

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 14 June on the following motion moved by Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Emergency Services) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 2203A–E (2023–24 budget papers) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 11 May 2023.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [12.31 pm]: Before I commence my contribution to the budget debate, I want to make some comments, first of all, about the retired Premier, and also to give my deep thanks to Hon Pierre Yang for his comments because they touched me deeply. This idea of service, of putting ourselves out there and standing up united together for a worthwhile cause, is so honourable. It reminds me of our response at the medical front line. I vividly recall discussing with the health services manager at my hospital, bearing in mind that at that time the death rate from COVID was supposed to be 10 per cent, my command that if I got infected, I was not to be treated—I was to be allowed to die should a younger person come into the hospital. This preparedness to stand up for the community and do what is right is vital not just within society but especially in a political concourse, where we are to serve the people at all costs. It is our duty. I thank my friend Hon Pierre Yang for that.

I would also like to thank Hon Mark McGowan for his wonderful service and wish him every happiness. I am sure his retirement will be interrupted with work in the not-too-distant future. I also thank Hon Rita Saffioti for taking over his post as Treasurer. My best wishes to the now Premier, Hon Roger Cook. I will be sure to do as much as I can to cause him trouble in the not-too-distant future!

We are discussing the budget here, and I always have to remind myself that doing justice to the budget is very hard. At the outset, I will say it is a good budget, but there is always a “but” that comes after that. It is just like when I am discussing with my wife what to do with the finances that we allegedly have and our opinions might at times differ. The correct answer, of course, is always to acknowledge that my wishes are wrong, as much as I could justify them in person! The same is true for every budget that comes up because there will be different opinions. With that in mind, what has happened with this budget is perfectly acceptable. However, I note, and I will mention this again in my speech, that the limited number of staff I have does not allow me to do full justice to this contribution to the budget debate. I call that a loss to democracy. It could be rectified, and I hope it will be, but there is no apparent intent of the government to uphold that democratic equity by adding further staff to our budget. But we push on and work harder than ever. I will focus on this budget.

I will mention this in several areas because it has a widespread effect. I will mention, firstly, the local effects of the budget; secondly, the statewide effects; thirdly, the federal aspect; and, lastly, the international aspect of the budget. All these impact on us as a state, and it is important to go through them all. I will mention the international aspect last. That bothers me most of all, because—I have said this before and I will say this again ad nauseam—Canberra seems to be more focused on the United States, and I expect that in Western Australia our focus must be on our Asian partners. There is a difference. I will speak about the AUKUS agreement in some detail later, but I wonder whether it is in our national and state interest. I ask my colleagues to discuss with me over coffee or, indeed, a gin and tonic how we might have influence at a federal level on making adjustments that serve the people.

I move on from that and go to the budget. To my mind, the first thing that came up was the \$400 electricity rebate, which I think is a fine idea. It is almost universally welcomed across our community. Of course, there are huge financial stresses coming upon us now, and each one of us, even dual-income households, wonder how to put money together to get food for the family. We are worried about how to manage our day-to-day lives, so \$400 added into two tranches of \$200 will certainly be welcome and help us keep our homes warm this winter. I commend the government for implementing this rebate. It is particularly commendable also because it does not put money into people’s pockets directly. I do not know about other members but I know from my personal approach that the money I have in my wallet is easier to lose than that in a bank account somewhere else. I think that is a universal truth, especially when going to the bar! There should be a minimal effect on inflation but that is not quite the full story. Here is where the “but” comes in: Western Power. One reason I am not convinced is that Western Power has attempted to increase the local level tariff on street lighting by 44 per cent. That was rebuffed by the regulator, but at some stage Western Power will have to recoup its costs for the lighting situation. We are now looking at a much more moderate increase of seven per cent; yes, it is well above inflation just now but there is a strong chance, a certainty I would say, that Western Power must recoup its costs. How will it do that? One way we are certain this will happen is through local rates. This will now appear in front of local governments as they have to find out how to pay the excess costs for the seven per cent increase, and that has to be with a rate increase. For this 44 per cent increase—and I have direct information from Rockingham council—local governments will need to find \$1.4 million almost overnight just for the change to the lighting tariff. They will have to balance that budget. Of course ratepayers, struggling as they are, will still be required to find that seven per cent increase. How does that fit the amendment to local government legislation that recently passed through this chamber? Councillors now need to consider dipping

into their already meagre resources and therefore dipping into the pockets of ratepayers. The CEOs will lie back and let the blame be taken by the councillors. Of course the government will sit back and say, “Yes, it is the local councillors. You need to manage your finances, and any rate increase is because you have failed to manage your funds properly.” We could ask, maybe we should ask, whether this is perhaps a tax by stealth. It is a possibility. Of course, Western Power is a wholly-owned state asset, and if it needs to, it can simply ask the government for more funds. Although by all means there is increased transparency, it is not quite gold transparency. I maybe should not mention gold in the presence of the Perth Mint issues, but at least there is some form of transparency, which is indeed always welcome. The state is now shifting this responsibility onto local government. This is an essential service—roads, rubbish and rates. The government will sit back and be very happy with this.

We ought to think a little bit further about how we are really managing the situation to assist the people who elected us—the people of Western Australia. Shall we just sit back or shall we go Machiavellian and allow this to happen and find the blame to be pointed elsewhere? We could take this a stage further and ask about a rates cap. Again, I am looking at the effect of the budget on local government. It does not appear in the budget and nor should it; it is a matter for local government. However, issues will apply to how we finance things if our state is moving things in a different direction. I listened to the Reserve Bank of Australia chairman, Philip Lowe. I am sure all of us were angered by how he has been treating us, not as politicians, but as residents and how difficult it is now for all of us to manage with the increasing interest rates. I wonder how essential it is really. He has one tool for managing inflation and here we are copping it like a sledgehammer. He said that the patience of the bank is not unlimited when it comes to interest rates. The patience of the public, who pay his handsome wage, is also somewhat limited. We could look at managing this with a rates cap, which might be helpful. It is certainly an option that has been considered in Victoria. The Victorian state government considered a 3.5 per cent cap on rates and I believe it has been implemented. In New South Wales, they are keen to do something similar. It has a 3.7 per cent rates cap. They are two Labor governments that have chosen to reign in the impost from local governments at a time when families are hurting. I would ask that perhaps the government might consider this, certainly not now, but it might be useful to look at going forward for how we could ease the burden on our residents.

Figures vary from council to council so I have a few figures. The City of Kwinana, which of course is our Premier’s electorate, is looking at a 3.95 per cent increase in rates. In the City of Swan in the East Metropolitan Region—my electorate—it is 3.75 per cent but that comes off the back of three consecutive years without any increase at all. Well done to the City of Swan. In Belmont, they are looking at a five per cent increase in rates. That is a whopping increase. In the City of Canning, it is 4.65 per cent. I could go on but people are looking at an increase of 3.5 per cent or above across the board. In the City of Vincent, which is the old council of the Minister for Local Government, there will be a seven per cent increase in rates and on vacant land it will be 30 per cent—wow! For the new Minister for Local Government, his City of Stirling offers 3.24 per cent, so it is slightly better than average. It is clear that every resident in Western Australia is going to be paying more. That means that they are materially now worse off than their counterparts in other states. I think it was a missed opportunity that the government has not considered a rate cap in this budget. That would have shown leadership and fiscal responsibility but I think the buck is going to be passed. Having said that, the \$400 is most welcome. There are positives in this budget and there are things to be praised.

I will move on to a particular area of my concern—health. There is an additional \$2.7 billion, making it a \$10 billion net budget for health. That is not small change—not at all. I certainly welcome that increase in funding for health and mental health across our state. The two examples I am going to give are the new women’s and babies’ hospital that has been relocated to Murdoch and money set aside for the expansion of Graylands Hospital. Let me be very clear. One of my issues is that, in managing the state of wellness in our society, the answer is often to give more money. We are doing more of the same and we are getting more of the same results, which everyone here can see is not working. If we are going to pump more money into a failing system, we are wasting that money. We ought to be considering new ways. A feature that members will find throughout my replies to the budget is the use of the words “status quo”. I have mentioned this in previous contributions in this chamber. The status quo is our enemy. We need to think differently. We must think differently because, to do the same, we get more of the same back and currently I do not think we are thriving as a result. Money is not a cure-all for the health system either. I have said this before and I will say again very publicly that we do not have a health system just now—we have a sickness system. I can back that up, but in another speech perhaps. Until we attack and manage the system that underpins the sickness system, we are going to continue to throw money at it. There is no other option for us because we are thinking in the old system. We are thinking in the status quo. We are not thinking of improvements and innovations or thinking outside the box. As a result, we are not going to see the results that we need to see, especially in managing our wellness but in all areas.

An example I am going to give here is the question of money versus lives. We all know that the maternity hospital has now been relocated to be situated next to Fiona Stanley Hospital, which is an excellent hospital and an excellent place for it to be. Is it an appropriate place to be? If we look at the concept of a maternity hospital, by definition it is a place where women go to deliver babies at higher risk or whose pregnancies are at higher risk. Internationally,

we have standards by which we measure the quality of a health system on maternal and neonatal deaths. It is kind of a benchmark or a measure for the function of a health system. If we are going to have high-risk pregnancies with high-risk deliveries, we need to be prepared that there are going to be problems occurring—deaths of mothers and deaths of children. They are potentially avoidable deaths if you are in the right place at the right time. I will go back a bit. A few weeks back, I mentioned health experiences I have had. It was countered by members of the government saying they had read all about it, knew about it and had studied it, saying I was not teaching them anything new. I found that to be very enlightening but also a bit saddening. It is a little bit like, for example, if I were to say I read a book on Chinese grammar and, having understood that book, I could now speak Chinese. I may know the principles, but I would not be able to master the topic. I have experienced this personally. Has anyone here been called to a neonatal emergency? There is a blue, lifeless baby who is non-responsive—floppy. It is there, just fresh in this world. I cannot begin to express the amount of panic in those who are not trained to deal with this. I am not a neonatal physician. I am a simple GP. Out in the rural areas of Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Newman and even out of my own place in Kununoppin, when this happens, it is a major problem. I do not need to transfer the patient elsewhere via the Royal Flying Doctor Service or by ambulance. I need someone right here, right now to help me because at that moment I would not be in a good state. So far, I am happy to say I have managed to find a line and managed to save lives but it has been a major effort. We need immediate care with all expertise. Normally, what happens now is that the baby is transferred next door to Perth Children’s Hospital. Andrew Miller, a very competent colleague of mine who was not very complimentary about me but was certainly an excellent colleague —

Hon Stephen Pratt interjected.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: He is a doctor, of course; he does that. For being self-deprecating about the medical profession, I do apologise. When we have an emergency delivery at the new facility, we are now going to have to transfer that emergency—whatever it is—into an ambulance to Perth and up to Perth Children’s Hospital. That is by no means ideal. If we are going to do this, we are planning for deaths—we are planning to have neonatal deaths. The maternal life might be saved with a move in that hospital or the other intensive care facilities—that would be taken care of—but for the baby, can members imagine the stress on the paramedics who are taking that baby in the back of an ambulance, its blue light flashing, up the freeway to Perth Children’s Hospital? All the while, this infant is at the point of death. What about the paediatrician or the nurse involved? How will that be managed? They are going to be doing their very best in the back of a bumping, moving ambulance to save a precious little life. When that fails, as it undoubtedly will at some stage, how does one then feel as a healthcare provider? It seems that the reason for this move is actually a cost reason, and so we can clearly see that juxtaposing this is a balance between the costs and the lives that could be saved. It is lives versus cost. Have we then taken into account the costs of post-traumatic stress disorder arising from the trauma faced by the healthcare professionals, paramedics, nurses, doctors and the parents themselves when a precious life is extinguished? Has that been addressed in the budget at all? I think probably not. Therefore, I ask at this still remediable stage that some reconsideration be given to that, and that a new choice be made. Let this be revised and revisited; otherwise, I would hate to be in this chamber saying, “I told you so” when yet another person has written to me saying, “This is what has happened to me, and I am destroyed.”

The other area is Graylands Hospital. My first connection with Graylands—members will be surprised to know that I was not a patient!—was as the medical director of Hakea Prison, dealing with prisoners who were in need of urgent psychiatric care. They had done horrible, vile things in the community, not because they were vile people, but because they had a mental issue that made them think it was a reasonable thing to do—it is part of the problem in the corrective services. Some were transferred to Graylands, but, in general, they were not transferred because there was no space for them. There was no place available for the urgent psychiatric care or forensic psychiatric care of people who were seriously disturbed. They got treated in prison. I will come back to that in a moment. Graylands is actually an outdated, institutionalised, old lunatic asylum. Those are not my words; those were the words of Hon Helen Morton, who was the Minister for Mental Health in 2014. She said —

“Graylands is an outdated, institutionalised, old lunatic asylum ...

It needs to be closed. She continues —

“There is no excuse in this day and age for us to be providing mental health services in a facility like this.

Almost 10 years on, once again, we have a status quo. This insufficient, inadequate system is being perpetuated. In 2020 the Labor government again gave more funds. Remember that I said with a status quo all we can do is give more funds to the same system and hope for a better outcome, but that will not happen. If we simply put more money into a failing system, the failing system will continue to fail—maybe a bit less rapidly, but it will still fail. We need more funds again this year, and more commitments are leading nowhere. The Australian Medical Association has also said that we need more resources. It did not say that we need more buildings; it said that we need more resources.

When I first sat in this chamber and listened to the inaugural speeches, they very often were filled with praise for the McGowan government for putting, say, \$300 million towards finding more psychiatrists and psychologists.

My response is that we do not really have a problem with a lack of psychiatrists; we have a problem with a society that causes mental health problems in the first place. Fix that and the need for psychiatrists should go down. But in this particular case, in forensic psychiatry and forensic psychology, we do need more psychiatrists. But the AMA said that little of the money that we need is going into recruiting new staff. Dr Omar Khorshid, then president of the AMA, said that it would be naive to think that the extraordinary pressure to push people through the system and out the other side was not contributing to the negative mental health outcomes being suffered by patients.

I can translate that because I had a mid-level job in the hospital of going around the wards to find those patients who were not at imminent risk of dying so I could discharge them because we needed the bed because the emergency department was filling up. Take someone who was “partially treated” with let us say heart failure because I was in cardiology. The heart failure is controlled and they need a couple more days to be stabilised, but the doctor would go out, give them medication and tell them to go see their GP. The patient would then come back a month later with cardiac failure again. However, at the time, the bed had been freed, someone else had come in with an immediate need, and was then kicked out. So we get this ping-pong ball coming backwards and forwards across the sickness-system table, with patients been kicked out and then coming back in, and each time it costs enormous amounts of money. Therefore, by not having the facilities available, first of all, patient health suffers and, secondly, it costs more money. That is exactly what Dr Omar Khorshid said about the mental health system and Graylands.

Three years on, the Treasurer has an interest here because Hesperia has proposed to use 10 hectares of that site for an urban infill project. One can see the dollars coming, and rightly so. The Department of Finance has allowed this to progress to stage 2, and rightly so, as we have not fleshed out the plans of how we will close the hospital. What is the actual priority? That has not been made clear. What about the land deals? What is the mental health priority? In the last couple of weeks, there have been renewed calls for a review of current funding models for mental health, especially, I might say, in rural WA. Again, I have worked in rural WA at a variety of locations, and I can tell members that the mental health provisions there are miserable. I will give members an example. Up in Broome, a psychiatric facility was built for Indigenous psychiatric care. To build it, the models developed were predicated upon the psychiatric needs at inner metropolitan Perth. Indigenous health psychiatric need is very different from inner-city psychiatric need. Nevertheless, the facility was built in Broome, but it was destined to fail and be inadequate for the purposes of the patients there because a statistician in Perth was not aware of the actual need in the Kimberley. Rural WA has a problem in getting its needs met. In the wheatbelt and the north west of Western Australia this is urgent. Perhaps it is not urgent for politicians or public servants, but it is certainly urgent for the people whom I represent and who have spoken to me.

I recommend that members get their hands on a report titled *Going the distance: Making mental health support work better for regional communities*. It was released by the Centre for Social Impact at the University of Western Australia, and is about a week or two old. Do have a look, please. This report is compiled by researchers at UWA and the WA Association for Mental Health. A key recommendation is for an urgent review of the current funding models. That is despite the budget commitment that we have in front of it. It is a good budget commitment, and I commend the government for that, but it could be better. The recommendation is to allow the sector to invest in place-based solutions, rather than discharging a patient, cutting them loose, and sending them back into their community where there is minimal support. I will speak about one aspect of this. This report is about care in the community. In the UK, I experienced so-called care in the community, and it was an abysmal failure. The concept has been revived now, by left and right, because it is a cost-cutting model. The politically correct reason is that it moves away from a structured, institutionalised, inpatient setting towards looking after people at home, in the community, with people they recognise, where they belong. This would be a fine idea for mental health, but in the case of Graylands, it is also a revenue-earning option because we can now make money on the land that will be offset. It will defray the mental health institution for potential financial benefit but without giving the resourcing we actually need for managing people in the community.

Having experienced this, it is soul destroying. I as a doctor find myself personally challenged because the ability to manage the needs in a community of people who are very highly needy without the resources that we need to match that need is killing for those who look after them. It is soul destroying. I can assure members, from practical experience, that that is the case. But the health minister has set up a working group, so we must be in safe hands!

Additionally, \$218 million of the \$420 million allocated to mental health will go to upgrading those ageing facilities at Graylands, the site that both parties have committed to close! We need new trained psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses, not new facilities in a location we committed to close 10 years ago! There will be \$218 million for refurbishments, for a building that is close to closing anyhow.

I note that the Department of Finance is already looking at the prospect of a private sale. I also note the recent issues with the rapid antigen tests when the Department of Finance and Department of Health had mixed messages and overshot the budget by half a billion dollars. I wonder whether the communication between the two departments is as seamless as it should be. I anticipate that it is, so this must be planned, but I just want to point that out.

Time is coming a little bit to a close. I really want to go on to the idea of community care.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Member, just before you embark on your next topic, I might note the time and leave the chair until the ringing of the bells.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: I will just give a short recap of my reply to the budget speech. I have gone into the local government area and now I am looking at the state government and health. We have spoken about the mental health services at Graylands Hospital. I found the dichotomy of what we can do right now and what we are going to do in the near future very interesting. Do they fit together? I would suggest that they probably do not. I was recently approached by people who are most concerned about the lack of available mental health services. We do not have much in the way of available psychiatrists and psychologists, and I know that from my practical experience as a medical practitioner. Mental health needs are immense. When someone is discharged from hospital and given medication and told to get on with it, the question for them is: how do I survive in society?

Recently, there was a great deal of discomfort in the community that funding was removed from four local organisations that deal with mental health issues at a local community level. I went to visit the GROW community. GROW Australia produces a blue book, much like the green book at Alcoholics Anonymous; the same principles apply. GROW does an absolute sterling job. People who have significant mental health concerns are being treated. There is medication and there may be services elsewhere, but these people are not managing well while living on their own or with family in the community. I think we have all experienced this either personally or with our close friends—people who are just not travelling well. GROW—as in growing big—has a wonderful system. I went to see the people at GROW. I was invited. They were very friendly and very accepting. I took part in the program—it probably helped me a bit as well. This organisation has offered psychosocial mental health services across Perth and the south west for the past 56 years. These services are going to be replaced with recreational activities. Basically, this organisation is being told that it will be defunded and it should do something else, such as find a boating club.

As a health practitioner, I know that inpatient services are very expensive and difficult to come by. This is a cost-effective and well-utilised mental health support system that has been defunded, along with three others—probably to save money in the short term. But will it save money in the long term? I put it to members very clearly that no, it will not. This is cutting off your nose to spite your face. It is a false economy, so I beg members of the government to please take this to their caucus and cabinet, because this is an area in which we can not only save money in the long term, but also do a lot of good at a community level, reduce the burden on the healthcare system and enhance people's ability to live independently at home and contribute back to the community. It is an excellent system. I beg members to please take this seriously. Tenpin bowling clubs and bike clubs are wonderful things, but there is no answer like a well-organised mental support group that works according to a system and has been doing a sterling job for the last 56 years. David Butt is the national CEO of GROW Australia and when the decision was announced, he observed—I completely support this opinion—that WA is going backwards on mental health, not forwards. Members, this is important. These are not my words; these are the words of someone at the coalface.

We could take it further and look at the WA Prison Officers' Union, which continues to call for funding for mental health training for its staff. It is funded in every other state in Australia except WA, but this government has rejected the union's calls. By the same token, this government has mandatory mental health checks for gun owners. Healthy people who possess guns are seeking mental health assessments to be fit to own a gun and are depriving others who are suffering from mental health problems because these psychiatrists are now occupied with trying to tell people that they are safe and they can go and enjoy their gun. It is putting pressure on a system that is already buckling. There is no good reason for this pressure on non-existent psychiatrists, and there is no extra resourcing. I welcome the \$420 million spending commitment, but I am far from convinced that it will be spent in the most appropriate manner.

This goes on to the other thoughts about the sickness system, as I call the health system. Most of the federal health budget—50 per cent—is spent on the last six months of people's lives. This is quite a major statement. How does it apply to the state government? What are we spending our revenue on in managing people's health? It turns out that most of the health issues that we face are caused by what we put into our bodies. The food-processing industry is a major source of health problems internationally, nationally and statewide. It has a major impost on our economy. It is costing us our quality of life. I would not say that it is costing us our quantity of life, because we are pretty good at managing people's lack of wellness until death. We really ought to ask ourselves whether it is okay to allow the food-processing industry to continue poisoning the residents of this nation. We are carrying the cost of trying to shore up a health service that is screaming for more funds and resources that we cannot supply. It makes no sense whatsoever.

The same is also true of our water. Did members know that we are allowed to have four parts per million of mercury in our body? We get mercury from eating fish that has mercury from the sea, unless it has been cleaned,

and from healthy fish oils. We are allowed to have four parts per million; we are told that is normal. I have to tell members that if they look up the biochemistry of the human cell, they will find that there is not one single spot in that biochemistry anywhere at any time ever when one molecule of mercury is needed—zero. Yet because of our mismanagement of our environment, we are exposed to a multitude of chemicals, including mercury, that have no purpose in our body. We could then ask: could all the chemicals that we are being exposed to be related in any way to the increase in the incidence of autoimmune diseases and general illnesses? Could this be related in any way to a lack of general wellness; and, if so, are we, as a society, prepared to undertake the fundamental change that will allow us to live a healthy life and reduce the cost of illnesses that have been caused by what we are doing to ourselves? Would that make more sense than chucking more money at a failing system?

I could mention the COVID-19 episode, and I would have to reflect on the success of Premier McGowan in keeping Western Australia safe from the influx of COVID from abroad. By the same token, the question that arises is: are we doing the necessary scientific research into what is really needed? For example, we were told that by getting the COVID vaccine, we would stop transmission and infection. We were reassured that if we got the vaccine, the rate of transmission and infection would go down and lives would be saved. A person's chance of survival is undoubtedly better if they have the COVID-19 vaccine in their body, but what about the adverse effects? My answer is that I do not know. As a medical health professional, I do not have access to the science that I need to make an informed decision. The reason I do not have that is that it has been banned. My medical board has forbidden me from asking questions. Were I to make this statement outside this house, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency would ping me and I would be at risk of losing my medical licence for daring to ask a question. The whole foundation of science is the ability to ask a question. It was Galileo Galilei who asked whether the sun goes round us or we go round the sun. The only way to find things out is to ask questions and do the research that is needed, so that someone can say, "Based on these observations, this is what I have found and this is my conclusion." That is a scientific advance. Science does not mean just following what happens now; science is always a matter of asking questions. If anyone says that something is established science, we have to tell them that it is established science so far—until we ask another question. It was not so long ago that the established science was that a certain anti-nausea medication would be useful for pregnancy. The end result was multiple deformations of infants. Only then was the question asked: I wonder whether it could be that? The established science was that doctors should give people a cigarette to calm them down. People were told to take up smoking to calm their nerves. It is now absolutely clear that that was wrong. We now have a problem with people saying that vaping is bad. If we allow vapes to include chemicals from China, they absolutely will be bad for people. If we regulated the chemicals, we would find, as in New Zealand, that the incidence of smoking, cancer death rates and the incidence of illness would go down. Vaping can be very useful in helping people stop that obnoxious habit of cigarette smoking. It is vitally important. I tabled a 1 400-page paper in this place not so long ago that showed that, by extrapolation, we would save 200 lives a year in Western Australia if vaping were allowed. However, the narrative we have is unscientific: vaping is dangerous; it has chemicals and it will kill people. By prohibiting vapes, we have allowed them to come in via the back door through the black market. We do not want to have these vapes—I 100 per cent agree with that. We need to regulate vapes to keep our children safe, but to do that, we first need legislation, as Mr Burkhard Blienert said when I visited him in Germany in November. I will move on. That is one of my rants out of the way.

In terms of public servants, we want to boost health care. New nurses are coming on. Why are nurses in Western Australia the worst paid in Australia? Could the government do something about that? There was a report today about a nurse who worked 26 or 29 hours over three shifts. Was she paid appropriate overtime? Do people want to work here or, as recently reported in the press, are healthcare professionals deserting us for other states where the conditions are better and they can live normal lives and afford to put food on the table? Why are we making it difficult for nurses to survive, especially given the cost-of-living problems that we now have? We are doing the same with our police officers. Is there not enough money in the budget for them? Have we considered that more appropriately? What about the loyalty the government owes to those who stood at the COVID front line and put their lives at risk? Have we given them adequate remuneration for their service to us? They put their lives on the line, but what have we given them in recompense? We have given them nice words, but we have not given them anything in the way of remuneration. It is the same for WA police. Members can say what they like about how they feel about the police managing us, such as through the cannabis legislation, but they are doing a fantastic job. There was the sad and horrible event on Sunday when a police officer lost his battle for life after having been run over. It was an example of a criminal element having a callous disregard for human life. What remuneration or courtesy do we give to our police officers? Do we give them an appropriate salary or appropriate remuneration for the service they give to us? Have we given them just empty words or have we given them real support? They have been crying out for that. I can go even further. What about the 24-hour health coverage at the Perth watch house? Are we doing that? No, we are not. Are we supporting auxiliary police officers? The same thing could be said of the fire services: volunteers are being discriminated against. We need to be more mindful of our public servants. I do not think this budget has given enough in that direction. Members may disagree, but the word I am getting back from those who are critically involved is that not enough is being done.

The next point I will make is about the Parliamentary Counsel's Office. I have looked through the budget but I do not see anything about the facilities for drafting. Members might ask why this is important. The Legalise Cannabis WA Party was elected to this place in 2021. About two months after I took my seat, we put forward a request for a bill, and the drafting process was started. In July 2021, we put in the drafting instructions. It went backwards and forwards until August that year. We then sat back and waited for a drafter. However, we received a small email that said there was no capacity to finish the work and that the PCO would let us know. We had one draft that was completely wrong; it had been given to an outside agency. In March this year, 12 months having passed, the PCO told us it could no longer commit resources to any crossbench drafting. Members might ask what is the point of us putting forward bills because the government would slam them anyway, but what the government is doing here is attacking the very foundation of our democracy. We were elected and we ought to be able to put forward what we think is sensible legislation for consideration, but that is not possible. In May I asked the Clerks for clarification; it was still on the Premier's desk. We were given no indication of what was causing the delay and no idea of any outcome. I think it is disgraceful. This strikes at the heart of our role here. The government has created a second class of MPs. That has to be said quite loudly—there is a second class of MPs. We do not have the same privileges or support as others. The crossbench is not being treated with equality. That cannot be allowed to stand. It is disrespectful to those who elected us and our colleagues—the Greens and the other Independents. That could have been solved through funds being given to the PCO to allow drafting to happen. Somebody could have been recruited, maybe even from outside government. The then Treasurer was aware of the situation, but this matter sat unattended for three months. No decision was made to act. Why? I refuse to believe it was incompetence. I have too much respect for our ex-Premier; he is a fine man and I appreciate all he has done. Was it an orchestrated plan to ensure that we remain second-class citizens? That is a bit vile, is it not? I would not say that. Maybe we are not important enough; we do not matter enough in the bigger scheme of things. The government does not need our votes. It does not care about us. This is a fundamental flaw of the current government. I ask that this matter be reconsidered. The budget wasted an opportunity to afford us the same democratic principles as others.

I move on to housing. I think everyone must welcome the \$750 million set aside to boost housing stock, particularly for social housing. As a medical practitioner, a lot of the problems I see are from people who are suffering some social situations like a lack of housing. People are couch surfing with friends, living in caravans or sleeping in cars. I see this regularly from patients who come to my clinic. The government has established an Office of Homelessness. I am certain that additional bureaucracy is not the answer to homelessness. We need to get people out onto our streets with their sleeves rolled up. Time will tell, but I worry, as we hit the coldest months, that we cannot have much hope for those who are living unhoused and without shelter on the streets. Hope lies in innovation and a new way of thinking. Let us fight the status quo. Doing what we have done in the past and hoping for a different outcome is madness. Hope lies in innovation. The status quo is our enemy—I am sure members have heard me say this ad nauseam. One way that we could help the housing situation is with hemp. Members were expecting this, of course! It has huge benefits. I will limit my words in this speech because members have heard them all before. We can build homes with hemp cheaply and effectively while benefiting our environment and reducing our carbon emissions. Bear in mind, a hemp home does not need cooling in summer or heating in winter. If we give a hemp home to someone who is short of the necessary funds, they do not have to find extra funds to cool in a Perth summer or heat in a Perth winter.

Hon Martin Pritchard: Do you need tradespeople to build those homes?

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: Tradespeople to build those homes—that is an excellent question. Yes, we have people who are doing that, but there are moves afoot now to produce hemp homes quickly using 3D printing. There is a wide variety of hemp options from the Lego-style building bricks to the formal building, which takes a long time and needs specialised crew. There is a wide variety of options there. It is an excellent question.

We can look at innovation and how we would use this sensibly, especially as there are thoughts there about—how can I put this?—using sustainable facilities to create, if you like, a homegrown battery to power the home as well. That is an interesting thought. But that is another speech altogether. We need a government grasping with both hands the option of using this. I am aware that Master Builders Western Australia is looking at this with interest and maybe offering an award because it sees this as a potential for the future. I encourage the government to work with builders and providers to see whether we can use hemp as a sensible alternative to the status quo. If we do not do that, we know innovation is not a priority, because we need innovation to break out of this status quo that is holding us back in the past. It is vitally important. Out-of-the-box thinking in housing is needed.

Let us now consider the state's renters. I do not really find much relief for renters in this budget. Rents continue to rise. We are creating a new class—the working poor. Although this may be ameliorated in the near future with measures that are taken, people are now working a job or two jobs and are still unable to meet their demands. Philip Lowe might say to get another job or put some savings in there; that is sensible advice from someone sitting on the sidelines, but people are having a hard time surviving. As long as the demand for property outstrips supply, prices will go up. The population is going to suffer. I am disappointed to see that we do not have firm time lines for

the increase in housing stock that the government is promising to do. Let us see when. On the other hand, we need to commit to innovation and cutting-edge technology, as I mentioned earlier. We need to commit to finding out how to work smarter, not harder, to provide what is needed. It is available. We are thinking about it. Let us grab it with both hands and move forward.

The next topic I want to move on to is justice. The justice system really has a fair amount of cash available, but we are looking here at \$100 million for a boost to youth detention. I am aware that the new Minister for Corrective Services, Hon Paul Papalia, is taking a close look at this. He was at Banksia Hill Detention Centre and he also visited unit 18. I am sure there will be innovative thinking from him. I note from his history that he thinks about things differently, so I am very hopeful that things will be improved. Some of the money will have to be spent on repairs at Banksia Hill, so that will reduce the funds available for making significant changes.

Another aspect is the \$50 million to divert children from the criminal justice system in the first place. I was visiting Banksia Hill a couple of months ago with my crossbench colleagues and as we were leaving we asked what needs to happen. Members also have to bear in mind that I was previously a medical officer with the corrective services and I have worked at Banksia Hill, so I know it from the inside. The point I made to my colleagues is that when we start treating those who come to Banksia Hill—13, 14 and 15-year-olds—we start treating them before they are born. It is a multifactorial problem for why they are there in the first place. We have to work with them before the child is born. I remember in Derby a four-month-old baby was given to us by the then Department for Child Protection, and that baby was drunk. It was drunk because it was drinking its mother's milk and its mother's milk was laced with alcohol, not for the first time. We were given this baby on a Friday and said the family has no access to this child. For the whole weekend we were bombarded with family trying to get access to the child because, of course, it is culturally appropriate. On the Monday, DCP said we would give the child back to the drunk parents. That girl would be probably about 13 years old now. It is very likely she will have been sexually abused, if not abused, may even have got pregnant —

Hon Lorna Harper: You cannot say that.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: I know I cannot say that, but the chances are that that has happened, because that is the way society is currently. The member may disagree, but having worked there I think I am entitled to an opinion, even if it is wrong. She will be exposed to glue, petrol or paint sniffing or other drugs. I am reminded of a 16-year-old lady, also pregnant at the time, who had trouble feeding her baby, who was vomiting. She came into ED with the baby and she had a bottle filled with Coca-Cola and she was feeding the baby sausages—a nine-month-old baby. This is what we are dealing with. These infants progress to toddlers, then to children, in an education system that is trying mightily to bring them into some kind of education and failing, because the parents are elsewhere, which is why we see terrible problems. It is not a word of criticism because I can understand where it is coming from, but it is not acceptable. We have to do something differently. We have to break the status quo.

We know from substance abuse, alcohol is first place in that part of the world and 90 per cent of prisoners are smokers. The children who are coming into Banksia Hill are probably users of tobacco. The risk of psychosis is higher with alcohol, less high with tobacco, and certainly to some degree with cannabis. They will have all three. They are multi-morbid. They have the whole variety of conditions that we have heard about. With cognitive deficits and neurodevelopmental disorders there is a lot of pathology. When they came to me as a doctor working in Banksia Hill, I was dealing with a list of problems before I came to the problem that needed to be dealt with right then such as a headache, trouble sleeping or crying. They are disadvantaged and there is social abuse. Very often there is childhood trauma, maybe not personally experienced, but certainly witnessed. Childhood trauma is ubiquitous. When do we start treatment? It is before birth. We have to start treatment before birth. The last maternal death I saw was a 14-year-old bleeding out at the airport at Fitzroy Crossing. The situation is intolerable also for those working in the area.

Mental health in corrective services is inadequate. Prisoners are being held in their cells, rather than being put in mental hospitals because we simply do not have the places. I remember vividly speaking with psychiatrists about patients who are clearly psychotic and a psychotic process is ongoing, having committed the vilest crime. All we can do is put them in the general prison population, give them anti-psychotics and hope they survive. Quite a lot of them do not. The deaths we see in prison are certainly an issue. We have overloaded psych services. That is why I pray that Graylands Hospital can be bigger. We must have a solution for these people. It is heartbreaking. A lot has been done by dedicated people, but the system is failing.

We could look at how we can improve what is really going on. How do we make an improvement? I am going to come back again and again—maybe not today but certainly during the course of this current Parliament—to the proposals of Hon Wayne Martin, KC. His report *Review of the Criminal Property Confiscation Act 2000 (WA)* had major changes with 64 recommendations. The report says that the legislation is not fit for purpose. The report has been sitting on a desk for over four years. Is it not important stuff? Does it not matter? I thought earlier that it is a bit of a stretch. The government is not giving us help on the crossbench in the drafting. That is true, but this is much

worse, I think. This important report recommends major changes to a major bill and it is being sat on. The government has accepted the recommendations—at least, I think it has—but what is it doing about it? Nothing.

The ex-Chief Justice stated that the laws are inherently flawed and not fit for purpose. This budget does not offer a resolution to that. Looking at the education part, children come into Banksia Hill Detention Centre for three days and leave again. For three days they have access to some form of really high quality education given by people who are experienced, but then they are discharged again, and when they get back out to their social situation, they do not have access to regular education. The Criminal Law (Mental Impairment) Bill 2022 was passed in this chamber just a few weeks ago. Offenders with a neurological disability or with mental health issues will be treated in the community, and for that, there will be dedicated psychiatric and psychological services to ensure that they are properly treated, but that bill has no mention of resources—no money, no psychiatrists and no psychologists. Yes, we can send them back into the community, but there they will be bereft. They will have no access to the necessary treatment needed to ensure that they do not return to prison. We just offset this into the community, which will be a springboard back into the prison service.

I now turn to education. This is a steady-as-she-goes budget. That is fine. I have to mention that there is \$100 million for two schools in the previous Premier's electorate. These are long overdue upgrades that I welcome. There are graduate grants to encourage nurses to take up jobs in remote and regional areas—excellent. There is \$13 million to bring international students back into WA—excellent. I have to state very clearly that I was disappointed in the statement in the media suggesting that this was some form of pork-barrelling on the departing Premier's behalf. I can assure the chamber that no-one on this side thinks that, because Rockingham has missed out on so much, probably because he did not want to be seen to be pork-barrelling. They are much-needed upgrades and there is a compelling need to do that. I very much welcome that. I distance myself entirely from any claims of any improper behaviour and give full support to the then Premier's decision to do what is necessary for those schools. All of the education initiatives that the government has made are valuable, laudable contributions to our economy for both now and into the future.

What more could have been done for education? What more could be done with justice, housing, health or public sector pay negotiations? I wonder whether the government would have benefited from an extra \$1.25 billion? Where would it get that from? Members know what I am going to say. It is in *The missing budget paper*, which some members have taken and some have downloaded—I am very happy. We are seeing that the government is currently voluntarily turning down \$1.25 billion in the forward four-year estimates.

Hon Pierre Yang: What do you say, Steve?

Hon Dan Caddy: You assume he is listening.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: Thank you for that interjection, Hon Pierre Yang. I will scold him later.

We have here very conservative estimates. The report is available; I would recommend that members please get their hands on it and look at what we have done. It will tell them how we have come to these figures. This \$1.25 billion over the four-year forward estimates would have allowed us to get maybe a parliamentary budget office. I just now mentioned that we were second-class citizens compared with others, but it is a lack of funds. Maybe this would help get a parliamentary budget office, or help the Parliamentary Counsel's Office to get some more drafters. That is the norm in some states as a resource available to all members. We should try that here. The parliamentary budget offices in South Australia and Victoria gave the first inkling of what we could do, because they provided the figures and estimates—mind you, very much less detailed—of what could be done. I have had to dip into my pocket and pay for this report out of my private income. We may also have to do that for drafting and pay for it ourselves—that is, if this government continues to be intransigent. I believe we have one of the most comprehensive reports, the first comprehensive report, on the potential benefits of legalising recreational cannabis in our economy, not just here, but in all of Australia. This report shows very clearly and unequivocally that we are missing out on a major revenue stream for the state. It is not reliant on the fluctuating price of iron ore. It is agreeable to the voting public, with 78 per cent agreeing with us. If the government were to decriminalise cannabis, as the Gallop government did—thank you to Hon Mark McGowan at the at the time, who spoke very much in favour of that—why not go the whole hog and reap the economic benefits that come from full legalisation?

I have tried over the past years to squeeze figures out of the Department of Health and the police, to see how much cannabis is in circulation and how much is used at any particular time. Time and again the response I get back is, "We don't measure those statistics. We don't have the numbers; we don't know." That makes me wonder whether it is important enough for the government. If the government is so keen to claim that cannabis is a dangerous drug and wants it taken off our streets, and surely if it is important and that much of a social ill, we would have the facts and figures to back up the government's case, but we have nothing at all. Nothing is forthcoming. We had the University of Western Australia's school of business look at the national data. Canberra is good for a few things, believe it or not. It not only decriminalised ahead of the rest of us, but also managed to get figures for us to extrapolate into WA. The National Drug Strategy Household Survey suggests that in WA in 2020, 43 500 kilograms of cannabis

was in circulation. Yesterday, we got a reply saying that a sting in Mandurah had recovered three grams of cannabis over a week.

Hon Stephen Dawson: There were lots of other things.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: Yes, six grams of cocaine—they are very small numbers—but three grams of cannabis? Wow. Perhaps we ought not focus so much on cannabis, but thank you for that.

Hon Stephen Dawson: We only focus on cannabis because you asked us about it. We are only doing what you asked us to do and now we are getting into trouble!

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: I can tell when I need to spice up my speech, otherwise they get a bit bored across there.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I am about to call time, very soon.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: Okay.

That was worth about \$778 million, and 37 per cent of our population in WA, including many in this house, have used cannabis at some point. Certainly, 11 per cent are using it on a regular basis. That is really interesting, because it is used more commonly than tobacco. Members will know, I have repeated it often enough, that I am a rabid anti-smoker, and I will persist in saying that smoking cannabis is the worst thing one can do with cannabis, but because it is illicit and we cannot educate people properly, the other options are not being followed well. About 11 per cent is also interesting, because if, like tobacco, we were to introduce a tax on cannabis, we could expect to see a steady and reliable income stream. We are not advocating the sin tax of tobacco. We are not advocating pricing it out of availability. It has not worked for tobacco; it is still there. People who are hooked are hooked. We are looking for the ability to legalise cannabis to tax it and still make it fractionally more affordable for users than it is today. That is a win-win scenario, is it not? If we could do that as a community, what would that mean for the budget bottom line? This relies on something that economists call a risk premium. A risk premium is basically an amount of money that has to be paid to criminals to cover their risk. When we legalise a product, that risk premium is no longer viable. For example, in America, during prohibition, there was something called bathtub gin, which was easy and reasonably cheap to make. People would not bathe in it; they would drink it. It was sold at a high price for the simple reason that those selling it were operating in a black market. They might find themselves arrested or, indeed, shot. They inflated the price of their commodity to compensate themselves for the risk that they were taking. Eliminate that risk and the price can come down. A sensible government would then look at setting its taxation rate in the goldilocks zone: not too high, not too low, but enough to ensure that a healthy revenue is generated, while also ensuring that the cost of the product does not go up. The government would be happy with the revenue stream, the consumer would be happy to now source the legal product and the growers would engage in a legal market. That is a win-win-win situation. We should do this.

We are not here to talk about the social aspects of a policy. Would there be social ramifications? Yes. Would we deal with them? Yes. Should we? Of course we should. I am here to look at the response to the budget, so let me break these savings down for members. It would mean \$14 million a year in savings for the police budget. That would save the time officers spend not only on minor infringements, but also attending court. Police officers are desperate from forcing themselves to engage in this losing drug war. They are demoralised and therefore less efficient. In that aspect alone, \$14 million could be saved. That could be used to then make a state-of-the-art police station. The station in Baldivis, with 100 staff, cost about \$25.3 million. Without being too simple about this, a new modest-sized police station could be created every year on the current police budget, without an extra cent being spent.

This is when I get worried. I am at risk of making the reputation of the Legalise Cannabis WA Party not only as the party of law and order, but of fiscal probity.

A member interjected.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: It is a shame, is it not?

Within the court system, \$11 million could be saved. That would be fantastic. Not to oversimplify, but with that money a couple of other judges could be put on the bench, there would be reduced time spent on minor infringements, staffing would be improved and there would be necessary research costs, with money to spare. In that time, we could have put more than \$40 million aside for the justice system alone. That would have made our state a safer and fairer place in which to live.

Legalisation could save \$75 million a year in the corrections budget. We are spending \$75 million a year to keep people in jails because they once experimented with a safe and healing herb. In total, that is a \$100 million saving every year. That is over and above the \$137 million per annum that we would get from the 25 per cent taxation regime. We are literally throwing money away. More than that, we are unnecessarily criminalising people who believe, as we do, in cannabis. It is past the time for government to act to update not only our laws, but also our taxation system so that all of society can benefit from well-regulated and appropriately taxed hemp and cannabis products.

I listened with great interest to Hon Dr Steve Thomas when he rose to give his budget reply contribution. He talked at some length about the states and WA being too big to fail in many respects. He was far more erudite than me. I thank the deputy leader for that comment as well. He also gave the advice of “suck it and see”, which is very appropriate for the cannabis side as well! Far from being too big to fail, I think what we have here is a missed opportunity represented by legalised cannabis as something too big to ignore. It has been ignored in this budget.

I hope that the new Premier will take a different line than former Premier McGowan. I suspect that it will be ignored in the future but I very much hope that a different point of view will be found. The budget paper is a good, workmanlike paper. It does a lot of good, laudable things. However, it fails to think outside the box. I do not think it has really listened to people as well as it could have, but it is a good enough budget paper. I would not want to go toe-to-toe with Hon Dr Steve Thomas when it comes to economic theory; I could not do that. I also listened to what he said about debt. To the government’s, or the mining sector’s, credit, our total debt has fallen in recent years. However, that debt could be written off in its entirety within 80 years simply by legalising cannabis. Our debt could be zero.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: You said 80? Eight zero?

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: Yes, 80, not 18. I am being very conservative and slow with this. It is just a possibility.

I will move on from the state to national issues, looking at climate and environment. I think we can all agree that net zero emissions by 2050 is not enough. We have inadequately planned carbon emissions and are putting our territories at risk, especially those in low-lying areas. There is a cost to agriculture and society. It demands an innovative approach and out-of-the-box thinking. I am pessimistic that people are going to use common sense and intellect in making a change. There are too many vested financial interests defending the status quo. Sea rises are going to happen. Not that many thousands of years ago, we could walk from here to Rottnest Island. It will continue to rise and we will have to make plans for that.

How can we do that? We need to change the way that we do things. For example, the leafy suburbs at the river’s edge will have to change. Rather than having European style lawns that require water, why not plant native gardens? Why not put fruit trees and vegetables there so that those who are hungry can actually eat rather than go hungry, sleeping rough on the streets? Why are we following the 18th-century French tradition of having a lawn when we could actually be doing something different? Roses are nice but we do not need them; we need water-safe gardens, fruits and vegetables and permaculture. We need to feed the hungry and we need short lines of transport.

I like desalination, it is fine, but why do we use drinking water to poo into our toilets? What about biodigesters? How about turning household, farm and factory waste into electricity, the by-product of which would also be useful? Biochar could be used to produce hemp batteries. I mentioned hemp houses before. Although \$3 billion is not nearly sufficient, let us flag it as an essential activity. The status quo needs to be brought down in every department. We welcome the economic diversification and infrastructure investment, but I have no time to go into that in detail. Members are probably all bored by now.

I will now go into international issues, which is one of my passions. I have two boys and the youngest is almost 17. I want to make sure that they live in a fit society. At the moment, we can look at the current moral state of the United States and the United Kingdom, and indeed the moral state of Australia. I see great problems there. They are decaying empires. The US is falling and the UK has fallen. For example, an idea I have is for Scotland to leave the union with England and rejoin the European Union. We need to work with alliances, not friendships, to manage our economic situation and better work cooperatively internationally. We have \$400 billion being spent in supporting the military-industrial complex with submarines. That money could have given us a lot more than the crumbs of jobs it is currently. Why are we doing that? Is it to attack or defend? How will they defend against the nuclear bombs raining on us from above? We have to have a long think about this.

This requires a federal government response. I am not expecting any response from the government here. However, I want to note that the effects of an international conflagration will have an impact on our budgets in the future. It needs to be looked at now because if the government does not take action to look after ourselves, we will have very difficult times ahead. No-one benefits from a war. China is seen as an enemy. I have said this before: America is not our friend. We may have an alliance with them, but they are by no means friendly. They do not care about us. They care about themselves, as they rightly should do. Why are we putting our needs second to other countries? China is running out of potable water and it is running out of food. It is surrounded by enemies with atomic weapons nearby. It is under threat by US garrisons. It is looking for safety as well. I can understand that. It is looking to encourage alliances beyond its boundaries to give it some measure of security. Is that a wrong thing to do? I think that is perfectly logical and normal. We should not see China as an enemy, but as a potential trading partner—as it indeed is—and maintain it, much as the Swiss do in a neutral country that has managed very well over the centuries. We can focus on our Asian relationships. If Canberra will not do this, we in WA must. I thank the former Premier for his trip to China and what he has done to restore our relations with one of our major partners. I also think the

current Premier for his travels to India and Singapore. We must do this because we are an Asian country. The balance of trade relying on iron ore is not something that we need; we need to find a balance.

I will mention hemp here for the last time. The \$1.25 billion cost estimate of legalised cannabis in the forward estimates is only five per cent of the total possibility once hemp is realised as a viable trade property. With those few words I will say thank you and sit.

HON SOPHIA MOERMOND (South West) [2.48 pm]: I value the opportunity to be able to speak to the budget this year. It is great. I would like to address a few particular concepts. I am going to start by complimenting the government. It has taken the great advantage of the resources boom and the adjustment of the GST to keep the state in a reasonable fiscal shape. The \$3.3 billion operating surplus paying down of government debt resulted in reduced interest payments and burden on future generations. It is also positive to see robust economic growth of 4.25 per cent, and an employment level so strong with an unemployment rate of only 3.4 per cent. That is pretty amazing to achieve.

However, our state, which is experiencing these robust economic conditions, is also a state that is under pressure. Inflation and cost-of-living pressures are weighing down on households as people flock to Western Australia to take advantage of the employment opportunities offered by the mining boom, compounded by pressures at global and national levels. Our services, facilities and infrastructure are becoming more strained. Last year there were media reports that the average emergency waiting time was 10 hours and that there was one preventable death every 72 hours because the hospital system did not have enough beds. People trying to rent homes in some suburbs of Perth tell stories of 100 or so people turning up to view properties. Psychologists report that demand for their services has increased by 70 per cent each year since the pandemic, and prior to that, demand for mental health services was already rapidly trending upwards. Compared with Perth, these pressures are often many times worse in regional centres, and inequality will no doubt increase with the abolition of the electorates in the upper house, which is such a shame.

It is good to see that the government in this budget is taking steps to address these pressures while balancing the need to be fiscally responsible with the requirement to ramp up services to meet the needs of a growing state. The \$2.7 billion of additional investment in health and mental health in the 2023–24 state budget will help reduce pressures on an overburdened system, including 600 new hospital beds on top of the 547 beds already promised and the \$201 million of funding for mental health. I would also like to mention the additional \$750 million for housing, with a range of different initiatives; almost \$1 billion for education; big spending on infrastructure; \$4 billion for royalties for regions; and \$11.2 billion for regional infrastructure over the forward estimates.

However, digging a little deeper, it seems that the government is still in some ways failing to keep up with meeting the service delivery needs of a changing and growing state, particularly for the most vulnerable members of our community. In areas such as mental health, out-of-home care and other forms of care for vulnerable people, the government is failing to shift towards the prevention, early intervention and community-based approaches that would ultimately save money through more support for problems before they get to an acute stage. For example, of the additional funding for mental health, there is no new money for prevention, intervention and community-based programs; rather, it is all going towards clinical-based acute care. This is in spite of the fact that the *Sustainable health review: Final report to the Western Australian government*, published in 2019, found that care was too heavily directed towards hospitals and less towards community-based prevention programs, as did an Auditor General report of the same year. Moreover, most of the targets in the most recent strategic plan for the mental health sector, the *Western Australian mental health, alcohol and other drug services plan 2015–2025*, have not been met and the plan is now rarely referred to by stakeholders in the sector.

A similar situation can be seen in relation to out-of-home care for children. The government has been glacially slow in implementing its frameworks for improving systems for safeguarding children at risk and increasing funding to the necessary level. This includes the implementation of the Department of Communities' *Building a better future: Out-of-home care reform program roadmap 2019–2023*. That report, from 2019, recommended that contracts for out-of-home care service providers be retendered to ensure an upgrading of funding and level of service, but this has not happened until now. Hopefully, some of that will take place later this year. Similarly, the *Rapid response framework*, prepared in 2021, was intended to improve collaboration between the Department of Communities and other departments, but it has not moved forward. Meanwhile, there is a lack of foster carers and remuneration for them is too low. Their superannuation needs are not met, and many requirements are too restrictive, such as the need to have one full-time carer. New evidence-based approaches are not being taken on board. Importantly, an insufficient amount of resources are going into keeping families together, which could help to stop the cycle of family breakdowns, delinquency and incarceration et cetera. Although the strategy sought to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' involvement, it is not clear that there has been enough support to ensure that Aboriginal-controlled community organisations will be able to fully and effectively take up the roles that the department hopes they will play.

These are just a couple of examples of how, in relation to supporting the most vulnerable people in our state, the Western Australian government continues to be stuck in an acute care, putting-out-fires mode—in some cases, almost literally, such as in the recent situation at Banksia Hill Detention Centre. The government is also failing to develop strategies for prevention implemented through community-based approaches.

In one of my early member's statements I spoke about the funnelling of funding towards crisis care versus preventive care. We need to funnel funds towards preventive care, particularly in making sure that children, families and single mothers have appropriate and stable housing, and that parents have sufficient income to provide good nutrition to their children and are not under any threat of having to move house regularly. Single mums, in particular, need to be able to be self-sufficient in that way, rather than being made more vulnerable to exploitation. I have come across stories of predatory men using dating apps to source single mums with children. They then use their housing, making those women more vulnerable to domestic violence. There are also cases in which these men have groomed both the mother and the children and are perpetrating child sex abuse crimes. That happens because those single mums are simply more vulnerable to exploitation and are not protected by the system.

Looking at child sexual abuse overall, the statistics show that it is increasing rather than decreasing. I have spoken to many people who have experienced child sexual abuse when they were younger and we see in the newspapers an increase in crimes of paedophilia, in particular. Online interactions contribute to those crimes. Children are accessing social media online and are being groomed by these men; that is one component of it. Porn seems to be another contributory component to a rewiring of the brain in which normal sexual behaviours develop into more damaging and abnormal sexual behaviours. Sentences for paedophilia also seem to be quite low. In cases in which child sexual abuse material has been found on hard drives, as opposed to cases involving direct contact with children, the sentencing seems to be inadequate—and paedophilia is never a victimless crime.

When we look at childhood trauma, that is one of the big factors that contribute to misbehaviour as children grow older. It also contributes to addictive behaviours, delinquency and a higher risk of ending up in crisis care as they get older. Banksia Hill is a clear example of crisis care; the courts, our prison system and rehabilitation centres are all examples of crisis care.

We cannot expect a society to not have that crisis care available; we absolutely need that. However, the more we invest in the safety of children, in making sure that the family unit stays together, that single mums have enough money and that there is adequate schooling and services available at the beginning of the life of those children, the more likely we are to improve their chances of not requiring crisis care as they grow older. There is quite a bit of research coming out from different countries that shows that a focus on family life at the beginning of life has good results. Although initially we spend more money, over the long-term, the money will be saved in crisis care, and we end up with a happier, healthier society overall. I think that is an admirable goal to move towards.

One thing we see in more vulnerable children is that they are often born with foetal alcohol syndrome. I do not feel that has been sufficiently acknowledged at Banksia Hill Detention Centre. Those children are being blamed for their delinquency, but they are not being given the support that they need. It is not being acknowledged that victims of foetal alcohol syndrome cannot focus, cannot learn and cannot manage their behaviour. They have trouble managing their emotions and they may also have a reduced IQ. Those children are a product of the system that they are brought up in. When we look at a lot of those children and their families, we see that they have been exposed to systemic and institutional inequalities. We try to provide them with corrective services without fixing those inequalities in the system, and then we release them back into that system and expect them to cope better the second time around. That is simply not how it works.

Another component that I am quite passionate about is general health and wellbeing. Hon Dr Brian Walker mentioned this, as well. We now have food in our diets that really does not provide a lot of nutrition. When we go to the supermarket, if we basically follow the outside of the supermarket, we will come across the fruit and veg, the meat and dairy and some of the breads. Everything else in the centre of that supermarket is almost superfluous. The more packaging a food has, the more chemicals will be found in it, the more processing it has been exposed to and the fewer nutrients we will get from it. A lot of these heavily processed foods taste really nice; our tastebuds tend to rule our shopping habits, so we end up buying foods that are not necessarily healthy for us. There is also a certain trust by people that the products they are buying are not harmful, and that is often not the case. I am talking about additives, artificial colourings, flavourings, high sugar levels, artificial sweeteners and things like sucralose, which has been shown to change the microbiome and lead to leaky gut syndrome.

Farming practices also contribute to that. Glyphosate, which is one of the ingredients in Roundup, also disrupts the microbiome. Once a person's microbiome has been disrupted and the gut bugs are affected, we see an increase in mental health issues. It is often not acknowledged that our gut health basically affects how we think. We also see more autoimmune disorders, more cancer and more metabolic disorders such as obesity, which leads to diabetes, which leads to cardiovascular disease, which can also affect kidney function. A whole bunch of diseases are simply

caused by our diet. I think that is definitely an area in which we could make a big difference by regulating the food production industry.

Another interesting thing about a high sugar diet and metabolic disease is that Parkinson's disease has also been linked to a high sugar intake, and I think it is now known as type 5 diabetes. I cannot remember what type 3 and 4 are at the moment, but type 1 and type 2 diabetes are very common. Type 1 is the one that is controlled by insulin, type 2 can usually be managed by diet, but type 5 is Parkinson's. Parkinson's in particular can also be caused by methamphetamine addiction. Methamphetamine increases the dopamine release in the brain, and as those dopamine cells are depleted, it sets up those people with long-term use of methamphetamine for early onset Parkinson's. In this state, we are seeing the making of an epidemic of Parkinson's patients. My mum has been diagnosed with Parkinsonia, which is kind of a related disease. I can tell members that it is horrifying to see her go through that—to see her lose her independence, her mobility and her cognitive functions. It is really important to prevent that in our society in WA. I do not like to see that type of suffering.

I refer to methamphetamine. One thing that has been shown to help methamphetamine addicts to get over their meth addiction is cannabis. That would be a useful strategy. There is a clinical trial starting on that right now, and hopefully this year I will be able to update members on how that is going along. Interestingly enough, Parkinson's disease and Parkinsonia can also be treated with cannabis products.

We are looking at the use of glyphosate and other chemicals in our food production. Regenerative agriculture is one of the best ways to create healthy paddocks, healthy food and healthy animals. I was very lucky to go to The Dam in Denmark and try some hemp-fed beef, which was high in omega-3 fatty acids. I have to say, it was one of the best steaks I have ever had in my life, and I am quite the connoisseur! When our food supply is cattle that has been fed grains, there is a higher rate of inflammatory factors in that meat. Animals from feedlots also display higher stress and have more cortisol in their systems too. The type of meat that we eat can directly affect our health, and the quality of the food that those animals eat directly affects their health as well. If we have more omega-3s in our meat, we will have less inflammation, less cardiovascular disease and better brains. It also means that we have happier, healthier animals overall, and with regenerative agricultural practices, we are also sustaining the land and improving the health of the land. From an environmental perspective, that is a really good idea. We are also reducing the load of herbicides and pesticides within agriculture. Those herbicide and pesticide residues that we get on food can, once again, negatively affect our microbiome. The whole system is involved in this—from manufacture, to food production, to growing our food. Obviously, I would like to see organic food growing wherever possible. We are very lucky in WA, with a lot of farmers and particular vineyards also starting to adopt those principles. There was some research showing that feedlot animals produce less methane, and obviously that is an important factor in farming, but there is now research showing that hemp-fed animals also produce less methane.

Moving on, as time goes on and our state continues to grow, the need to transform our approach to service delivery will become only more pressurised. The government is currently missing out on revenue that could be used to support the needed transformation of service delivery in important sectors such as health, education and community support. A report recently commissioned by the Legalise Cannabis WA Party estimated that the legalisation of cannabis would bring in \$1.25 billion in additional government revenue over the forward estimates, from 2020 through to 2028, based on a modest 25 per cent taxation model, and 1.5 per cent annual growth. It is crazy that the Western Australian government is missing out on this revenue due to an outdated narrative that cannabis is bad for health and morality. This needs to change.

I would also like to touch on the issue of economic development. As members are no doubt aware, the government has a platform to diversify away from mining, for obvious reasons, such as the fact that it makes us vulnerable to a potentially volatile market. Let us face it, it cannot last forever. It is not a sustainable resource. The framework for economic development, *Diversify WA: Future State*, identifies nine targeted sectors and specific diversification opportunities, including: production and scaling of renewable hydrogen; advanced critical minerals processing; manufacture of medical products and digital health devices; decommissioning of oil and gas infrastructure; Naval shipbuilding, sustainment and maintenance; development of regional tourism destinations; manufacture, utilisation and maintenance of space and cross-sector technologies; development of new carbon capture, utilisation and storage projects; and value-added food and beverage production.

We are starting to see more of the value added to food and beverage production. There are a couple of WA companies now making hemp-infused gins and vodka and beer. Although alcohol is not necessarily the best form to take things in, it is good to see that at least some more useful components are being added to drinks there. We will also see an increase in functional foods that way, with the development of different terpenes. In reading about the sectors selected above, I cannot help but wonder what were the key performance indicators in selecting them. Clearly, we are looking for big earners that match the lifestyle to which we have become accustomed. With our top-notch economic growth of four per cent—well above the 2.5 per cent Australian average—are they sectors that will provide employment for people from all walks of life? Will they breathe life back into regional towns? It is noticeable that the mining sector, with its FIFO workforce, is not doing a great job of building towns and communities. We may

be one of the richest states, but we may also be one where the social fabric is the most broken, with so many people spending half their life in dongas and so many families spending so much time with an absent parent.

Also, with the strategy to attract people to WA as a tourism and investment hub and chosen international education destination—which is mentioned in the budget papers—I wonder how we will put them all up, given that we are having a lot of trouble housing the people who are here already. What is also noticeably missing from the budget papers and the economic diversification strategy is a focus on specific agricultural commodities. There is no specific mention of developing particular industries such as hemp, cannabis, wine, wool or avocados. In the Legalise Cannabis WA Party, we think a focus on agricultural commodity development is important. It can help sustain regional centres and towns, as other industries such as coal and native forestry become unviable. Industrial hemp, in particular, would provide outstanding potential benefits for the state. We believe that by failing to develop this commodity chain, WA is missing out on a huge market opportunity. There is a big local demand for hemp products made from seed, flower, fibre and hurd, but are currently being made from imports. We have so much space in WA, and hemp is such an adaptable plant. It does not need pesticides, fertilisers or herbicides quite so much. It uses less water than cotton and it is more climate-proof in that sense. It is hardy. It grows really rapidly, and that would be a great way to replace the native logging industry, for instance. It would also create industry around making paper, cloth and other artisan products. There are opportunities there to replace imported hemp hurd, seed and flower with locally grown and processed material.

In the 2019 cropping season, 59 000 hectares of hemp were grown in the United States, and 17 900 hectares were grown in France, but only 280 hectares were grown in Western Australia. By 2027, the global hemp market is projected to reach \$18.7 billion. As a building material, hemp also sequesters carbon at all stages of production, from plant through to hempcrete blocks, in which it continues to draw in carbon throughout its lifetime. Due to various roadblocks, sometimes commodity change requires a bit of a lift-up before it can really get wings. The state government could usefully support hemp industry developments through grants for supply chain actors, particularly processing facilities and subsidies to reduce prices until industries have been established. Currently, hardware chains are held at ransom by companies that supply building materials, such as bricks and wood. They are threatened with a reduced discount if they choose to stock hemp-building products. I do not believe that companies should dictate environmentally friendly building processes. This should be something that the government supports, and as consumers, we should absolutely have the choice for more environmentally friendly building products and more sustainable building products.

That is it from me. There are so many sectors and aspects of the budget that deserve consideration, and I have only been able to mention a few here, focusing mostly on the aspects that ally with the ethos of the Legalise Cannabis WA Party.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Peter Foster**.