

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Peter Watson; Mr John Quigley; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Lisa Baker; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Shane Love; Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Tony Buti; Acting Speaker; Mr Chris Hatton

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**STATE BUDGET — IMPACT ON SENIORS AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE**

*Motion*

Resumed from 15 October on the following motion moved by Ms M.M. Quirk —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for the impact its mismanagement of the state budget is having on seniors and vulnerable people in our community.

**MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park)** [4.01 pm]: Before I was so rudely interrupted at 7.00 pm last Wednesday, I was in the middle of my persuasive argument to the government about the impact of its budget, as well as, more broadly, the budget of the Abbott federal government, on seniors and vulnerable people. I remind the house of the motion moved by the member for Girrawheen —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for the impact its mismanagement of the state budget is having on seniors and vulnerable people in our community.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** The key point I was making last week when we were originally debating this motion was that the government has no coherent financial plan and has never believed the forward estimates, and the only consistent assumption it has stuck by with the budget is the magical belief that the revenue of the state will always increase. Over the first five or six years of the Barnett government, that increasing revenue got the government out of some fixes. For example, the efficiency dividends have not been successfully met for some time now, but revenue increasing at a higher than expected rate has covered those holes. We saw a couple of weeks ago the announcement of another one per cent efficiency dividend on the general government sector—a situation that is unlikely to be hidden by increasing revenue, because we are all very familiar with what is going on with the iron ore price, and the impact that will have, not just this financial year but when the recalibrated iron ore price washes through the forward estimates, and the impact that will have on projected revenues. Because of the lack of a consistent coherent financial plan since the Barnett government came to power in 2008, we are now starting to see that play out in a number of places—one being revealed, as the shadow Minister for Water pointed out, when the government accidentally tabled a strategic plan for the Water Corporation.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** It was a strategic development plan.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** The strategic development plan revealed that the government's debt problems more broadly across government are now impinging on the efficiency and operation of the Water Corporation. I know that the government says that even though it keeps on putting in these efficiency dividends—which are lazy, blunt instruments to try to find savings in government—and even though it is not actually achieving those dividends anymore, there will be no cuts to front-line services. Everyone in this place knows that that is simply impossible, because we are all familiar with what the government's cuts have done to front-line services. We cannot quarantine front-line services forever, and, ultimately, that is where we are now. That was what was so interesting in that Water Corporation document that was tabled by mistake. It showed one of those rare examples in which the government's financial mismanagement is having a direct impact on the delivery of an essential service for Western Australia. That is why that was an interesting document that will no doubt get further discussion in this place.

One of the points I made last week was that, because of this reactive financial management style of the Barnett government, seniors and vulnerable people in Western Australia are now suffering the blunt end of those cuts. The cuts are not targeted. I know that the Leader of the House, the member for Kalamunda, who is not here at the moment, got a very hostile reception on the weekend in Kalamunda from a room full of seniors. Hon Alannah MacTiernan, the minister, the federal member for Hasluck, Ken Wyatt, and the member for Girrawheen were all there. He is no doubt very familiar with that hostile reception because speaking with my seniors shows that there is a very dim view of the government—not just the Barnett government, but also the Abbott government.

When we debated this motion last Wednesday, I had spoken that morning at the launch of Foodbank's report into hunger in Western Australia. I want to quote again for the interest of members—it has been a week since we last debated this motion—from the press report of the breakfast at which Foodbank launched the report. An article in *The West Australian* that day reflected on that report. It stated —

The annual Foodbank hunger report reveals it gave food relief to 51,300 people a month in the State, up from 43,000 last year.

Agencies reported that an average of 8841 people, almost half of them children, were turned away each month because of not enough food and resources—down from a monthly average of 16,000 last year.

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Foodbank WA chief executive Greg Hebble said demand for food had increased almost 20 per cent in the last quarter of the past financial year and the “hunger gap” was disturbing.

I found that interesting, Madam Acting Speaker (Ms L.L. Baker), as no doubt you would find interesting, not just in your current role but also in your previous role. That was the same day that Credit Suisse released a report saying that Australia is the world’s richest country. Credit Suisse made the point that this was due to significant increases in property prices in this country and also, because it was an international report, the increase in the value of the Australian dollar has meant that Australians are wealthy compared with other countries. Of course, all manner of evil is hidden in statistics, and Greg Hebble and Foodbank highlight some of that evil. Despite our wealth, significant numbers of people are struggling to eat. I am confident that most, if not all, members have a relationship with Foodbank. They may not know it, although I would be very surprised if every member of Parliament did not know Greg Hebble and Foodbank. The fact that Foodbank provides meals to an increasing number of schools in Western Australia now highlights the point that, even in the richest state in this rich country, we have some significant issues. I do not think a reactive financial policy, which the government has had for six years, built on an assumption of ever-increasing revenue, helps that any further.

In my electorate of Victoria Park, where Foodbank is currently based, before moving to its new facilities near the airport, the Victoria Park Seniors’ Centre, whose committee I chair, has forged a relationship with Manna. People may know Bev and John Lowe—a quite extraordinary couple. They established Manna literally out of the back of their car, initially providing soup to the homeless. I have known Bev and John for a while and, in a beautiful combination of events, they lost access to their kitchen in the central business district and were looking for kitchen facilities. By chance, at the Victoria Park Seniors’ Centre, we had made the tough decision that, because we were no longer providing home and community care services out of our commercial kitchen due to compliance requirements, we had to close that kitchen.

At the same time, Manna was looking for one, so we now have a wonderful relationship in which Manna cooks out of our kitchen and provides the members of our social club and seniors and residents with very cheap meals. What Manna shows, and what Bev and John will confirm, is that the demand for their services is ever increasing. It is not just the homeless of Western Australia. It concerns me greatly—the member for Albany talked about this some time ago—that in our electorates we have seniors who are alone in their houses because their partners have passed away, who do not have revenue sources other than the fixed pension income and who do not have a social network, or that social network of friends has since departed. We have seniors who are not able to look after themselves; therefore, the reliance on home and community care funding and services from organisations such as Foodbank of Western Australia and Manna increases. It is an interesting issue, I dare say, for those in the mental health space. I do not think the mental health of our seniors is really quite understood at the level that it perhaps should be. I know from the experiences with the Victoria Park seniors and, indeed, from speaking with people at the Harold Hawthorne Day Centre that that issue requires more consideration.

I want to make a couple more points about Foodbank specifically, and then I will make some more general comments in my final few minutes. The growth of Foodbank in Perth and regional Western Australia is, on one level, impressive. There has been extraordinary growth, largely through the work done by the many volunteers within Foodbank and the small number of paid staff. I am fortunate to have had a relationship with Greg and Foodbank in every year since I have been an MP, and each year we collect tinned fish in the lead-up to Christmas. We aim to get 1 000 tins a year—we get way more than that now—for the simple purpose of Foodbank distributing Christmas hampers to all agencies. Tinned fish is one thing that Foodbank does not get because it keeps and it is a very healthy, high-protein meal. However, the demands on Foodbank, as pointed out by Greg Hebble, show that the hunger gap, which appears to be growing, is not reflective of a wealthy state in a wealthy country. That is why, when we talk about the state budget impact on seniors and vulnerable people, the government needs to understand that it cannot simply react and lurch from budget crisis to budget crisis. There needs to be an element of consistency so that seniors and vulnerable people can plan around the programs and services that they receive through that budget process. This has been the madness. Today we saw from the Premier the madness of local government. The local government announcement today was a crazy approach to public policy. After five years of thrashing around, an extraordinary announcement was made today. It is a fine example of a government that does not have a consistent policy theme or narrative. The Premier took up the local government issue because he needed something to do. He got elected for a second term without an agenda and, despite specifically saying during the 2013 election campaign that there would be no forced amalgamations, he immediately moved on it. I know that the National Party will vote against the proposed City of Perth act. They have to so that they can look at themselves in the mirror each morning; otherwise, they will be turning on their own membership base, and I know they will not do that.

I congratulate the member for Girrawheen, because we sometimes forget that when we come in here and create a mess of the finances, generally the most vulnerable pay for that mess. To this day, after six years, the Premier

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still does not have a consistent financial plan that he can explain to the people of WA. Ultimately, the one philosophy that he has relied on—ever-increasing revenue—has now come unstuck, which is why I dare say that the vulnerable people and seniors of Western Australia have some pain to come, because ultimately there will be more reactive and desperate measures from the Barnett government to help solve its financial problems.

**MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood — Minister for Regional Development)** [4.14 pm]: I thought I would take the time to say a few words on this motion and put the perspective of those who live and work in regional Western Australia. I understand the view of the opposition in raising the issues of those people who are most vulnerable in our community. Although some of us in privileged positions might get impacted by some things, those in the most vulnerable positions get hurt the most. However, having said that, the Liberal–National government has been more than conscious of the challenge faced by the most vulnerable in our community, and I am sure that other members will talk about the steps that the government has taken to ensure that the impact of prices, household costs, access to services and a range of things that are important to them are covered.

The people who live in regional Western Australia are the most isolated from services, social infrastructure and all those things that are important to them that contribute to a community and to their lifestyle and livelihood. I make the point that since we came to government at the end of 2008, there has been one of the most significant shifts in resources and significant investments in regional Western Australia in 100 years in Western Australia—that is, the Liberal–National government’s royalties for regions program. Up until February this year, \$4.2 billion had been spent on 3 500 projects. Those projects are not just infrastructure projects. We often get up in this place and other forums and talk about the big-ticket items, the things that are transitional, the things that change the face of the economy in regional Western Australia and the things that enable investment to happen and therefore enable strong and vibrant communities to be formed. But it is also just as important to think about those in our community who are sometimes the most vulnerable. A couple of policy decisions that were taken by the government have had a very significant impact on those who live and work in regional Western Australia, particularly country pensioners. When we came to government in 2008, we put in place, on the back of a policy position going into that election, the Country Age Pension Fuel Card. I remember deliberating on this policy position around the party table. It came off the back of an announcement at the time by the then Premier of Western Australia, Hon Alan Carpenter, who basically said that pensioners could access free public transport. There were obviously some conditions around that, such as travelling on trains at certain times. The point that we made, and the point that pensioners who live in regional Western Australia were concerned about, is that the places where they and their families live and call home do not have the same level of public transport service as there is in the bigger cities.

In an endeavour to get a level of equity for those who live in the isolated areas of the state, we introduced the notion of a \$500 fuel card for country age pensioners to allow them some compensation for the fact that they live in parts of Western Australia that do not have the same access to services and transport opportunities that they would have if they lived in the Perth metropolitan area. That fuel card has been rolled out now. In fact, recently, the government made the decision to increase the value of the fuel card by \$50, so it is now worth \$550, and the amount will increase annually in line with the consumer price index. That card has fundamentally changed the position of country age pensioners. It is interesting to see some of the commentary about it. Members might make the assumption that people use it to go on a trip, to visit a cousin or to do some of the social activities that they might not otherwise be able to do, but, interestingly, the anecdotal feedback—I regularly get a lot of letters and commentary in my electorate office—is that they use it to access fundamental services, such as doctors and dentists and other services, that they might not otherwise be able to access because they feel some price pressure in making that decision. People who have come to us have said that this has fundamentally changed their access to services. They have not talked about visiting friends or people who live in other towns, but about accessing fundamental services.

We allocated in the forward estimates \$125.9 million of royalties for regions funds. In the latest state budget, that has been committed to continue through to 2017. Now more than 45 000 pensioners across regional Western Australia have access to the Country Age Pension Fuel Card, which provides vital assistance. That is an interesting policy. It was sparked by an equity issue that we saw for pensioners who live in regional Western Australia. This government has taken a significant step to support that group of people in our regional communities who otherwise would not have the same access to the transport opportunities as a person living in the metropolitan area. I am sure all members across the chamber support that policy position.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker):** Member, may I just interrupt you for a minute? Are you the lead speaker for the government on this motion?

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** I do not think I am, but I am taking the opportunity to speak so that I can reach a meeting pretty soon.

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**The ACTING SPEAKER:** That is fine, we just need to adjust the allocated time, member.

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** Recently in response to a question in this chamber I talked about the benefits of telehealth and the \$36.5 million of royalties for regions funds used to support regional telehealth services. That initiative came off the back of the fact that we have access to digital communications technology and it is a natural fit to extend services to access them. However, what is sometimes sold short and is not fully understood is that having telehealth facilities available in key locations in regional Western Australia means people can access specialist services and treatment from some of the best hospitals in Western Australia. It is very easy to say, but it is a service to get specialist treatment to people who live in even the most isolated areas in the state and it has been supported by this government's investment in using technology built on a digital communications platform. I used the example of Toby, I think his name was, in Kununurra, accessing health services through telehealth facilities. Again, it is another investment in and initiative for using technology to get services into the more isolated parts of the state to help out, in many cases, people in the community who might otherwise be challenged trying to travel to the metropolitan area to get access to those services. Seniors, pensioners and all people throughout the community will have the benefit of that program as it rolls out right across regional Western Australia.

In addition, royalties for regions funding is providing \$30.8 million over four years to expand the patient assisted travel scheme. Again, because of where people live, it is a challenge to get access to those services. In some cases, those services are for ongoing treatment. Treatment might not be just one-off, but ongoing treatment for which people need to make regular trips to see a specialist in a bigger centre or, indeed, in the Perth metropolitan area to access what we might consider to be fundamental health services. Eligible participants can access some compensation for the costs of travelling and the cost of accommodation. Again, through the state government's royalties for regions program we have been able to support a greater level of assistance than was provided previously to those vulnerable people in our communities.

Although today's discussion is not directly about aged care, we talk about seniors and pensioners being the more vulnerable members of our community. In regional Western Australia aged care is proving to be quite a challenge. Indeed, I am sitting next to the member for Central Wheatbelt, whose electorate is in the area of the Wheatbelt Development Commission, and she has been involved in rolling an economic and social investment infrastructure blueprint for that area. Aged care and how we manage and provide the services needed to support the aged people in our community are common themes in the area covered by the Wheatbelt Development Commission in particular, but also the areas covered by the other commissions. We know we have an ageing population that needs access to services, accommodation and facilities that allow people to live safely, comfortably and independently. These things will allow them to live many more years in their communities than they might have otherwise done, because in some cases they might have needed to shift to a bigger regional centre to access those services. We have made fairly significant investments in aged-care facilities in places such as Geraldton, Northam, Morawa, Albany, Tambellup, Capel and Kellerberrin. I am sure that as we create a set of investment priorities from the blueprints that have been developed, there will be more initiatives to support really good work in the delivery of aged-care services in regional Western Australia. The state government will work out its operating arena, hopefully partnered with the private sector, to develop a strategy that will allow people to remain in their communities a lot longer than they otherwise would, to feel safe in those communities and to be able to afford to access key services in those communities. We know there are challenges for regional Western Australia and they will not go away on the back of some of the things I have talked about this afternoon, but I think this Liberal-National government has made some fantastic investments in regional Western Australia. In my view, those investments have made a fundamental difference to and brought about a fundamental shift in how we support the vulnerable people living in the more isolated parts of regional Western Australia.

**MR P.B. WATSON (Albany)** [4.27 pm]: It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak on this motion. Unlike the previous member, I will talk about this motion, which addresses the cost of living for seniors and pensioners. It is interesting that the Leader of the National Party has been talking about what it is doing in regional areas for seniors. Originally, 25 per cent of royalties were to go to the regions, but this same Leader of the National Party has rolled over, put his legs in the air and had his tummy tickled, and now it is only 12.5 per cent. I was one of the few members on our side of the house to support royalties for regions. I always thought that when members came into Parliament and made laws, they were enacted. Obviously, the "Emperor" and all his little crew are just changing things to suit themselves. When I first got into Parliament in 2001, then Premier Hon Geoff Gallop said that we had to be so careful that we did not end up with working poor. We are talking about seniors and vulnerable people today, and in my electorate there are husbands and wives who both work and yet they cannot pay their bills. They put their children into day care because they have to work, but the cost of day care is astronomical. I know that some parents are lucky because the grandparents can look after the children, but the grandparents of a lot of people in regional areas live in the city and the parents have to put their children in day care every day. A large amount of the money they make goes into paying for day care. What plan

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does the government have to fix the mess it has made? There are seniors in my electorate who cannot afford to turn on their lights at night and some cannot pay their bills. The Premier says people can access the hardship utility grant scheme to pay their bills, but a lot of people are too proud to do that. Wives have come to my electorate office asking me to talk to their husbands because the wife wants to access HUGS but the husband does not want to because he is too embarrassed. I visit their houses at night, sit down and see grown men burst into tears because they cannot look after their families. It is through no fault of their own. They work really hard and their wife is working, but they cannot afford to pay their bills. Their kids cannot afford to play sport and they do not go to the movies or have treats, and this is supposed to be the lucky country. The power and water bills have gone up, and we are spending money on projects like Elizabeth Quay—when the Premier retires, he will say what a great project it was. How many seniors in my electorate will stay in a really big hotel at Elizabeth Quay with all the fancy stuff?

I listened to what people said about Gough Whitlam yesterday. I said in Parliament that when Gough Whitlam wanted to get things done, he did not worry about the next election. He wanted to get things done for the people on the street, the people who really mattered, the battlers, at whatever cost, and he was not worried about the next election. All this Premier worries about is making a legacy for himself. He is taking away all the money. We have been told that by the time all the interest has been paid for the football stadium, it will amount to \$3 billion. I am the shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation and I love sport, but not many people in Albany—I stand here representing the people of Albany—will go to the football stadium. All these big projects brought up by the Premier and the National Party will not help people in my electorate.

I have people sleeping in cars. I remember when I first got into this job, someone would ring me up and say, “Look, I’m sleeping in a car. Can you get me a house with Homeswest?” I would get onto Homeswest and within a week or less that person would have a house, but I cannot say that these people are sleeping in houses now. We have people sleeping in vulnerable situations. I know some young people from our Indigenous community who stay with families in houses that are not safe. People wonder why these young Noongar kids walk around the streets at night. It is because no houses are available for them, and if they do not sleep on the street, they have to sleep in a vulnerable situation.

I do not know whether some members go to the supermarket, but I go there about once or twice a week and I see my seniors there. They wander around the aisles looking at the price of things that we would not even consider to be a luxury. They are unable to afford it so they put it back on the shelf. I know a lot of people are eating food that is not good for them. They buy the cheapest stuff there is to eat because they cannot afford things like steaks or chops or the expensive foods or anything like that. They get the cheapest thing they can find.

As I said, people are sleeping in cars. Families are sleeping in cars. When the forts in Albany were being refurbished for our Anzac celebrations, four or five people I know were sleeping at the fort and had to find alternative slum accommodation under a bridge or something like that. Our seniors do not feel safe in their community.

When the Labor Party was in government, seniors could get money to install proper wire security doors or lighting around their house; they cannot get that anymore. These people cannot afford to do it by themselves. A lot of seniors in Albany now have a dog, which is really good when I am out doorknocking. In an area like Lockyer or Spencer Park, 80 per cent of people have dogs. The dogs are out the front of the house because people do not want anyone to get into the front yard or the backyard because they do not feel safe in their own community, which is a shame. These people have worked hard all their lives and now they lock their doors as soon as it gets dark. They do not put on their power and they use their blankets instead to keep warm. Just recently, I doorknocked a lady who had to open about three locks on her door just to let me in, and she had a little peephole. She said she does not go out at night, and when she goes out during the day, she leaves the dog in the house because that is the only way she can feel safe.

The hardship utility grant scheme is good, but people have to go through much rigmarole to apply. They have to get a councillor and someone to help them organise what they have to do, and a lot of people cannot be bothered doing it—they have neither the time nor the inclination to do it. These people are losing hope. We have heard about Elizabeth Quay and the football stadium and all the things that are happening in Perth. The Premier keeps telling us that we have a new hospital in Albany, and that is done, but what is the plan of the government, the Nationals and the Liberals for the unfortunate people in Perth? What has it done? It has whacked up their power and water prices. It has done everything it can to make it tough for them just so the big part of the town looks good and the Premier can be re-elected.

Let me talk about the royalties for regions program. It was a tremendous concept. I fully applaud the previous Leader of the National Party, Brendon Grylls. I thought he was great for the regional areas and tremendous for people in the country. He was not afraid of Colin Barnett; he stood up to him and I really admired him. I do not

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know the circumstances behind why he is not the leader anymore, but I am disappointed with the person who has taken his place. Instead of getting 25 per cent of royalties for regions funding, we are now down to 12.5 per cent, which is \$3 billion less over the forward estimates—money that could have gone into the regional areas to look after our seniors, our roads and the patient assisted travel scheme.

The Leader of the National Party said that the PAT scheme is great, but I asked him when was the last time that the price of accommodation in Perth went up. We know that it now costs over \$300 a night. I remember when we first got into government, I could organise accommodation for people in Perth for 80 bucks a night or something like that. It now costs \$300 a night and the PAT scheme has not moved with it. In the regional areas, we do not want our seniors to have to travel to Perth by bus. I do not know whether members have travelled by bus from Albany to Perth, but it takes about 6.5 to seven hours. Imagine if a person has something wrong with them and they cannot sit down for very long—they have to stand up and walk around—or they have a crook hip or are just not feeling well, and they have to get on a bus from Albany to Perth. They then have to get from the bus stop to where they are staying in Perth, and then they have to get from where they are staying to the hospital, and then back to the bus. All this royalties for regions money is just sitting there, holding up the bottom line for the government. It is an absolute disgrace. If it had not come in in the first place, I would not have worried. However, the fact is that the royalties for regions money was for the regions and now it sits in Colin Barnett's bank account to make him look good for the next Standard and Poor's rating.

I will now talk about access to programs for health for our seniors. I do a lot of doorknocking in Albany and these people are just sitting at home. They do not go anywhere and they have nothing to look forward to. We put on a seniors concert every year. We started off with 69 people attending, and now, in our fifteenth year, we have 500 attend. On the day we advertise the tickets, it is like a rock concert. The tickets are free and the people line up outside my office, right up Aberdeen Street and around the corner—it looks like a fire sale is on. For 70 to 80 per cent of these people, it is the only thing that they go out to for the whole year. In this day and age, to have that many people without something to look forward to is an absolute disgrace. These people have paid taxes all their lives. They have worked hard. They have built this country up. But this government is just ignoring them. The government is doing everything it can to build all these things in Perth and make these big announcements, but it is not looking after the most vulnerable people in our society—our seniors.

It is not only our seniors who are vulnerable in our society. There are a large number of families in my electorate who, over two or three generations, have never worked, so they do not know what it is like to look forward to something. They do not know what it is like to save money. They just live from fortnight to fortnight or week to week, and from cheque to cheque. People just say that they should go out and get a job. There are not many jobs in my electorate for these people. What worries me is that we are forgetting the most vulnerable and most important people in our community.

We have talked about Foodbank. Foodbank is really good. I do not know what the situation is like in other electorates, but Foodbank in Albany is run off its feet. I congratulate Hon Col Holt, because he has helped to get a lot of food for Foodbank in Albany. He does that every year. The member for Victoria Park does that, too, every year, with his tuna collections for Foodbank in Victoria Park. We can always tell when the member for Victoria Park has done that, because there is a tuna smell all around the chamber for a week!

My main concern is that we do not have a plan for what is happening. We have little programs here and there, but we need to have a program to look after the most vulnerable. We have a couple in Albany who run a food kitchen. This guy used to run around in his van to the spots where people are in need. It is remiss of me not to remember his name. He had trouble with the licensing of his van, and he now has a small restaurant, and on two days a week he opens his restaurant to provide free food for people in Albany so that they can get a decent meal.

The weekend after next, we will have 60 000 people in Albany, supposedly, and we will have all the pomp and ceremony and it will be a very momentous occasion. But, at the same time, in a society that is supposed to be going pretty well at the moment, we will have people sleeping in cars. We will have young people sleeping in vulnerable situations in houses because there is nowhere else for them to go. I have doorknocked in areas such as Spencer Park and Lockyer at 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock in the morning, and people will say, "Come in, Watto", and I will go into their house and see people sleeping in the lounge room or the kitchen or the hallway. I cannot believe that can happen in a society such as ours. We are supposed to be a society that looks after its own. I do not know where we went wrong. I do not know where we have lost our way. Everyone in my electorate is a special person, but I cannot give to those people the basic things that I have and that my family has, because of the way things are at the moment. I have been coming home from a function late at night and I have seen young kids whom I know really well through sport, and I have stopped a couple of them in the street and have given them a lift home. Often when I ask them what they are doing there, they will say that it is a lot safer on the street than it is at home. That is a blight on our society, and it really concerns me. I do not know with the answer is.

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This is not just in the Noongar community, either. These are the wadjelas—the white boys and girls—in our community, and they are out late at night, vulnerable.

I know it is a hard job for any government but, as I have said, I am extremely disappointed about royalties for regions. I congratulate the National Party on the Country Age Pension Fuel Card. It has done a lot of good, especially for my seniors, because they cannot afford the fuel prices. The minister said that they can use it to go to doctor's appointments and things like that. But often they have to use it to drive to Perth for specialist appointments, because we do not have the facilities in Albany for our seniors. Their petrol card runs out pretty quickly if they need to go to Perth for medical appointments. We need to have specialists in Albany so that our seniors do not need to go to Perth and be away from their families. We have young people in Albany who need cancer treatment in Perth. We had a young family come in recently whose child had leukaemia. They had to pack up and go to Perth. They did not have any family in Perth, so they had to find accommodation. They had to spend 11 weeks in Perth. The patient assisted travel scheme pays for a certain amount, but, bang, it is soon all gone. We need those facilities in Albany for not only our children and families, but also our seniors. Albany is an ageing community. We have a lot of people in our community who are ageing quickly and are not very well. Therefore, we need to get specialists in Albany. We also need to have a plan for our seniors and the less fortunate. As parliamentarians, that is our job. Our job is to look after our constituents. It should not be just us and them on the other side. We need to get together as a parliamentary community and find a way of dealing with this stain on our society, whereby seniors cannot afford to go out, they cannot afford to turn on their lights at night during summer, and they have to lock their doors in summer when it is really hot so that they will be safe.

I am calling on both sides of the Parliament to find a way in which we can look after the more vulnerable people in our community.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I give the call to the member for Mindarie—sorry; Butler.

**MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Butler)** [4.47 pm]: We have had a couple of goes. I like the previous go best, actually, Madam Acting Speaker—member for Quigley. But, as I commented earlier in this chamber today, that carries the horrible notion that the former member is deceased and they have named the seat after him. I do not want to qualify for that yet. I want to kick on for a while.

I rise to support the motion that this chamber condemns the Barnett government for the impact its mismanagement of the state budget is having on seniors and vulnerable people in our community. Much has been said this afternoon about royalties for regions, and much has been said about the expenditure on large capital items in the CBD, or close to the CBD—mainly Burswood stadium and Elizabeth Quay—and the government's commitment to spend \$2.4 billion on seven kilometres of rail track under the Swan River and under Perth Airport.

The member for Albany has complained to the chamber this afternoon that under the new leadership of the National Party, royalties for regions has slumped from 25 per cent of royalties to 12.5 per cent of royalties. In fact, the royalties for regions fund was never spent in the way in which it was first announced—that is, that it would be 25 per cent new money for the regions. It was not intended to be money that was already going to be spent in the regions for, in the proper course of events, the building of hospitals and police stations and other necessary infrastructure. When royalties for regions was first announced, it was going to be 25 per cent on top of that. However, the government was dishonest about that. Although the government goes around trumpeting royalties for regions, the capital and recurrent expenditure that has been normal throughout Western Australia's history is being badged as royalties for regions. I am sure that if we got KPMG or Deloitte, or someone, in to do an audit of royalties for regions, it would find not much more is being spent on the normal capital rounds but it now comes out of royalties for regions. Who are the losers in all of this? I will not be political here and say Labor-held seats, but the losers in this are the constituents in the member for Jarrahdale's electorate. Just as in Butler, the ring of outer metropolitan suburbs are bearing the brunt of this. Whilst there is a concentration of money being spent in the regions that is being badged as royalties for regions and whilst there is a further concentration of large infrastructure projects being built in the CBD that is being badged as "We're getting the job done"—I should have said member for Darling Range, I am sorry; I said Jarrahdale —

**Mr A.J. Simpson:** It used to be Serpentine–Jarrahdale.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** We will call it the member for Simpson's electorate after the member has croaked! With the response of the local government authorities, that might be sooner than later, but I hope not.

The struggle is occurring in this ring of seats in the outer metropolitan area. The member for Darling Range is nodding his assent from the other side of the chamber, and he is a cabinet minister. There is the big spend in the CBD and there is the concentration of delivering infrastructure into the regions. People from Mandurah,

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Darling Range, Swan Hills, West Swan, Wanneroo and Butler in the north also suffer. This is non-political, member for Swan Hills. It is a fact that the areas in the outer rim of the metropolitan area have not attracted the government's attention. These areas have been labouring for these past eight years since royalties for regions was announced because there has been this twin concentration on spending money in the regions and badging it royalties for regions and, by that swift political strategy, securing most of the country seats with some notable exceptions. Even if it was 50 per cent royalties for regions and a tonne of TNT, the government cannot bomb the member for Albany out of his seat, nor the member for Collie–Preston, because they are so well regarded. With so many other country seats, the government is ensconced because of that badging. In the metropolitan area, it appeals to people close in, as I said, with these big infrastructure projects.

Look at the seat of Butler, for example. Two Rocks is 60-odd kilometres from Perth. There is sparse public transport between Two Rocks and Perth. When the member for Albany talks about the distance that people suffering from cancer or from kidney failure travel to come to Perth for dialysis or to the cancer centre—perhaps at the Bendat Family Comprehensive Cancer Centre at St John of God Subiaco Hospital or the cancer centre that I go to run by that wonderful man, Dr David Joske, at the WA Cancer Centre located at Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre—the patient assisted travel scheme helps a little. For people in Perth who live close to the CBD, as was my experience when I had to continually come in for chemo—you feel as crook as a dog having to travel home again after it—it is bearable, but in the outer metropolitan area, people have to do this not on public transport but by private transport. It is hard for them. The round trip by taxi from Two Rocks to the cancer centre costs just over \$200. What pensioner can afford that? The only way they can get there is through volunteers. The community of Two Rocks raised funds for a community bus. It runs a cancer transport service. Those pensioners are doing it hard.

As the member for Warren–Blackwood said, there is recourse to the Country Age Pension Fuel Card. If elderly people in Two Rocks lived four or five kilometres further north, just over the line, they would get the fuel card and would find it a bit easier to get to Perth for their hospital appointments. I know that would be the same for the member for Darling Range. To get from places such as Jarrahdale twice a week for cancer treatment would cost pensioners a fortune, but they do not have a fuel card. Similarly, in Two Rocks —

**Mr F.A. Alban:** It is the same in my electorate, member. I just said to the member for Darling Range that we will have to talk about that one. We have a similar issue.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I take that interjection; I hope *Hansard* records it. The member for Swan Hills says that he has a similar issue in his electorate to what I am saying about Butler. On this occasion, he is not disagreeing with me; nor is the Liberal minister, the member for Darling Range, disagreeing with me.

What has fallen through the crack is the outer rim of the metropolitan area. That is where the problem is. These areas are being populated quite fast. I received a call the other day from a reporter who wanted to interview me—perhaps she will and perhaps she will not—about the redistribution out my way and how this will affect me. I said that where the lines are on the map will not affect me at all because the complaint will be the same: Where are the services up here? It does not matter whether at the next state election a Liberal wins the seat or I retain the seat; the people coming to the electorate office will have the same complaint to whichever side represents that area: What are we doing about public transport out here? What are we doing to ease the cost of living in the outer metropolitan area? We know what we are doing in the country; we know what we are doing in the CBD.

Getting back to this possible interview concerning electoral redistribution, there was a redistribution just before the last state election and we were all brought down to an average of about 23 500 to 24 000 people.

**Mr A.J. Simpson:** How many do you have now, member?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Just under 33 000.

**Mr A.J. Simpson:** I have 31 000.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The electorate of Darling Range is a booming electorate, like mine. We share many of the same issues.

**Mr A.J. Simpson:** The same fear—what part are we going to lose?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I do not have the same fear about what part we are going to lose. That is all beyond our control; it is in the hands of the independent umpire. Wherever those lines are drawn in these outer metropolitan seats, what they will demand of their local member is what they can do to ease the cost-of-living burden in an outer metropolitan area. What will they do about public transport to this area? Here is the big one: what will they do about mental health services? I do not know what the member for Swan Hills or the member for Darling Range feel about this, but I can tell members that in Butler, to try to get into the Clarkson mental health

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service, one just about has to know the director of mental health in Western Australia and queue-jump! The service is swamped with people suffering from mental health issues. In our public discourse, mental health has been brought to the fore as an issue by both parliamentarians and other significant people in our community. I think this started with Hon Andrew Robb, who put his hand up when he was in opposition and said that he was suffering from depression and needed to stand aside for a while. He has come back as a cabinet minister and is the federal Minister for Trade and Investment. When people started doing this, other people in the community thought, “Hang on, if he can come out and put his hand up and say he needs help, I can say that I need help, too.” People regularly come into my office very distressed that they cannot get their children or wife into mental health services. There are no more vulnerable people in the community than those afflicted with mental health issues.

I do not want to speak ill of a former member, and I will not, but when we look at the talents of the former member for Vasse, we can see that it is a tragedy that he had to put up his hand and say that he was stricken with mental health issues. However, as he said, he has the financial resources to seek private assistance. Most of my constituents in Butler do not have those sorts of resources. The Liberal member for Swan Hills is nodding in agreement; a lot of people in the electorate of Swan Hills who have anxiety or depression problems—before moving along the scale of mental illness to bipolar disorder and perhaps psychosis and, ultimately, more serious and chronic mental illnesses—cannot access services because it has not been on the government’s agenda to look after the most vulnerable.

I regard those afflicted with mental illness of any sort as the most vulnerable in the community. They cannot speak up for themselves; they cannot mount a cogent argument. They have been pushed out into the community because the beds are not available in live-in accommodation. A friend of mine to whom I have referred before, a very eminent psychiatrist, Dr Oleh Kay, and his lovely wife, Dr Marjorie, a clinical psychologist, told me that the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists recently convened a crisis meeting because it is unable to find beds anywhere in Perth for its severe cases that must be dealt with on an urgent basis. The only way that the hospitals can find a bed for these people with chronic mental illnesses in a crisis situation is by kicking out someone else who should also be hospitalised.

[Member’s time extended.]

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Three weeks ago there was a meeting of the college of psychiatrists to bring pressure to bear on this government to do something about providing facilities for these people. When I say that they are the most vulnerable people in our community, others may say, “Well, what about the poor Indigenous?” We all know that the incidence of mental health issues in our Indigenous population is enormous. It comes from not only foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, FASD, but also myriad other sources. Being from a totally dysfunctional family, being poor, being on the streets, engaging in substance or alcohol abuse and all those things precipitate mental illness. I suggest that because it is not a sexy issue, the government is not giving it the attention it deserves. Building a 20-bed mental health facility out my way would not get the sort of good publicity that a huge front page with an artist’s impression of the football stadium at night, gloriously glowing under lights, would get the government. Because it is not being done, the vulnerable are really, really suffering.

I now have many grandparents in my electorate; we call them the “Grandparents of the North”. They met this morning in my electorate office. These elderly people have had to step into the breach and take over the parenting of their grandchildren because of social problems that their own children have run into—quite often drugs, such as methamphetamine. I am sure I am not the only member with instances of people such as this visiting their electorate office. A great swathe of grandparents in Perth, during the evening of their life, when they should be perhaps sitting back and taking the odd caravan trip or trying to live as best they can on their fixed income, are now having to dip into that fixed income to support their grandchildren. I had a function at my electorate office last Thursday night, and I met a couple whom I will leave nameless, but they were helping to raise their grandson. He lived principally with his dad. His mother was a total methamphetamine addict. He shared time with the grandparents because of the father’s work obligations. When he lived with his mother, he was never required to go to school; school optional for him, as it is in a lot of poor families. When he eventually got to the age of about 12 or 13 years and could work out what was going on, he could then grasp that his mother was a drug addict who could not cope and he went to live with his dad and his grandparents; he alternated between them. He then really wanted to succeed at school. He was at Wanneroo Secondary College and his grandparents asked the school whether it could provide some tutoring or special assistance to improve his literacy so that he could get to at least year 12. The department’s response was that the department’s budget meant it could not supply any tutoring. The department’s best suggestion was to find a computer at the Clarkson public library and find an online tuition program. I then wrote to the director of education and said, “I want a letter signed by you personally giving your reasons why you will not assist this child.” In the letter I asked whether he could put his reasons in writing quite fulsomely because I wanted to lodge an appeal at the

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State Administrative Tribunal against the decision-maker as soon as I received it. He relented, and the student was given some tutoring. I am very pleased to say that this young man has completed year 10 and is now in an apprenticeship with an air-conditioning firm in Joondalup, as I was told at a function last week. The battle in these outer metropolitan suburbs to get that basic support for a family and a vulnerable child was incredible. Given the amount of money that the state spends on other things, I would have thought that supporting a born and bred West Aussie child who had found himself in dire circumstances through no fault of his own would have been a priority.

I am not looking accusingly at the member for Armadale, but I know that this chamber took a lot of time deliberating the Mental Health Bill. I forget how many days of debate took place, but it was a big bill and it took lots of days. I did not contribute a lot during the consideration in detail; that was ably handled by the member for Armadale. But I want to repeat now what I said in my speech on the third reading of that bill, because it is apposite to what we are discussing this evening. I said that it does not matter how long we debate the Mental Health Bill in this chamber, and it does not matter how big and how detailed the bill is, it will count for nought if the services are not delivered into the community. If the beds are not provided in the community and the mental health professionals are not provided to the community, we can all stand in this chamber to speak on the Mental Health Bill but it will count for zip, because the people in the outer metropolitan area, where there are no big tertiary hospitals, will not be able to access mental health services. Out my way, it is extremely hard. As I have said, I regard those with mental infirmity to be the most vulnerable people in the community. I am waiting to hear the announcements of beds throughout the metropolitan area that will service the mentally infirm in accordance with the aspirations that we all had during debate on the Mental Health Bill.

We can find the money to commit \$2.4 billion out of the blue to build a tunnel under the Swan River and under the northernmost runway of the airport to deliver a rail line to the airport and Kelmscott.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** It is Forrestfield.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is Forrestfield, of course. When I am looking at those suburbs from as far away as Butler, it is a bit of a blur. I am sorry; no insult is intended to those people, but even when I add binoculars to my glasses out there at Butler, I cannot see that far. I know that a lot of people in this chamber are not familiar with the geography of the seat of Butler, because it is all so new.

The government can commit \$2.4 billion to these two stations, but cannot find the money to protect the most vulnerable people in our community—those labouring under the dreadful burden of mental infirmity. The Premier can stack what he would regard as iconic infrastructure project on top of iconic infrastructure project to build a legacy for himself—he will soon be forgotten—at the expense of the most vulnerable people in our community. That is where we are heading as a state; it is just intolerable.

I was debating this yesterday with the Premier. When the Barnett government was first elected, it commissioned an independent committee to look at rail infrastructure needs for the next 20 years. The first priority that committee identified was to finish the rail line to Yanchep to unlock the jobs and give people public transport to the hospitals, like other people have in Perth. The second priority was to build the Metro Area Express light rail. The last recommendation was to build a rail line to the airport by 2031. However, with the stroke of the pen and without consulting anybody at all—I would say without even consultation with the Minister for Transport at the time—on the eve of the Liberal Party’s state conference, the Premier, wanting to announce an iconic infrastructure project again, turned this committee’s recommendations and findings on their head. When I say “committee”, I am not referring to a committee of this Parliament. It was chaired by the chairman of the Western Australian Planning Commission, and the Public Transport Authority was involved. With the stroke of a pen, the Premier turned that on its head and said that he will spend \$2.4 billion running this seven kilometres of track under the river and under the Perth Airport, while the rest of the people in the outer metropolitan area, such as the Liberal-held seat of Swan Hills and the constituents in the minister’s seat of Darling Range, can all whistle for their supper. If they want mental health services, tough luck. The \$300 million that could have built enough beds to accommodate the mentally infirm in hospitals has just been blown—not on a railway to the Perth Airport, but on the blowout in cost between the announcement and when Parliament resumed, which went from \$1.9 billion to \$2.2 billion overnight.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** That was only an estimation.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The member is quite right; that was only an estimation.

**MR A.J. SIMPSON (Darling Range — Minister for Seniors and Volunteering)** [5.17 pm]: As the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering, it is important that I contribute to this debate. I thank members for their contribution to the debate on this motion. I would like to place a couple of things on the record on behalf the government about seniors in Western Australia particularly. This is an interesting time for seniors in Western Australia, when their numbers are growing at such a fast rate. Just to place it on the record, between 2006 and

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2011, the population of Western Australia grew by 14 per cent. During the same period, the population over the age of 50 grew by 17 per cent, and the population of those over 60 grew by 21 per cent. There is a seven per cent difference between the increase in the state's population and the increase in the number of people turning 60. This is affecting governments all around Australia, including the federal government. The federal government has announced an increase in the pension age. Every two years, the eligibility age for the pension will be increased by six months, so that by 2035 the pension age will be 70. The reason behind that is the sheer number of baby boomers retiring.

An interesting aspect of this is that seniors are remaining healthier, more independent and more socially connected, and have a far more valuable life than they ever did in history. Seniors now are so much more aware of early intervention on health issues and so forth, and so much more in tune with what it takes to live healthier lives. This leads me to an area that involves me as Minister for Communities, as well as Minister for Local Government. The state government has provided over \$50 000 to local governments to develop an age-friendly community network. As we plan for growth—the member for Butler talked about the massive growth in his electorate—we are making sure that we take into consideration how we develop our housing to make liveable, walkable communities. We see subdivisions coming up in these new areas, and quite commonly on the main road into the subdivision will see cottage lots that overlook what is called a standard pocket park.

The entry to those houses is at the back and they are very skinny, but I think the Acting Speaker knows what I am talking about. There are more designs to allow seniors to live independently; they are the eyes and ears on the street because they are home during the day and see the traffic moving. We are looking at how we can best design age-friendly communities.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** You would have heard your colleague the Minister for Transport in the last couple of days talk about the new pedestrian crossings. They are about facilitating a faster crossing. How is the introduction of those crossings age friendly?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** They are designed to let people know how long they have to cross the road. It gives a countdown and when it turns red, there are so many seconds left. It is about knowing how much time people have to cross. The member mentioned seniors, the elderly and frail people.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** They are being given 1.2 metres per second to cross at the crossing. How is that age friendly?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** There is more time once the timer turns red, but at least people will have a timer to work out how much time they have to cross the road. This is a trial that the Minister for Transport is running to try to work out how pedestrians can best interact with car traffic. This is feedback that the member and I can give the Minister for Transport about seniors. The important part is to make sure that when people cross the road, they do it as safely as they can, and that there is good interaction between pedestrians and cars on the road. That is the idea behind it.

We have done a fair bit of work in a number of areas. I spoke last week about Carers WA because it was Carers Week. We had a great celebration of carers. Some 310 000 carers in Western Australia care for a loved one, whether that be a child, a sibling or a partner. They have taken on the responsibility to look after their loved one. It is very important. Again, the government has committed over \$450 000 to ensure that there is awareness of Alzheimer's disease in Western Australia. At the start of September, the member for Albany and I opened Hawthorn House. It is fantastic. It is great to see a community come together in a great partnership between Lotterywest, the shire and a raft of community groups. Hawthorn House is a beautiful house that has been designed especially for people with Alzheimer's; they can go to Hawthorn House in the early stages and allow their partner to have a bit of respite. The house has an orchard, a flower garden and an outdoor centre. It even has a respite unit to allow people to stay for a few days.

**Mr P.B. Watson** interjected.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** As the member for Albany has pointed out, Hawthorn House is fantastic. More importantly, Alzheimer's Australia is getting right behind it and is promoting it. It is a little sad that this is becoming more and more a reality of life. My father-in-law, Mike, is in that situation with his wife, Val.

Another commitment we made at the last election was to establish an elder abuse hotline. I am pleased to say that we launched that hotline this year. Advocare has taken on that role. I have talked about elder abuse on many occasions in this house. It is not the abuse that we think about. In fact, the number of offences against seniors has decreased in the last 10 years as a result of modern technology. With the use of screen doors and security lighting, the number of assaults against seniors has reduced. However, we are seeing that most assaults are being committed from within the family unit; for example, children are asking their parents to sign their house away to borrow money. This type of abuse is happening more often in an ageing community. It is something that the government has recognised and, along with Advocare, a hotline has been set up on 1300 724 679. It is basically

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a one-stop shop. It has been running for just under a year. It was launched at the elder abuse conference. We have a conference each year on elder abuse, which shows how prominent it is in our community. We know that the people who are being abused probably will not ring; it will be a friend who has noticed that someone has not turned up or something is not quite right. People might want to seek financial advice or advice on making a will, on dealing with the Public Trustee or on police matters. The hotline is a bit of a one-stop shop. It was an election commitment of the government. I am glad that we could deliver on that to help. Seniors, carers or anyone who thinks they are being abused can ring that number.

In 2008 we introduced a security rebate of \$200 to help seniors live at home comfortably. We offered \$200 for security doors and lighting and screen windows. In the first five years, 46 000 people applied for that money and we have spent just over \$9.9 million through that scheme. The Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council guides me on how best to support seniors in the community. People who live in a gated community, a retirement village or a nursing home do not need security doors or lighting because they already have that protection, so this year we kicked off with \$200 towards a personal device that can be hung around the neck. They cost about \$290, so with this rebate it will cost \$90. We have had a good take-up of that, so we will work through that process. The interesting part is that the government has committed to making sure that people feel safe in their communities and in their houses and is working with them to find the best way to support them in the community.

The member for Butler spoke about a grandparent who was looking after their grandchild. Again, this year the government made another commitment to grandcarers. Western Australia is the only state in Australia that acknowledges grandcarers in our community. We have set up a scheme under which a grandcarer can receive \$400 a year for the first child and \$250 for every other child under the age of 16 years. It is not a great deal of money, but when we launched it in January, the grandparents at the launch commented that it will help to buy shoes and backpacks for the start of school. They are all the costs of raising grandchildren. More importantly, we have acknowledged grandcarers in our community. Someone has had to take on the responsibility of looking after their grandchildren at a time in their life when they should be hitching up their caravan, travelling around Australia and enjoying retirement. They have gone back to the period when they raised their own kids. It is great to recognise them. I have had a lot of support from the federal government. Senator Dean Smith came over to WA with a committee and met with representatives of Wanslea Family Services, which is running the program.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Did the government make a submission to that Senate inquiry?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, we did. Senator Dean Smith is very keen to get involved in that process and is very supportive of it. The federal government has come to the table. The money that we give grandcarers will not impact on their pension. We are now working on the tax liability issue for them so that they do not lose any money. It is a good commitment from the government. Again, it was an election commitment. Western Australia is the only state in Australia that recognises grandcarers in our community.

That leads me to Seniors Week, which runs from 9 to 16 November. It is a great opportunity to celebrate seniors in our community. We will have an awards ceremony to acknowledge the senior of the year. It is hard to get seniors to nominate. Although they do a fantastic job in our community, they are very proud people and do not think they are doing anything unusual, but they are doing some fantastic work. We will have the opportunity to recognise a number of community groups and individual seniors and also the senior of the year. During the week from 9 to 16 November, there will be Have a Go Day and some different events all over the state. Money is also available for local communities to put on their own morning tea or function. I am sure that I will be able to update the house next month on the events and the senior of the year. Again, I acknowledge the important role that seniors play in our community.

That leads me to my next portfolio of volunteering. A huge number of seniors volunteer; they do some fantastic work. The member for Albany touched on Foodbank of Western Australia. He is right; it has done a fantastic job in trying to support our community. It is run by a lot of volunteers. We have worked with Foodbank in Perth to build the new facility at Perth Airport in your electorate, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr P. Abetz), with Lotterywest and state government funding. It is a larger facility. Members would have seen the report last week about not enough food being distributed. The interesting part for Foodbank is trying to distribute the food to areas. That is one of its sheer struggles. We must keep in mind that there are 247 remote Aboriginal communities throughout WA, so trying to get food to those communities is a logistical nightmare. Fantastic work has been happening. We acknowledge volunteering organisations. Some people have volunteered for 50 years with one organisation. There is a special badge for people who have done that. Members would be surprised at the number of groups that have people with those badges. Again, we are also looking to maybe bring that back a bit to also acknowledge 10 and 20 years of service as well. We are working on trying to acknowledge volunteers in the community and the great work they do.

There is also the WA Seniors Card and I make the point that funding from the state government has not changed at all, even though I know there have been a lot of conversations about the federal government's seniors rebate.

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More importantly, I hope all members have had the opportunity to get the *Seniors Card Discount Directory* into their electorate offices so that they have something to give to seniors. If members have had the opportunity to read through it, they would have seen that about 500 businesses have come on board to give discounts at a raft of places. It is a fantastic directory and it is a great way for seniors to keep —

**Mr P.B. Watson:** I have been doing my own for 10 years.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Good to hear, member.

**Mr P.B. Watson** interjected.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I am glad to hear that the member is on the front foot with the seniors in his electorate. Using the discount directory is very, very important.

The important part is that a senior can save about \$1 000 a year from discounts alone. Keep in mind that there are 360 000 Seniors Card holders in WA. Another area we have some issues with is that to be eligible for a WA Seniors Card, two things are needed: firstly, a birth certificate proving the person is over the age of 60; and, secondly, a signed form stating that the person works fewer than 25 hours a week, annualised. With those two things a person is entitled to a WA Seniors Card. The important part is that if a person is still working full-time, they cannot access a Seniors Card. The reality is that a lot of people over 60 years of age still work. I have talked to one of the seniors' groups in my electorate about the fact that a part-time teacher over 60 years of age could access this card, and actually does, and get the full benefits of the card while working their part-time job. Some work needs to be done on working out the eligibility criteria for the card and how we can best support people. The other area we are also looking at is that the WA Seniors Card holder gets a 25 per cent discount on their shire rates, a 25 per cent discount on their water rates, free public transport, a discount on driver's licence fees, free Museum entry, free entry to the Zoo, the safety and security rebate and a raft of other things. It is interesting that if a person also holds a commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card or Health Care Card, they get a 50 per cent discount on their shire and water rates.

People might remember that in the May budget the federal government tore up the national partnership funding agreement and took away \$25 million that went towards helping the vulnerable in our community. Through my department's advice and by consulting with the sector, we made a decision about the cost-of-living rebate. I still believe that some work needs to be done on the cost-of-living rebate. We are the only state in Australia that gives a cash payment to Seniors Card holders. The rebate covers cost-of-living expenses, but I think we also need to target people on a fixed-income pension. When I meet the seniors' groups in my electorate, I always talk with them about the categories of seniors in our community. A self-funded retiree who has done well and has not cost the state or federal government any money and does not get a pension is fully entitled to a Seniors Card and can get those 25 per cent discounts, free public transport and all the other things. They probably do not need the cash payment. At the other end of the scale are seniors who, for whatever reason, are doing it hard—perhaps a widower living on a pension. The cost-of-living rebate should be targeted at that end of the scale. That is something we need to address, along with the Seniors Card, to make sure it is helping the people who need it the most because they are most impacted on, especially with the cash payments. It is something we need to look at, as the number of seniors is growing at such a phenomenal rate.

As we all know, through the cost-of-living rebate process we took the opportunity to look at how we could possibly save that \$25 million and we came up with a saving of \$20 million. I sat around the boardroom table in my office and talked to groups such as National Seniors Australia, the Council on the Ageing, the Association of Independent Retirees and Retirees WA—about six groups represent seniors in Western Australia—and all of them made it very clear that we should not cut the concessions because the concessions are what they want most. That is important and we need to look at how we can support those seniors. Imagine a 25 per cent discount on local government rates for a \$4 000 rate notice for a person living in Nedlands versus that of someone living in Kalamunda —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** They'll need a concession after what you're doing to local governments.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I will actually put downward pressure on rates. I will make sure they —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr N.W. Morton):** Thank you, members.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** We all know that rates will not go down, but in the last couple of years we have seen the increases in rate fees go up quite considerably, running into seven per cent, eight per cent or nine per cent increases at a time. We have to work on a way —

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Do you reckon it is going to decrease in our shire?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** We will have a bigger budget in our shire.

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**Dr A.D. Buti:** It will be a bigger area.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, it will be a bigger area, but our rate base will now get up to around 100 000-odd people—so probably about 90 000.

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

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, the service will be delivered but we could possibly accept not having these huge increases if we were a bit more rational about where the increases needed to be.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** What do you reckon the increase will be under the new arrangement?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I do not set the rates for local government. The budget is adopted by the council, and as an ex-councillor, the member for Mandurah knows very well that the council sets the budget and the councillors vote on the rate increase.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I wasn't a high-rating councillor.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Nor was I, member.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members, enough interjections. Minister, if I could just take you back to commenting as you were, I think, about seniors. Please make your comments through the Chair.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I got distracted and I do apologise.

As I was saying, the WA Seniors Card is the most generous card in Western Australia. Concessions on bus fares, ferry fares, rail fares, Museum fares, national park fares, spectacles and fishing licences are all available by the possession of a WA Seniors Card.

I will just finish on the fact that as the Minister for Community Services, I know that there are some 300-odd community groups in that sector. They work with people with disabilities, youth and seniors and provide family centres and child care. There is a raft of community groups out there that all deliver their services to their community. This government has been very, very committed to that with a \$600 million increase, people may remember, just over three and a half to four years ago, to make sure that that sector had the money to deliver those services and to keep up with rising costs affecting non-profit organisations. We also need to look at other things. As the Minister for Community Services, I travel around the state and get to meet many of these community groups. I am always interested in how we can best deliver those services and, more to the point, how we can best support community groups through that process. A lot more work is to be done in this area. I still see a huge number of non-profit organisations in high-rental properties, and we need to look at trying to support them. It would be really good if we could find a better way. Maybe through this reform process there will be an opportunity to look at some of the buildings housing local governments and whether there is some space in which we can put some of our community groups. It would be a great connection for the local government to provide some community facilities and charge some of those organisations cheaper rent so that they can deliver more services to their communities. That is something we could look at in the future. It is really, really important to acknowledge the great work that those organisations are doing. One of the best parts of my portfolio is visiting those community groups to see what they are doing. There is some exciting stuff happening and it is really great to see that in the community. To see organisations delivering some really good community services to people is what I call the nice part of my portfolio.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** The minister would be aware that the Association of Independent Retirees and other retiree groups also raise consistently in their budget submissions the issue of the cost of downsizing. I think they are always requesting governments to consider stamp duty concessions or a sliding scale for stamp duty concessions. Have you got anything to say on that from a policy perspective?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I have done a fair bit of work on this. I met with National Seniors Australia and it raised that issue with me. I said that all the groups raise this issue with me, but I said I would really like National Seniors Australia to know that it understands as much as I do. If I were sitting around a table during the budget process and I took money out of the budget—let us just use the stamp duty example—I would need to know how much it was and I would have to provide a budget for it. I asked National Seniors Australia about this when this issue was raised with me. I said it had raised this with me a couple of times and I asked what the true cost would be. The interesting part is that I have heard a couple of ideas about putting a discount on the stamp duty to the median house price, for instance. That could possibly be done and it would enable seniors living in a large house—empty-nesters—to downsize to an independent living arrangement. It is clear that I would have to go back to the Treasurer if I had an idea about trying to do that. It is something I would like to do a bit more work on. I know that if there is to be a saving, the Treasurer will be right next to me asking, “If I am going to lose this money, how much will it be and where I will get the other money from?” That is the issue, but I would really like to flush it out a bit more. I would also be interested in exactly what downsizing means, because

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sometimes people could spend more going into a retirement village—it could cost more to do that than what the house is worth. Is that actually downsizing or does it go on the value or the size of the house? I have asked for work to be done on that because I have heard that question asked a number of times, but I have no facts or figures to look into. At one of the last meetings I had in my office with Michael O’Neill, the issue was raised and I asked him about what work was being done on it. That organisation has quite a large research unit based in Canberra that can look at some ideas and the costing involved, and I would like to look into that. Supporting seniors in our community is a key area. It is a growing demographic. We are all politicians in this chamber and we all want to be re-elected, and this growing demographic of seniors will be a very big voting demographic —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** It is very big in my area.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, it is, member for Mandurah. Part of the process of supporting seniors in our community will always be a movable feast on how we can deliver different programs to attract them. One of the clear things I mention to my seniors is that as this demographic becomes a large voting demographic, governments around Australia will definitely lean towards finding ways to do that. We need to fish out those types of options and, as we move to the next election, work out the sorts of programs we can offer. Consider where we are today: we have brought in the grandcarers support scheme and the elder abuse helpline. All of those election commitments were fully funded and are working very well.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** What is the progress of the review on the Seniors Card and the associated issue of how we provide existing services and make it fair et cetera? What is the current status of the review?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** We are still looking into that, member. At the moment I am doing some modelling with Treasury to work out, more importantly, where the growth will be. In this year’s budget, I fully allocated \$405 million from the state that fully funds all the rebates for the WA Seniors Card. I am making it very clear to the Treasurer that the graph is going up at quite a considerable rate. Over the last four or five years it has grown by six per cent, and it is growing quite strongly. We need to make sure that we are supporting the seniors in our community. We must provide for them for what they need to do, and part of that process is to make sure that the Seniors Card keeps up with our ever-changing demographic of seniors, who are far more active and out and about more, and what best suits them. As part of that process, we will now look into how we can best support them and what areas we have to adjust to make sure we keep in line with the changes.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Does the minister have a time line?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Not really. No, I have not got a time frame at all. I am just working through that at the moment to —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** A bit like local government reform.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I have a time frame for that. I thank members for their interjections and their comments. Again, this government is very supportive of seniors and vulnerable people in our community. It is a fantastic sector to represent and I am very pleased that we can support them.

**MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands)** [5.42 pm]: This motion is about not only seniors, but also other vulnerable people in our community. I will cover some points on both these categories. There is no doubt that seniors are some of the most vulnerable people in our community, but there are others, some of whom were mentioned this afternoon. People suffering from mental illness were mentioned and we have heard children mentioned. I would like to pick up on few other issues too, but before I do that I will talk about the seniors’ forum that ran in my electorate about two weeks ago and was attended by the federal shadow minister for families and payments, Jenny Macklin; the federal member for Perth, Alannah MacTiernan; and me. The invitations were sent out in quite a short time frame and one never knows with short time frames whether a lot of or just a few people will come. This is clearly an issue that has raised some angst in the seniors’ community because over 60 people turned up to the Recreation, Information, Socialising and Entertainment facility in Maylands. It is fair to say that I thought that perhaps they were all WA Labor supporters, but indeed they were not; a mix of political affiliations was present. However, they all shared one unifying feature, which is that they are thoroughly fed up with what the Barnett government is bringing down on their heads. The straw that broke the camel’s back was the election of a conservative federal government. They have been in the unfortunate position of watching a number of cuts rolled out with what they feel is very little power to influence what is now coming down on them. I will run through some of the things that they were concerned about so that members are clear about how the seniors in all our electorates must be feeling.

A number of people asked me why their vehicle registration had suddenly become almost an insurmountable bill this year. They said they did not even know that there would be any changes until they opened their registration documentation and saw the new amount on the bottom of the bill. Some of their car registration bills increased by as much as 75 per cent because the state government’s private vehicle concession was abolished. That is

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shameful, not just because the government did that, but also because it did not warn pensioners in any fashion so that they could prepare themselves to foot the extra 75 per cent on the car registration bill when it arrived. The figures across Western Australia show that under the Liberal government, car licence fees for seniors may be upped an additional 212 per cent, which is on top of the removal of the rebate. Vehicle licensing registration has increased by three per cent and the compulsory third-party insurance has increased by 3.7 per cent. That is just the start of the reason why seniors are concerned and feeling incredible pain from the Liberal government's price hikes.

I am sure that it is not just electorates on this side of the house that are registering pain over these cuts; I am sure that members opposite are feeling additional pressure after the federal government started to make more cuts to seniors' concessions. Since 2008, under this government, household bills have gone up at least \$2 500 per household per annum when the increase in electricity and water prices is factored in with other household items. An increase of \$2 500 a year might not sound like very much for people who work in this house, but I can tell members that that is a huge amount of the annual income, or what they are living on, for the seniors who were represented at RISE in Maylands two weeks ago.

In addition, several people at the meeting said that the security rebate is no longer applicable to them. Of course, we all know what happened with that. If the government wants to paint itself as not cutting something, it just fiddles with the terms of something or changes the criteria by which it is measured and it thinks it can get away with blue murder. Unfortunately, the rules on the seniors' safety and security rebate now make it almost impossible for seniors to claim that rebate. The Barnett government has attempted to try to dress it up and say that the seniors' safety and security rebate is still in place and that nothing has changed, but it has fundamentally changed. For a person to be eligible to claim this rebate, they must have not only claimed it previously, but also been burgled sometime since January 2014.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** That is exactly right. One might wonder whether it is almost worthwhile getting someone to pop in and open the front door, pull back the flyscreen, sneak down the corridor and remove a toilet roll or something, and then report it. It seems to me that it is not a fair impost on seniors to change the eligibility criteria. Do members know how many people have received the rebate as a result of the changes? It is only four. In the period between February and June of last year, before the rules were changed, 2 709 seniors received that rebate. I will say it again: four people have received that rebate. The rebate is supposed to give people up to \$200 to help pay for home security items such as alarms, security doors, window screens and deadlocks. I do not know what people are saying about this rebate in members' various electorates, but when I hold seniors' forums, street corner meetings and community meetings around antisocial behaviour and whatever, one of the things that I have found really productive and helpful is to ask people whether they are eligible for the seniors' security rebate; and, if they are, tell them how they can apply for it. However, when I hold those forums now, I have to tell seniors that unless they have been the victim of a burglary, and unless they have applied for the rebate previously, they will not get it. That is not good enough. It does not sound very good to just state that this security rebate has been changed so significantly. I suppose it is some sort of attempt to claw back funds. I do not know. But it sounds like penny pinching to me.

The other issue that was raised is that the cost-of-living rebate has been slashed or cut in half. The Premier made that announcement after he refused to stand up to the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, and fight for a fairer deal for Western Australians. Our Premier is always very quick to speak on behalf of Western Australia and Western Australians in federal forums. Indeed, he pats himself on the back regularly, in front of anyone who stands still long enough to listen, about his ability to push Western Australia's interests. Whether it be the goods and services tax revenue or any other kind of income source for Western Australia, the Premier is always very quick to say he is looking after us. Therefore, it completely befuddles me that the Premier refused to stand up for our Western Australian pensioners and seniors when Mr Abbott talked about halving the rebate. This will impact on 306 000 Western Australians. It will cause a lot of pain in the community. That is certainly the feedback that I get from a lot of people who know about this change and are commenting on it. The rebate will be cut from \$245 to \$123 for couples, and from \$163 to \$82 for singles. I understand that the Barnett government is currently reviewing a range of other concessions and discounts. So we will be watching that page to see what else will be cut.

I am looking at my colleague who sits next to the Leader of the National Party. Earlier today, the Leader of the National Party spoke very positively about royalties for regions and about the great cushion that has given to regional people. Although I agree that it has given regional people a great cushion, I also agree with what the member for Albany has said—that a lot of that money previously came from consolidated revenue. So there has been a bit of tricky footwork around the shifting of costings. I think regional pensioners may be in a better position than our metropolitan pensioners after the next round of tough cuts comes down, because the royalties

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for regions program has locked in some positive benefits for regional seniors that metropolitan seniors are not likely to be able to continue to benefit from.

I will run through some of the other changes. I have mentioned the abolition of the private vehicle concession on car registrations. I have mentioned that household bills have gone up by \$2 500 a year. I have mentioned the changes to the security rebate, which effectively will lock out more than 90 per cent of seniors. Coming from the federal government, there is a possibility that pensions will be indexed to the consumer price index from September 2017. Again, that change will cost every pensioner significantly. I do not think people understand yet what that will do to pensions. It will have a dramatic impact.

Do not forget that also coming from the federal government will be the additional pressure of the \$7 tax for people to see a general practitioner. The cost of a prescription under the pharmaceutical benefits scheme will also increase by \$5. Unfortunately, one of the things that happens when people get a bit older is that they are more likely to have to go to a doctor. It will also cost people an extra \$7 if their GP orders an X-ray or a scan or if they need to see a specialist. People have no control over that; if they want to have their health effectively managed, they will go and get those tests. But it will cost people an extra \$7 every time that happens. As I have said, people cannot influence that decision. That is their GP's decision. Obviously, if people do not want that treatment, they can say "No, I'm not going to have a CAT scan", or "No, I'm not going to have an X-ray", but I do not think that augers well for the health of people in our community. Every time we put pressure on things like health care, we immediately get a reaction from people who are on low incomes and struggling financially. My experience of that reaction is that people will not go to a doctor themselves if they are ill; they will take their children to a doctor, because that is where they think their commitment and responsibility lies, but they will put off any medical attention that they might need. When it comes to things like dentistry, forget it; people cannot afford that if these kinds of additional imposts are coming into their budget.

I have talked about the abolition of funding for states to deliver concessions to pensioners and Seniors Card holders. That is the big hit that Mr Abbott has taken out of our state. That has made a \$24.5 million hole in our state budget that the Premier is refusing to fill. It is okay for the Premier to spend money on his pet issues, but when it comes to filling the hole for pensioners that the Liberal federal government has made in the state budget, the Premier is not prepared to do that.

I have talked a bit about what happened up-front for me at that seniors' forum. I should say I was quite shocked, firstly, at how much the people who came to that forum knew about what was happening. But maybe that is a reflection of the fact that when we put out the information and invite people to come along, they will look into it. I was also shocked at how angry these people are, and at how willing they are to look for a way in which they can take action against this government.

I now want to talk specifically about the Western Australian Council of Social Service pre-budget submission for the 2016–17 budget, which was released late last week. For the first time, WACOSS has put a contextual statement at the front of its pre-budget submission. I want to draw from some of the elements in that WACOSS submission and relate this directly to the vulnerable in our community. The Western Australian Council of Social Service starts off by making the general comment that as last year's budget was framed as a little pain for everyone, what we are looking at now is a great deal more pain—but it is not for everyone. The impact of budget cuts is never felt by everyone in the community.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** There is always a more direct effect on low income households and the most vulnerable. It has a disproportionate impact as rising household fees and charges push up essential living costs for the most vulnerable in our community. The council goes on to say that it has —

... experienced cumulative impact from an ongoing ... series of reforms to the funding and regulatory environments of community services at the State and Federal levels.

The council goes into specific detail about the potential impact of federal funding reforms for the community sector. Members will understand that when I talk about the community sector I am talking specifically about sector agencies that interact with the most vulnerable people in our community. It is a direct issue in relation to this motion. The WACOSS submission goes on to say —

There is a risk they may impact disproportionately on small to medium sized organisations ...

We have been talking about this since 2008, since the Premier started to make changes to the way the government funded not-for-profit organisations. There will always be a rationalisation impact because of these changes. It is the government's preference to fund larger non-government organisations so that it has less paperwork and less auditing to do. The government can fund large amounts to the Anglicares or the UnitingCare Wests of the world and ask them to on-fund small agencies. That sounds like a great saving for government, but

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it is in fact, potentially, an extremely dangerous way to manage government work within the sector. If it truly wants to capitalise on the relationship that the human services sector has with the community, with volunteers and its proximity to real, local issues, it is effectively cutting out the agencies that have the capacity to deliver on this.

WACOSS's pre-budget submission goes on to state —

Our primary concern is that service procurement reforms should result in the delivery of more efficient, effective and sustained outcomes for service users, independent of who is delivering those services. Irrespective of whether or not we support the idea that fewer service contracts delivered by larger providers may be more efficient or easier for government to manage ...

It is very clear that WACOSS is worried. WACOSS represents 400-odd charities and agencies in the not-for-profit sector. In speaking for groups that I have heard mentioned today, Foodbank and the like, this peak body is worried; its members are telling WACOSS that they are worried.

The other issue that seems to be a persistent problem for the sector is how to develop and sustain a workforce that can undertake the kind of person-centred planning needed within, for instance, aged-care services or the National Disability Insurance Scheme. We understand the transition to an individualised funding model potentially has some very good outcomes and should be a good way forward; the problem is in seeking a workforce that has the skills to deliver these services. We do not have a ready workforce. We need a point of entry or a workforce training strategy that allows a low-level entry point so that people who have a natural aptitude for caring professions, or want to develop their career in that direction, can transition from a low entry into a more skilled level. There needs to be clever and urgent planning around that workforce training strategy.

WACOSS states that the WA public and community services sectors —

... face the prospect of significant challenges to both the viability of our service system and the budget bottom-line as a result of state budget pressures.

That was a direct quote from the "WACOSS Pre-Budget Submission For the WA State Budget 2015–16" titled "The difference we can make". The sector is clearly hurting. We rely on these people to help our most vulnerable people. It goes on —

These pressures include diminishing and uncertain revenue, growing state debt and a high level of investment in infrastructure, as well as the impacts of a ... federal reform agenda that is likely to reduce service funding and shift more responsibility back to the state.

This is the catch: why should we mind that the Prime Minister is cutting funding to the sector? It is pretty obvious that if we want the vulnerable in our community to be supported with effective service delivery, somebody has to fill the gap; somebody has to stump up the money. If we do not, the lines at Foodbank will grow. Emergency relief providers—whether it is at the back of a church, a home or a domestic violence shelter, whoever is delivering that—will increasingly be unable to cope.

Having spoken about the most vulnerable people and the agencies that serve them, I want to pick up on a separate, but allied, issue. Mahatma Gandhi was quoted as saying that society is judged by how it treats its animals; and others have said by how it treats its most vulnerable people. There is also a comment about how we treat the sentient creatures that we share this planet with. I want to talk about the RSPCA. I am sure many members would have read a story in the weekend paper about the incredible increase in cruelty cases that the RSPCA is dealing with. I feel that this is directly relevant to vulnerability in our community because families under pressure may become dysfunctional. Whether it be income pressure, relationship pressure, household pressure, financial pressure or whatever pressure, families under pressure may become dysfunctional. When the family is dysfunctional or there is severe stress in the family, it will often be the most vulnerable member of that household who is affected—apart from the children, it is the companion animals. It was reported in the paper that the RSPCA thinks that the increase in cruelty cases is directly attributable to the struggle of people having to make ends meet. That is a very sad indictment and probably not a direct outcome that this government ever thought it would have. Not only is the government putting significant cost-of-living pressures on families, but also that pressure is flowing on to children. Housing affordability is at an all-time low and there is an inability to pay bills. The member for Albany mentioned the hardship utility grant scheme. That is not enough. There are queues of people waiting to get access to the HUG scheme. People needing financial counselling are not able to get it because of the queues and there has been a reduction in the amounts put into these services. At the very bottom of that chain, the companion animals in those households are being made to suffer. The government funds the RSPCA. Its funding is a significant amount, to me, but in terms of the overall budget it is not huge. The RSPCA had to finance the ongoing care, for instance, of 108 cats that were taken out of a house in my electorate a year ago. I understand that the cost of maintaining those animals while a court case is pending is

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\$1 million or more. If one starts to think about why this government has not addressed changes to, for instance, the Animal Welfare Act that would allow the RSPCA to deal with the animals by fostering or re-homing them or doing something differently when a court case is being prosecuted, this government will have to face up to the fact —

**Mr V.A. Catania:** I can see how this is part of what we are talking about.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** The member does, and it is. I hope I have clearly made the link between income levels and exclusion and poverty in households and how the most vulnerable in the household may not be a person; it may be a cat or a dog. The RSPCA is struggling to meet a \$1 million-odd cost to keep 100 cats simply because a court case has not been allowed to progress and the Animal Welfare Act is in urgent need of attention. The act is due for a review. In my view, the government is badly dragging its feet on this, and is putting probably one of the most respected charities in the state in a very difficult position. I think the RSPCA has around 100 000 supporters who contribute directly or indirectly to it. I challenge anybody to come up with an organisation with that many supporters. If one went out and called for a public cry of who supports the RSPCA, I think that number would double or triple very quickly. The iconic agency charged with the responsibility for the welfare of particularly companion animals in our society is being forced to use its valuable assets to fund a failing in the Animal Welfare Act. I am not particularly proud of that because the Animal Welfare Act was reviewed in 2002 by a Labor government. However, when one finds holes in policies and legislation, they must be fixed. It does not take a Rhodes Scholar to figure out that this one should have been fixed a long time ago. I do not know why the Minister for Agriculture and Food is dragging his heels on fixing the hole in this law, but I do know that the longer it takes, the more strain organisations such as the RSPCA will come under.

That is the context of my contribution: we need to be extraordinarily careful about the services provided, the funding that has been cut from these services and the increasing level of vulnerability in households in all our communities—not just mum, dad and all the kids, but also their pets. It is really important that all these issues are looked at. Certainly, it is something that is increasingly an issue in my electorate, and I am sure it is always an issue in all our electorates.

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan)** [6.12 pm]: I am not able to make a long contribution, tonight, but I want contribute to debate on the following motion —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for the impact its mismanagement of the state budget is having on seniors and vulnerable people in our community.

Over this and the previous year, the government has focused on the wrong priorities, which has had a significant impact on the most vulnerable in our society, particularly our seniors. The chaos and dysfunction that is now the hallmark of this government—today's announcement of the shambolic local government reform is the latest chaotic example—is the result of a government that has mismanaged the economy and finances and is unable to provide the assistance and care needed by the most vulnerable in society. I remember when the government was elected, with its first couple of budgets, it talked about its focus on all in society—it would assist everybody. That rhetoric does not match reality. The government has focused on some bizarre deals with the private sector, undermining the state's finances and creating budget pressure that has seen it in the most recent and prior budgets cutting funding to seniors and impacting on the most vulnerable. Millions of dollars have been wasted on bizarre and costly deals with the private sector. We have seen the Pelago Apartment development, in which 28 apartments are sitting empty, while the state government pays nearly \$900 000 a year in rent to major Liberal Party and National Party donors. We have seen the farce of the Allia Venue Management deal. We have seen significant concessions on land at Elizabeth Quay and on the Burswood peninsula given to multinational, billion-dollar companies. We have seen a government completely lose its way. Although the government started with rhetoric about trying to look after all, it has fallen back to form and its policies are significantly impacting upon society's most vulnerable.

There is no better example of this than the massive increases in the cost of essential services and cost-of-living pressures since 2008. The cost of household bills has increased by \$2 500 since the Barnett government came to power. I have said on numerous occasions that this government has failed to look at the collective impact on a household of all its increases to charges. Remember that many of these households are on fixed incomes, whether by way of pension or self-funded retirement. We have seen massive increases to charges with massive pressure being put on these seniors and families. Electricity prices have gone up by 77 per cent and water prices have gone up by 90 per cent. I reiterate—similar to the local government reform process, the government has been playing around with the issue of electricity prices for about six years. It has done nothing to hold down costs and embarked on a bizarre agenda that no-one in the private sector supports, but reflects the personal prejudice of the Premier. When government members talk about the potential savings to come from re-emerging Synergy and Verve, they ignore the costs. Similarly, with the local government reform process, government

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members talk about some sort of hypothetical saving of \$50 million over 10 years, as I recall. We all know that significant mergers or forced amalgamations are costly. All those councils need new merged accommodation and signage—every process needs to be changed and amalgamated. The costs of that process will far outweigh the savings that the government claimed today it would make. All the bizarre and erratic decisions of this government—particularly those made by the Premier—and its complete mismanagement have resulted in an unwinding of finances and the government impacting upon the most vulnerable.

I look at car registration. By cutting and then moving to abolish the family subsidy, the government's policy is impacting those with cheaper vehicles more significantly because the rate of increase is far more significant the lower the value of the vehicle's registration.

The government has basically created a system whereby the biggest increases to the cost of living are felt by the people who can afford it least. The government has made other cuts to seniors' benefits. I think the key issue outlined by many of my colleagues is the cut to the seniors rebate. The rebate has been cut from \$245 to \$123 for couples and from \$163 to \$82 for singles. That cut will impact 306 000 seniors in Western Australia. Seniors have to deal with not only massive increases in cost of living and charges, but also a cut to the rebate that helps people afford those massive increases.

Another significant cut that I find absolutely extraordinary is the one to the security rebate. The Liberal Party promised \$15 million over four years towards a seniors' safety and security rebate. However, it has forecast and is delivering only \$3 million over the next three years. It has changed the rules to make it virtually impossible to access the rebate. The new eligibility rules mean that to access the rebate, seniors must have previously claimed the rebate and been burgled since January 2014. It is one of the most bizarre policy changes I have seen. Someone has to have been burgled before they can get the rebate. Whenever I tell that to people who come into the office, they find it absolutely extraordinary. Someone has to have claimed the rebate before and been burgled to claim it now. Up to June this year, only four people received the rebate, compared with February to June the previous year when 2 709 seniors received the rebate. Basically, the government has withdrawn the assistance that would allow people to purchase equipment to make them feel safer at home.

The Abbott budget announced in May this year imposed a raft of mean and targeted cuts to rebates for seniors, the most vulnerable people in our society, through the general practitioner tax and changes to the age and deeming threshold in the pension indexation system and cuts to the seniors supplement, the education entry payment, and the pensioner education supplement. Between the Barnett and Abbott governments, the most vulnerable have been targeted. As I said, this is a result of a government that has completely lost its way in all areas, including the economy. It has made sure that we are growing more slowly than is New South Wales—a huge achievement! It has slowed the economy —

**Mr P. Papalia:** Sarcasm does not read well.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** It does not read well. Sorry; that was sarcasm. The government has mismanaged some of these projects so badly that our economic growth has now fallen behind that of New South Wales. The government has lost its AAA credit rating.

I want to talk about the local government reform. The government is obsessed about lines on the map; this government has no idea about community. I want to talk about the City of Vincent for a second. Why do people go to the City of Vincent for a drink or something to eat? It is because of the atmosphere that is created by the people and the place. The idea that a city is about lines on a map and putting a hospital here and potentially a casino there and thinking that that is creating a place is contrary to all current thinking in urban planning. It is opposite to everything. Why do people go to these places? It is because, normally, councils create vibrant places for people to be. Including Vincent in the CBD would downgrade the role of the Vincent ratepayers, and it is an extraordinarily stupid decision. There is no concept of people in that idea. Government members talk about communities, but the government simply puts lines on a map and ignores what makes a place function. The entire thought in urban planning is all about creating places. It is not about creating monuments, big glassy towers, and saying, "Isn't that shiny?" and everyone will go, such as with the concept of Elizabeth Quay. It is about laneways and exciting and edgy experiences. It is not about —

**Mr V.A. Catania** interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The member for North West Central will have an opportunity to comment.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** It is funny; when the Court government broke up the City of Perth back then, the Labor Party's argument was: this is disgraceful.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The member for North West Central was a member of the Labor Party then.

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 22 October 2014]

p7765b-7789a

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Peter Watson; Mr John Quigley; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Lisa Baker; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Shane Love; Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Tony Buti; Acting Speaker; Mr Chris Hatton

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**Mr V.A. Catania:** You were arguing for the City of Perth not to be broken up; now you're arguing for it not to be reconstructed. Hopefully, that got in *Hansard*.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The member for North West Central was probably more active in the Labor Party than I was.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz):** Members! Through the Chair, please.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The member for North West Central is right; the Liberal Party broke up the City of Perth because it was too big and it was not achieving the goal. The member for North West Central confirmed through his comments that significant change occurred under Richard Court, and that completely contradicts what the Premier has said, which is that there has been no change for 100 years and that people have been talking about creating bigger councils for 100 years. Every time this government changes something, it tells us that it has been talking about it for 100 years. It has been talking about Elizabeth Quay, the Perth City Link and local government reform for 100 years. It has not. What the government is doing today undermines innovation and new cultural experiences.

I referred to the three paths. Councils in the western suburbs will not merge until a City of Perth act is passed through this place, yet that will not happen because the Premier does not have the numbers. The reform in the Premier's backyard is subject to an act that the government does not have the numbers to pass. Some members of the community are able to vote to stop change and the government has chosen areas—let us face it—where it believes the no vote will not get up. Where the government believes a no vote would get up, such as in Vincent or Bassendean, the government has proposed a boundary change. It does not allow the Dadour provision to kick in for those areas within which we have a small but very passionate group against change. Where the government believes Dadour will fail, it has said, "Yes, that is an amalgamation and we can trigger Dadour." Where it believes Dadour will get up, it has said, "That is a boundary change, not an amalgamation and the Dadour provision does not kick in." The Local Government Advisory Board recommended this, but any self-respecting board would not have delivered such a corrupt and terrible process.

As I said, this government has completely lost its way. It started in 2008 by giving lip-service to protecting the vulnerable. Over the last couple of years all we have seen are attacks on the vulnerable and seniors through increases in the cost of living. The government is making it harder for seniors to live in our community.

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore)** [6.30 pm]: I rise to contribute to the debate on the effects of the decisions of the Liberal–National government on the lives of Western Australian seniors and pensioners. I would like to start by saying a little about my electorate of Moore, which has living within in it a very large number of older Western Australians. About two weeks after the seniors discount booklet was issued I had to apply for more copies of it, which is a fair indication of how many seniors live in my electorate. I have now gone through two-and-a-bit office allocations of the seniors discount booklet and I am still getting demands for it. The Country Age Pension Fuel Card, which is supplied through the royalties for regions scheme, is also very popular in my electorate, and many hundreds, if not thousands, of my constituents have access to that fuel card. They do not have access, in the main, to a high level of public transport, although there are a couple of exceptions that I might mention later. The fuel card helps to offset two things: firstly, the lack of subsidised public transport for pensioners in my electorate; and, secondly, the higher cost of fuel in areas of my electorate, especially in the midwest, than in the wheatbelt and Perth areas.

As many people have aged they have chosen to stay in the electorate of Moore, and they leave the electorate only when the lack of aged-care facilities forces them to do so. The beauty of the Moore electorate, especially in the coastal areas, continues to attract many retirees from further inland and the metropolitan area. They come to settle in coastal communities such as Kalbarri, Dongara and Jurien Bay and also the communities along the Gingin coast. Nearer to Perth, many seniors are also settling in the foothills of Chittering, especially in the Maryville subdivisions, and in the foothills of Toodyay. Seniors are choosing to move to some of the less expensive areas of the inland parts of my electorate, and I know a number of seniors who have moved to towns such as Eneabba and Mowara in recent times to take advantage of cheaper housing and the facilities available there, which they can access and which gives them a much better cost of living than elsewhere.

Some of the issues highlighted by the member for Butler, such as the lack of mental health services and other health services that exist in areas on the outskirts of the metropolitan area, also manifest in the foothill areas around the electorate of Moore, which shares a boundary with the electorates of Butler and Swan Hills. There is a commonality of interest to try to get to the root cause of some of those problems, which have existed for many years. Those issues are not new and have not been brought about by decisions in the last couple of years; they have manifested themselves over decades.

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One of the ways to address that in my electorate, at least, is through funding from royalties for regions. We have heard members of the other side of the house question the value of royalties for regions to address the issues that face seniors and pensioners in country areas. It has been said that royalties for regions is being used simply to fund normal government functions and that it has not brought any benefits to the people of the electorates at all. That is absolute rubbish! Royalties for regions is bringing a billion dollars a year into regional Western Australia—money that would not have been available without that program—and it will continue to do so into the future under the good guidance of the current Minister for Regional Development.

Some things that have benefited from royalties for regions in my electorate include the very recent funding of the Wangaree Community Centre in Lancelin, which I and a member for Agricultural Region in the other place Hon Martin Aldridge are due to open on 6 November. On 12 December I am also scheduled to open extensions to the frail-aged lodge in Moora that received well over \$2 million in royalties for regions funding to make that extension possible to improve the lives of people in the central midlands area.

Other areas have also benefited from royalties for regions. Quite recently I accompanied the Minister for Regional Development to Northhampton for the opening of the extensions to Pioneer Lodge, which again was made possible from funding from royalties for regions. I recently opened the refurbished and rebuilt Eneabba nursing post, which was completely destroyed by white ants in recent years but which, thanks to royalties for regions and other sources of funding, has been restored and is enriching the lives of the people of Eneabba. It also provides a vital service on Brand Highway, where there are no medical services between Dongara and Gingin.

As I said before, there is not much in the way of public transport in the electorate of Moore. Along with the member for Central Wheatbelt, I was very sad to see the threat to the *AvonLink* after a decision made a little over a year ago. It was in fact royalties for regions funding that has helped the *AvonLink* run again into the future and is leading to improved services on the *AvonLink*. That service is very important for the many seniors who have chosen to live in Toodyay, as well as other areas of the Avon Valley. I am sure that seniors will continue to appreciate that service, and it would not be there without royalties for regions. There is no way that fact can be ignored.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** It is welcomed by the other members there.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes, and with the great assistance of our upper house colleagues, the member for Central Wheatbelt and I were able to secure that.

**Mr P. Papalia:** Your government cut it and now you are congratulating them.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am congratulating royalties for regions, because we would not have been able to achieve that without the assistance of royalties for regions funding.

Of course, royalties for regions has been instrumental in funding the Jurien Bay regional centre development plan, which has funding of over \$13 million to develop facilities in Jurien Bay. Royalties for regions also funded the growth plan for that centre, which is a really great plan for the central coast. The plan highlights the need to provide better services for seniors and it also highlights the need for the central coast areas of the electorate to have centres of attraction and provide great services for aged people because the increase in population that has occurred in that area is largely as a result of retirees deciding to move from Perth to the central coast. The growth in movement of retirees will continue, and with that movement services will increase, which will result in employment for the area and another boost of population as people fill the need for construction and the provision of aged-care and other services that a new population brings with it.

As the member for Butler has pointed out, there are many service gaps in the areas outside of Perth. As I said, I do not doubt that they exist in my electorate also but are being addressed one by one with the help of royalties for regions funding slowly but surely—sometimes not quite so slowly, but very surely.

Palliative care is another area of great concern in my electorate to me and many seniors. An unfortunate aspect of the geography of my electorate is that much of the palliative care service is provided in Perth and the designated regional centre is Northam. The planning for the provision of healthcare services in the wheatbelt part of my electorate seems to not address fully the needs of aged care and palliative care in my electorate. I have been the member for Moore for only a little over a year, but on a number of occasions I have been called upon to intervene in cases when people have not received adequate palliative care to make their lives comfortable. Unfortunately, my intervention has not always been successful in getting that care to those people in time. I have been involved in two very distressing cases of young men who passed away recently. They are examples of where we need to make improvements in this area. In the case of both those young men, they have young adult daughters who are very articulate and well educated women. One of them is a health professional herself. They were not able to find the palliative care they needed for their loved ones, their fathers. They are assisting me in addressing those issues with the Department of Health. One of the great problems is the fracturing between the

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service planning and the service delivery that occurs in the electorate. Aged-care services are an unmet area of need in many parts of the electorate. They are slowly being addressed. As I have said, the Moora situation has been a shining light on how that can be changed, and Moora is turning itself into a centre of excellence in aged care, and the care of its citizens right throughout their lives. Other areas, such as Northampton, are also working hard in that area. However, the gaps that exist need to be addressed, and royalties for regions is one of the instruments that will lead to that happening. These issues are not new; they have taken decades to manifest themselves. There have been decades of government neglect of investment in my electorate and similar country electorates, and royalties for regions is turning that around. It takes time, but it is making a huge difference.

The member for Maylands made the point that she felt that pensioners in country areas may be better off than those in the city. I would not go so far as to say that about some aspects. Yes, there are safe and pleasant environments for our seniors and pensioners in country areas, but the service gaps that I just identified are real, and they impinge on the quality of life of seniors in the electorate. This government is addressing those issues, although much remains to be done.

The member for West Swan was talking about local government, so I will raise that issue as well. When a vulnerable person or an aged person is dealing with large regional groups such as health services, it is very easy to fall through the cracks, as I have observed in the past year or so. One of the great institutions in country areas giving comfort to and providing services for the elderly is the local governments. When local governments service a large number of communities, the individual attention to those communities drops away. Typically, local governments, especially those comprising only a single town, have a much greater connection to their seniors, and they invest a much greater amount of their time and resources in making sure that seniors' lives are comfortable. It is not just a matter of resources; it is a matter of knowing and being in touch with the community. That is one of the great costs borne by communities when local governments are forced to amalgamate, as we have seen in other jurisdictions. This is one of the reasons why the National Party would oppose such measures in regional areas.

In wrapping up, consideration of the actions of the government, at least in my area, must take into account the great investments that have been made by royalties for regions and the great steps that have been taken in improving the lives of pensioners and seniors in my electorate.

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro)** [6.44 pm]: I stand to support the motion that this house condemn the Barnett government for the impact its mismanagement of the state budget is having on seniors and vulnerable people in our community. I will reflect for a moment on the premise of the motion. The motion is not about some slogan the National Party managed to milk for elections in 2008 and 2013. It is not about that. It is not about whether one individual electorate might have benefited inappropriately or disproportionately from one government policy or another. It is actually about whether the Barnett government is doing damage to the social fabric of Western Australia, and thereby hurting and inflicting pain on seniors and other vulnerable people. That is the premise of this motion. I would urge any speaker following me, if they do not agree with that, to address that premise. Do not echo slogans from a handout or flyer that has been printed by the party office and mailed out for free, about the gains of the party being part of a notional government that it rails against at one point and commends at another, for such things as taking away a rail service to York and then returning it. The National Party condemns the government at one point for taking away the service, and then commends itself a month or so later for getting the service back. Members should actually address the premise of the motion.

It is undeniable that the Barnett government, sadly, is not doing what conservative governments normally do, and what I would normally criticise it for—that is, just sitting there occupying the benches and enjoying the trappings of office. That would be okay by comparison. If all members opposite were doing was immersing themselves in some sort of stupor and enjoying the trappings of office, and were guilty of what Paul Keating accused the Menzies era of doing—embarking on not very much for a couple of decades—that would be okay in comparison to what is happening. We are seeing serious damage being done through the results of mismanagement and chaotic attempts to be seen to be doing something. The loss of the AAA credit rating has a consequence. Soaring debt has a consequence. The inability to rein in growth in expenditure has a consequence. We are starting to see it now. It has been going on for some time in a lot of hidden areas, but it is becoming very stark for the seniors in our community. If any members on the other side of the house do not believe seniors have been impacted by the policies of this government and of the federal government in their attacks on seniors, they are deluding themselves. The federal government cannot cut rebates for pensioners, and then pass the cuts on to the states, resulting in cuts to rebates from \$245 to \$123 for couples, and from \$163 to \$82 for singles, without having an impact. Electricity prices cannot be raised by over 77 per cent, water rates by 90 per cent —

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**Mr C.D. Hatton** interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** There is some sort of noise coming from the far end of the chamber. I think it is the member for Balcatta, and I welcome his interjection. What did he say in relation to electricity prices that have gone up 77 per cent during the time of the Barnett government? What pearl of wisdom did the member want to share?

**Mr C.D. Hatton:** You did nothing in your term of government to make it cost effective, or to reach cost realisation. All it did was spiral up, with government funds going straight into it. You didn't get the money back. You didn't increase the cost effectiveness.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The member will be aware that governments have a choice of priorities. If the government has a choice of priorities that has as its central focus keeping household costs at a reasonable and affordable level for those who are vulnerable in the community, such as pensioners and other people on fixed incomes, it must take into account things like soaring electricity costs, massive increases to water rates and increases to car registration fees. We have to prioritise expenditure and costs. The government should say to itself, "Our priority is to make the cost of living reasonable for people on fixed incomes; therefore, we will not embark upon a whole raft of unfunded, uncosted projects intended to hand some sort of bizarre future legacy to an individual who will retire before the next election." It should not do that because its intent should be to focus on providing a reasonable cost of living for people who are in vulnerable circumstances, such as pensioners. If the government has a different policy decision and it does not prioritise keeping the cost of living reasonable for people on fixed incomes, I understand that. I concede that is a normal process and a normal approach of a conservative government. I understand that that is the approach of the Barnett government. Clearly, the government does not prioritise making the cost of living reasonable for people such as pensioners and people on fixed incomes. That is fine. The government should not expect me to agree that that is a good policy.

I will go on and address more specifically other vulnerable people in the community. I think the way seniors have been treated by the Barnett government has been atrocious. It has clearly been demonstrated that they have been taken for granted. I think that is also the case with the Abbott government. I suggest to any senior out there who might read this speech in *Hansard* or hear my comments that they consider how they have been treated by the government. They should not look at what it says; they should look at what it does. These people know from the bills that are coming in the letterbox that the government does not care about them. The government assumes that these people will vote for it anyway. I do not think that is the case. The response by seniors across Western Australia to the Premier of this state has been demonstrated in a consistent fashion in a series of polls that shows he is the single most unpopular Premier of Western Australia in the history of Newspoll. Beyond that, he has become the single most unpopular leader in the nation.

**Mr C.D. Hatton:** Which polls are you looking at?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I hear another noise. There is more noise and more interjections. The member for Balcatta might want to check a thing called net disapproval, which in the entire history of Newspoll has never registered such a significant negative for a Premier at any time. I am not talking about disapproval during an election.

*Point of Order*

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** There needs to be some consistency here, Mr Acting Speaker. The member for Warnbro has taken some interjections, but the member for Balcatta thinks he has the right to interject. Could you please bring him to order, because that is what you do to members on our side.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz):** There is no point of order because the member for Warnbro continues to respond.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** The member invited me to interject.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** That is correct. There is no point of order. Member for Warnbro, if you do not want interjections, please direct yourself through the Chair.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** For the benefit of the Chair, I welcomed the member for Balcatta's interjections some 10 minutes ago. I know there is a lag down that part of the chamber, but I will push on.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I encourage you to direct your remarks through the Chair.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I was about to push on and depart from the comments I was making about the appalling treatment of seniors by the Barnett government. They know how they have been treated; that has been reflected in the polls. It will be consistently reflected in the polls. This Premier is the single most unpopular leader in the

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country. He is absolutely and undeniably the most unpopular Premier in the history of Newspoll at any time during, before and after elections.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I wanted to focus on another vulnerable section of the community, which can clearly be measured as an indicator of the impact on the vulnerable. It is a field that I often discuss because I have the shadow portfolio. The population in our prisons reflects the impact that the government is having on the vulnerable. When I speak of the vulnerable in this case, I am talking about the poor, women and Aboriginal people. I am not talking about serious offenders. Despite the good humour of the interaction between me and those opposite that was conducted earlier—quite frankly, I am serious about those comments, although I welcome the good humour of our exchange—I am serious about this subject, as members know. It is my belief that the Barnett government, which those opposite are all part of, is responsible for having incarcerated more poor Aboriginal people and mentally ill people than any government in the history of this state.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** How's that so?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** As I said, the member knows I am serious about this.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** I want to know. How is that so?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** At the moment we have more people in our prison system than we have had at any time in history. I think there are 5 368 people in our prison system, to date. I will check that figure. By virtue of the fact that the percentage of people in our prison system who are Aboriginal has remained unchanged throughout the term of this government—it is almost identical to the previous government at 40 per cent—by definition, there are more Aboriginal people. It has increased dramatically. I am not just making it up; I get the statistics through asking questions of the government. The growth in the prison muster from 1 June 2008 to two days ago was 43 per cent. The growth of the muster as a consequence of the percentage of Aboriginal people remaining unchanged means that significantly more Aboriginal people are in the system. That concerns me, and I know it concerns the government—it concerns everyone in this place. What really concerns me is my assessment of the composition of the prison muster. It remains unchanged from when I first started asking these questions in early 2009 to the most recent time I asked the same questions. The breakdown of the people going into prison was confirmed by an observation made by the Chief Justice of Western Australia in mid-2010, who said that if there were characteristics of the increase in the prison muster, they could be characterised as being people who are economically disadvantaged, as evidenced through their incapacity to pay fines; Aboriginal people; mentally ill people; and people who have offended at the lower end of the spectrum. That is not me saying that; that was an observation of the Chief Justice, who is the same Chief Justice that we have today. If I sent him the same statistical breakdown that I received from asking about all those categories and what percentage of the overall population they represent, it has remained unchanged yet the population has increased dramatically.

**Dr K.D. Hames:** If we formed the view to be tougher on crime, surely whoever does the crime will end up there.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Was the minister not listening to what I said about the composition of the overall makeup of the prison system? Those who have offended at the lower end of the spectrum—those who are incapable of paying those fines—are economically disadvantaged, as indicated through their incapacity to pay fines. Does the minister know how much that figure has grown under his government? I do. Note to self: go and have a look. Check out some of the questions on notice that I have been asking of the minister. There are a number of fine defaulters who are in prison solely for the purpose of paying off fines, not because they have done something else. I have encountered people in my own electorate who might get a \$68 parking fine.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

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