [3.01 pm] — in reply: I think he has 40 or 35 more seconds if he wants it.

Thank you, Acting President. I will take the opportunity to respond to what has been, frankly, a disappointing and slightly bizarre debate in many ways. There have been many good contributions. I may start with the last one. Hon Dan Caddy's was truly bizarre and quite disappointing. We are talking about a really important issue, which is around ending homelessness and how we fund it. He spent most of his speech talking about one particular advocate. Some of the veiled threats to homelessness service providers were pretty weird and I think it is inappropriate to say that if they associate with him they should watch themselves. That was my reading of it and I hope the member was not saying that, because that is pretty poor —

Point of Order

Hon DAN CADDY: That may be Hon Dr Brad Pettitt's characterisation of what I have said. That is absolutely not what I said. I said I would hope that they would disassociate themselves, is all I said. That is a moral judgement.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I am glad the member clarified that because I think many who heard that would have had the same interpretation as me.

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 9 August 2023]

p3482a-3497a

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Neil Thomson

Hon KATE DOUST: Hon Dan Caddy moved a point of order. The appropriate response before Hon Dr Brad Pettitt gets to his feet is for the person in the chair to respond to the point of order and then give the call as a result. What we saw is Hon Dan Caddy moved the point of order and Hon Dr Brad Pettitt continued the debate. I would appreciate if you could perhaps provide a ruling on Hon Dan Caddy's point of order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Brian Walker): I thank Hon Kate Doust for her sage words of advice. I note there is no point of order and my intent is to allow the debate to carry on with as little friction as possible. I give the call to Hon Dr Brad Pettitt.

Debate Resumed

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: Thank you. I am going to move on from that, but I think this is an important debate and throwing dirt at individuals lowers the quality of what should have been a substantive debate. I will spend the rest of the time responding to some of the things that people have said that I think were worthwhile—to the original motion, I should say. I acknowledge Hon Steve Martin who rightfully talked about the regions. I think this is really important. We clearly have homelessness rising and services under-resourced there. To paraphrase him, the danger is if we keep funding business as usual, we will keep getting business as usual. That clearly needs to change.

Hon Kate Doust: We can change all that, member, if you get your federal colleagues —

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I will not take interjections because I have not got much time, but thank you. Hon Wilson Tucker rightfully said we are in a position to eradicate homelessness, and asked what would it cost. I think it is an interesting question. I think the evidence that comes through this important report is that it costs less to end functional homelessness than it does to do nothing about it. That is one of the key things that we can find in this report. That is why we should be investing in it.

Hon Jackie Jarvis' comments were interesting, because she largely went through the list of what the government is doing. Interestingly, I think it highlights the heart of what the original response was. She talked about the hundred homes for rough sleepers who support a landlord model and spot purchases of 50 properties—50 Lives 50 Homes is now supporting 170 people. Adding it up, that is up to 500 houses. This is my key point. Even when it is listed like that, when homelessness is approaching 10 000 people, we have over 2 500 people sleeping rough on our streets. This is at the very heart: we are not matching the investment with what we need. The original motion on this was so important because we need to get it done to meet the scale of the problem. I acknowledge you, Acting President (Hon Dr Brian Walker), talking through a medical lens. That is really important because it is one of the key bits. It costs more to have people going into emergency services and going into mental health services because they have been on the street for so long. It helps if they get a house and get those services wrapped around from earlier on, as the Acting President knows from his medical training.

There are many good reasons why the original motion was important. There are many good reasons, unfortunately, why the new one is largely trying to defend business as usual. That is not going to get us there.

Point of Order

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Hon Dr Brad Pettitt is on his feet. He seems to be reflecting on a vote of the Council. Standing order 41 says a member shall not reflect upon any vote of the Council, except for the purpose of moving that such vote be rescinded. He has not done that. He is reflecting on a decision of the house. I ask that he not.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I have taken advice and I note the point of order but as the motion has been amended and he is reflecting on the amended motion, he is entitled to make a comment on that.

Question put and passed.