

BARNETT GOVERNMENT — IMPACT ON SENIORS

Motion

MS M.M. QUIRK (Girrawheen) [4.31 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for its lack of leadership and planning for the increase in WA's ageing population, for its failure to consult seniors in the course of its concession review and for a range of decisions which disproportionately impact on seniors.

Before I address the motion, with the indulgence of the house I would like to make a few comments about Ken Marston, one of the leading advocates for seniors in Western Australia, who will be retiring at the end of the year. I am indebted to Judy Hogben, president of the Council on the Ageing WA, for providing some biographical notes.

Ken has devoted his work life to enabling, supporting and improving the lives of vulnerable people in our community, particularly Aboriginal people and seniors. Striving to ensure that people have a fair go and are valued and respected has been at the core of Ken's life, in both his work and his personal life. For 35 years Ken's commitment has led to challenging but rewarding work, challenges that most would find too difficult. In Ken's first work appointment, as a fresh-faced graduate, he was the sole non-Aboriginal employee in the Moongoong Darwung Kununurra settlement for the Miriwoong people who were displaced by the Ord River development. He was responsible for all liaison with government and the wider community, fundraising, financial management and bookkeeping, assisting the community with traditional activities, and providing community adult education. This was clearly not a nine-to-five role and was one that in many ways reinforced Ken's commitment to social justice and improving equality of opportunity and access.

In the early 1980s he was based at Laverton and was responsible for the delivery of welfare services to Indigenous communities throughout a large region. His work involved capacity building, assisting community organisations to develop, and statutory work also of juvenile justice, child protection, associated court work, supporting youth centres and their activities, financial assistance and arranging indigent burials. Ken continued his extraordinary service to our rural and remote communities, including Aboriginal people, for the next 15 years or so through to 1996.

He also worked as a lecturer in community management and development at Curtin University, and in that role he continued his work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, developing, supporting and enabling career development and assessing their performance. He had a hands-on role that involved considerable travel to regional Australia for on-the-job assessment of degree and associate degree-level students. Since 1996, Ken's extraordinary contribution to our community and his leadership has come through policy work and advocacy at a state and national level. What has not changed is his ongoing commitment to those who have had few resources to advocate on their behalf or who have greater need for assistance or recognition.

He worked for the Western Australian Council of Social Service from November 1996 to mid-2000 as a senior policy officer and that gave Ken some opportunity to influence government policy positions as well as community attitudes. Since being at COTA, Ken has been a pre-eminent advocate for senior citizens and for a society that better recognises and values older Australians. His leadership at COTA has had a marked impact on the state's policy on ageing and on legislation changes, including that relevant to retirement villages, elder abuse, concessions, and the broader field of active ageing. Of note has been his focus on the needs and rights of seniors who are less visible in or overlooked by our society: those with limited financial resources, those with mental health issues, those from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and those who had no-one to advocate on their behalf.

Ken's work has directly translated into improved quality of life for many hundreds of senior Western Australians, both within Western Australia and in other jurisdictions. President Judy Hogben has observed that as a leader within COTA, Ken has been inspirational; he is a quiet but natural leader, who leads by example, and as a result has very committed staff who are prepared to go above and beyond their stated roles to progress seniors' issues even under current financial constraints. Judy says that during this period of her working relationship with Ken, she found him to be nothing short of an extraordinary man in his commitment to and advocacy by and on behalf of seniors.

Ken's commitment to promoting positive images of ageing was evident in an opinion piece in *The West Australian* this week entitled "There's no need to feel old—it's just a number". I commend that article to all members. It suggests a bright future for all of us who are ageing and shows that the glass is not half empty but half full. I certainly, and on behalf of the opposition, wish Ken well in what I know will be an enthusiastic and action-packed retirement. The last words need to go to Ken who concluded his article with the following —

Yes, getting older can be a challenge at any age, but it is possible to love later life.

The alternative is so much worse.

Thank you for that indulgence, Mr Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Indulgence granted.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I now return to the motion.

This week is Seniors Week, as most members would know, and it is the annual state celebration event in which we recognise and thank seniors for their contributions to the community; we challenge negative stereotypes of seniors and present a positive image of ageing; we encourage younger Western Australians to make decisions to improve their health and wellbeing for later life; and we promote intergenerational celebration of seniors. These are all very commendable intentions and give us pause to reflect. However, the warm inner glow soon dissipates and we are left to consider how to plan for and create a community of which seniors and the elderly can remain an integral and fulfilled part. I want to pose a few questions today and I do that in the context that we have an ageing population which, by 2020, will mean that 21 per cent of our population will be over 65. The questions I will pose are varied. They indicate that there are real challenges for government. In the words of the motion, the government has failed to consider how it can deal with many of these challenges. I ask: Why are only a few people in this state government allocated to the specific task of planning and policy for this significant change? Who is responsible within government for ensuring cross-agency change to address these demographic shifts? How will we ensure that employment practices change so that people who want to work in their later years are not only able to do so but are welcome? What changes need to be made to provide a greater amount of affordable housing, and what changes need to be made to provide a style of housing that is more suitable for older persons? What measures are being implemented to reduce the social isolation and loneliness of the elderly, and to encourage ongoing active participation in the community? How are we addressing the rising levels of homelessness among older women? What laws should we enact to ensure greater levels of security of housing tenure for the elderly? What steps are being taken to better integrate the state healthcare system with the residential aged-care system, which is the responsibility of the federal government? How can we ensure the provision of an adequate number of aged-care residential beds? Given that a greater amount of government information and services is being initiated and transmitted electronically, how can we address the digital divide among that section of the aged community who are not computer literate? What do we need to do to address ageism, especially as it impacts on the ability of older people to gain employment? Why is it not better known that people aged 75 years and over, particularly males, remain at very high risk of suicide? In fact, the suicide rate in Australia is highest among men aged 85 and over. Why has the access of older people to mental health services been falling behind that of the remainder of the population; and that, of course, is from a low base? What investment are we putting into research and facilities to deal with the fact that the incidence of dementia in Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley is fivefold the incidence in the general population? Do we have interpreting staff in our hospitals when needed to assist older patients from diverse backgrounds who revert to their first language in later years?

I pose some other questions. How can our seniors and elderly enjoy some level of income security and certainty when they are burdened by increasing massive hikes in government charges and taxes and ad hoc changes to concessions, done clumsily and without consultation? What planning is taking place within the training and technical and further education sector to encourage more people to take on the career of carer? How many people will be deterred from doing the entry level certificate III, or nursing, at TAFE, when the fees for those courses have increased exponentially? How can we prevent an estimated 10 500 people in Western Australian each year becoming victims of elder abuse? This number is, as I have said, a conservative estimate.

What can we do to instil a sense of urgency in the Attorney General to introduce laws in a range of areas that will assist in addressing some of these issues? The Guardianship and Administration Act review was announced in July 2013. The Attorney General received a final report earlier this year, yet we are still waiting for positive action on that issue. The Guardianship and Administration Act covers issues such as enduring powers of attorney, which are often used as a vehicle for financial abuse. The second tranche of the Retirement Villages Amendment Act was foreshadowed in 2012. We are also waiting for action from the Attorney General on that issue. That covers the management of residential villages, and seniors' right of redress if there is malfeasance by the management of a retirement village. There is also the review of the residential park laws, which have been the subject of much deliberation in Parliament and in committees, and elsewhere, the submissions for which closed in 2014. Another issue, which is probably less pressing, is the need for a code of practice under the Fair Trading Act to regulate the prepaid funeral sector and to provide certainty about the treatment and investment of prepaid consumer funds. These matters are all apparently in the Attorney General's in-tray, and he does not consider them important enough to take prompt action on. We are asking why those matters have not been addressed. Is this lack of expedition by government evidence of a lack of regard for key issues that impact

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on older Western Australians, and is that the view of all members of the government? What additional resources are being given to the Public Advocate to meet the increasing demand for guardianship services? Along with an ageing population, we have increasing levels of dementia, and the need for a third party to step in as a guardian is becoming more frequent.

In the wake of the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, in practical terms how will we manage the interface between disability and ageing? Likewise, how can there be improved cooperative integration between different styles and levels of government to better manage difficult and stressful transitions within health care? Why does it take a town hall meeting packed with seniors to get the government to sit up and pay attention—and then, I am sorry to say, only momentarily?

That is not to say that some excellent work is not being done in Western Australia for seniors. Many local governments, in particular the City of Melville and the City of Mandurah, which have been accredited by the World Health Organization as being age-friendly communities, are assiduous in ensuring that their ratepayers are able to live at home for as long as they can. They provide the necessary services so that older ratepayers can remain in their homes and participate in the community. The WHO criteria are extensive. They measure things such as the built environment, transport, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication, and community support and health services.

However, local governments are given insufficient resources to do this work. Most of the research on this area is pushed down to local government level. The increasing number of services means an increase in costs for local governments. As we heard today, there is increasing pressure on local governments to contain any rises in their rates. Therefore, not only should the state government be contributing more to the provision of resources and capital, but also there needs to be a greater level of cooperation between the state government and local governments. Likewise, I think a range of non-government organisations—I mentioned the Council on the Ageing Western Australia—are doing impressive work addressing the needs of and advocating for senior Western Australians. The problem is that this advocacy is by and large being ignored by the government. These questions that I pose are pressing and these serious problems are not being treated seriously. To repeat a phrase that is often used, “Serious problems need serious people to solve them.”

It is clear that seniors are an afterthought under the Barnett government. The government simply has no vision of a future comprised of a greater percentage of senior and elderly Western Australians. We think we need to plan for a future in which older Western Australians are valued and respected, and they can continue to contribute fully to community life. Seniors in Western Australia are often thought of as one size fits all—grey haired, bespectacled and usually cast in negative or derogatory terms. To craft policy responses for this mythical homogenous group is simply inexact and not good enough. We know that the population of seniors is far from homogenous and includes everyone from 65 years to 105 years—the active, the frail, the well-connected and the isolated. They are rich, poor, straight, gay, tech savvy, computer literate and speak many languages. We need to really listen to that diverse and growing sector of our community so that we can plan a community that values its members irrespective of their age. In this context, the Barnett government needs to lift its game and address these very real issues and the questions that I have posed. I am sure that my colleagues who follow me to speak will pose additional questions.

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [4.52 pm]: I rise to speak to this motion. It is extremely appropriate that the shadow Minister for Seniors and Volunteering has moved this motion and that we are debating it today, and I would like to add my contribution as the member for Maylands. The motion reads —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for its lack of leadership and planning for the increase in WA’s ageing population, for its failure to consult seniors in the course of its concession review and for a range of decisions which disproportionately impact on seniors.

I would like to speak around those topics, and I suppose the place to start is to reflect that I have been running seniors forums, as I am sure many of my colleagues on both sides of the house do, across my electorate for eight years. For the first six years, I chose to run about five small forums a year in the various precincts across my electorate. At those occasions, it was very clear to me that many of the people who attended were lonely and many were looking for information about how to manage their lives past retirement. Some were young retirees, if you like, who were looking for advice and support on this new phase of their lives, which, as we all know, is increasingly long these days. Changes to medical technology and great progress in health across the board means that people are simply living longer and there is a lot more time after retirement, and we have to make sure that we plan effectively to meet the needs of people post retirement and people into their senior years.

Two years ago, I decided that it might have more impact if, instead of running five forums a year and freaking my staff out, I ran one forum a year and made it a big one. So we changed our format and last year just over 200 seniors attended our first electorate-wide forum . They were fantastic and I remember very clearly the range

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 11 November 2015]

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of issues that they brought to that forum. This was a year ago, and members may remember the federal cuts that were happening across the seniors portfolio at that time. The federal shadow minister and the Leader of the Opposition addressed that forum and talked through what was happening and what the changes meant for people's lives. I am absolutely confident that the 200 people who turned up to the forum were pretty cranky about what was happening. They were angry that a government had got into power that they saw was suddenly attacking a vulnerable part of our community—those with the least flexibility in many respects to their income and living arrangements and people who were going through massive life changes at that particular point as well.

Cut to this week, which is Seniors Week 2015. On Friday, I am running another forum. Again, we are booked out. As I am sure that members would agree, members of our communities love it when we put on these forums and invite them to come. They love to come together and talk about their combined needs and to network. I am very proud that I can bring my community together and that I can bring significant policy-makers into the room to talk to seniors in my community. I am really interested to hear what they think about the state government's latest changes that affect seniors. Members heard my colleague talk about changes to the cost-of-living rebate. I have the letter that Synergy sent to seniors about changes to the cost-of-living assistance payment. As part of the annual price changes—I assume that is fees and charges—the state government has reviewed the eligibility criteria of the cost-of-living assistance payment, or COLA as it was known. It is now called the energy assistance payment, EAP. I am not sure why we have to change the name of something just because its value or how it can be paid changes—but, fair go, it is always good to confuse seniors under these circumstances, is it not? Never keep the same name for more than 12 months. These changes mean that all seniors in our communities who hold a current valid and eligible Centrelink commonwealth concession card are eligible for the new energy assistance payment. A senior's Centrelink commonwealth concession card had to be registered with Synergy. If it was not registered, the senior would not get their EAP.

I think I might just stop there, because that is a point of contention. There are people who did not know about that change or they did not get their letters. Let us face it; it is pretty easy to miss a bit of mail. For the people in my community who were not given the opportunity to clearly understand that there was going to be a change, it has been difficult, because they are now playing catch-up and trying to find out how to apply for EAP and get their paperwork in place. It is additional work for us, let us face it, but that is our job. It is untidy for the seniors in our community, and it is disturbing for them as well, because if a person thinks that they have a certain level of concession and then when they get down to it and the bills arrive and things start happening and they find that the level of concession is different, it is very concerning to people who might be on well-balanced budgets. I think that was an unnecessary failure in consultation and communication, and I think this government should be slapped over the wrist for that failure and it should be playing catch-up with the community. These are people who have worked throughout their lives, paid taxes and now want to live their lives—some of them might be extravagant lives and some of them might be simple lives. For many, as I said, it is a simple life with a finely balanced budget.

I want to reflect on the other issue that is a big concern for seniors who come to my forums, and that is housing. I will segue quickly into what the Council on the Ageing (WA) offers through its Seniors' Housing Centre. I think I am correct in saying that a year or so ago, the funding for some of the programs COTA offers was changed. Some of the support it offers the community around housing decisions had to be rejigged due to lack of funding. I do not think I am wrong in saying that. The Seniors' Housing Centre that COTA runs operates between COTA and Consumer Protection in the Department of Commerce. Its purpose is to give information and referrals to seniors on housing options. They help with buying and building homes, retirement villages, residential parks, strata title properties, residential aged care, renting, boarding and lodging and family agreements. They also provide help for seniors to stay with their family and with granny flats, reverse mortgages and accessing financial equity from their home. Those are the services COTA offers. I want to talk about the man behind that because I too would like permission from the house to spend a bit of time recognising the valuable work of Ken Marsden.

I am very privileged to have known and worked with Ken for many years—I think over 12 years. He was a senior policy officer at the Western Australian Council of Social Service before I started at WACOSS as the chief executive officer. I just missed him, but he had just started at COTA when I became the CEO of WACOSS. It is safe to say that without his guidance and incredible compassion and sensitivity to the issues and his vast knowledge, I would not have been able to so quickly pick up the issues we were facing in this community for older people. I have known Ken through some very, very difficult times in his life that he has steered himself through, and I am very proud to call him a friend. He will remain a friend until he perhaps goes to live on an island somewhere in his luxurious retirement. But given that he has been working in the community sector for most of his adult life, I doubt it will be all that palatial, I might say, because we all know the community sector is not all that well paid. Nevertheless, Ken is a remarkable human being with interesting family connections and he has made a remarkable contribution to this state. In particular his representation of people who are not self-funded retirees and his untiring efforts to put their case to all levels of government, his clever campaigning and

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his intellectual capacity around this issue are remarkable. He will be missed. COTA will move on, I am sure; these organisations are resilient but it will be a different COTA without Ken.

I have a soft spot for not just Ken and COTA but also Judy Hogben, the president of COTA. She and her husband are members of the Maylands Tennis Club, so I see them quite regularly at various tennis functions. The Maylands Tennis Club is one of many recreational and sporting clubs in my electorate that offer a wonderful opportunity for seniors in my electorate to come together and have a pretty good time. I always enjoy myself at the tennis club and the Maylands Peninsula Sport and Recreation Club functions. It is in the most glorious location right on the banks of the Swan River. The two—the tennis club and the sporting club with the bowling club inside—are side by side. I think members of this chamber who bowl and are part of the parliamentary bowling team would have been in my electorate bowling at the Maylands Peninsula Sport and Recreation Club. As I look at the minister, I remember seeing him there earlier this year, I think it was. I come back to COTA and the National Seniors Association Ltd, which both play a valuable role for seniors in this community. Of course, the NSA responds to the needs of self-funded retirees, so sometimes their agenda is different from that run by COTA, but it plays a valuable role.

I do not think some of the other concerns about those who are most vulnerable in this area have been adequately addressed in my community. An increasing number of women find themselves homeless or struggling to find appropriate accommodation. It is still a fact that, on many occasions, women outlive their male partners and are on their own. Sometimes circumstances mean that they find themselves either without their own home or in a very vulnerable position in their own home. The kinds of services that organisations offer in the community are the very things this government should be supporting, particularly for older women who find themselves homeless. They should be looked after and found places where they can continue to be valuable members of society.

I have also had occasion to give advice to some constituents around the issue of elder abuse, which, unfortunately, is becoming more prevalent in our society. I personally do not know why that is the case but as with many things, perhaps it is more obvious now because the mechanisms for seeing what is happening in our community are more accessible and there are more of them. In my electorate there are a number of accommodation options and housing alternatives for seniors. There is Camelia Court Retirement Village, Mertome Village, Amana Living, Bethany and Bayswater residences. They are all well frequented and well looked after. An amazing organisation that would do very well to have some support from this state government is Bayswater ECHO Community Services. This year I attended ECHO's annual general meeting, and want to again put on the record my gratitude for the incredible work it does delivering a home and community care program across my electorate. It helps older people with personal care, provides social support and helps with transport, home and garden maintenance and gives carer respite. It comprises an amazing group of people who have been working in my community for 32 years. Recently, the Central Eastern Business Association gave out its business awards. I am a bit biased because I am the patron of ECHO, but I am very pleased to say that Central Eastern Business Association members voted ECHO to be an outstanding non-profit organisation in my region. ECHO was the runner-up for the best community not-for-profit organisation. It works tirelessly in providing help, but it does so while often scratching for funding. The City of Bayswater has been supporting Bayswater ECHO with accommodation for a very long time. In fact, it moved into the State Emergency Service building when the SES was relocated. Bayswater ECHO made a strategic decision to look at its growth into the future.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L.L. BAKER: It is looking to the future and decided that, given the changes in the federal arrangements around aged care and the HACC program, it will have to grow. To grow it will need to relocate, hopefully, remaining somewhere within my electorate of Maylands, in either the City of Stirling or the City of Bayswater. Either way, costs will be incurred as a result of this move.

ECHO Community Services is a reputable organisation; it has been in my electorate for 32 years delivering excellent services. Members in the chamber might know some of the board members. I will start with the one who has just retired. I am sure members are familiar with an old fellow named Clive Brown. I think Clive has been on the board of ECHO for over 10 years.

Mr M.P. Murray: Not the same one, surely.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Yes, it is surely the same one. It is the same Clive Brown. Clive Brown and Sally Crawley have both been involved in ECHO. Sally retired from ECHO several years ago. Clive has stayed to help the organisation be sustainable and to ensure that it is well structured into the future. Clive has given a remarkable amount of himself to Bayswater ECHO. I want to thank him and wish him well on his way. He is still consulting to industry and spending a lot of time overseas. He is doing an amazing job. Unfortunately, he is no longer on the ECHO board.

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The CEO of Bayswater ECHO is a chap by the name of Phil Baker. I point out that he is no relation of mine. Phil joined ECHO in 2012 after more than 40 years in the health and disability aged-care sectors. He has an honours degree in sociology from the University of London. He was in hospital administration in the United Kingdom before moving to Perth and working with Activ. Phil is just delightful. He has single-handedly set up this organisation for a very positive future. Along with Christine Groves, the manager, who is also an outstanding employee of the organisation, they deliver a great service in my community. The president of Bayswater ECHO this year is Lorna MacGregor. I think it is her second term. She is a very impressive woman who has held senior roles at Activ, healthdirect and Landgate, and has served as a chief operations officer with Panorama Health Network.

Other ECHO board members that members may have come across in their travels include Jay Hardison, the vice-president. Jay is a wonderful man. He has a degree in psychology and education. He lives in Bayswater and holds a very senior role with the City of Belmont. He has a very keen interest in and great talent for making sure the community is properly supported. Other board members include Kathleen Howell, who has a nursing degree. She is an amazing board member. She helps us with occupational health matters. Juliane Emmett studied at the Claremont School of Art. She has done lots of different things in her career. She has been with ECHO for 13 years as a volunteer and is now on the board, along with Catherine Jordan, Christine Goodall and Jim Johnson. Jim is a great guy. He is an electrical engineer. He got his qualification in the US and served in the Navy for 10 years. He worked in electronics and then in the justice system back here in Australia. He has been with Activ and ECHO ever since. These are wonderful people. Bayswater ECHO brings an amazing range of services to my community. I am putting their current needs around accommodation on this government's agenda because I may choose to write to the minister in the future and talk to him a bit more about this issue.

Before I sit down, I wish to say that today I had the great privilege of attending a Remembrance Day ceremony. I do not know what the ceremonies that other members attend are like. Sometimes the one I attend makes me feel a bit sad because each year a few people are missing. This year I wanted to recognise a few of the people who strongly support the Bedford–Morley RSL. The president is quite a young chap. Russell Shearing-Jones is a good young fellow doing wonderful things for the Bedford–Morley RSL. The secretary, Colin Robb, is also a young fellow. He is a bit taller and maybe a bit longer in the tooth but he is a remarkable contributor to the RSL. Reg Cream and his wife, Wendy, have been supporters of that organisation for many years. One of the two really treasured people in that RSL branch that I have worked with is Ted Dubberlin. Ted is a legend. I think he has been involved with the RSL for 65 years. He is a remarkable human being. He was a lieutenant colonel before he retired. I cannot remember the name of his unit. Were they rats?

Mr P.B. Watson: The Rats of Tobruk?

Ms L.L. BAKER: I do not know that that is what he was. I am very embarrassed to say that I do not know.

Mr J.M. Francis: What was his conflict?

Ms L.L. BAKER: He was one of those they sent in that nobody knew about, in New Guinea and the like.

Mr J.M. Francis: Was it Z Force?

Ms L.L. BAKER: Yes, the Z Force. I believe that he is one of the few remaining members still alive. He is an amazing individual.

I also wish to mention the wonderful Les Smith. I was not able to see Les today, but he often comes to this service. Les is the proud father of somebody that all members know—Stephen Smith.

Having recognised the wonderful people in my RSL and thanked them for their contribution, I think I have probably said enough on this motion. I acknowledge the wonderful work of all those people involved in supporting seniors in my electorate.

MR P.B. WATSON (Albany) [5.16 pm]: It gives me great pleasure to talk about seniors in my electorate.

Mr P. Abetz: Talk about yourself!

Mr P.B. WATSON: That was so quick. I am just overcome with emotion after that interjection. I do not even know the name of the member who interjected.

We are talking about seniors. Seniors are a vital part of my community. I host a seniors' concert every year, which started 15 years ago —

Mr J.M. Francis: A seniors' concert, did you say?

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes, that is what we call it.

Mr J.M. Francis: I was not sure whether you said “conference” or “concert”.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I am getting a lot of interruptions, Mr Speaker.

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The SPEAKER: Now you know what it is like, member for Albany.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Thank you, once again, for your lack of support.

We hold a seniors' concert every year. It has been going for 15 years. We started with 68 people in the Mount Lockyer Primary School hall 15 years ago. We now have a cut-off of 475 people every year. It was great to see people lining up outside my office on Monday. It was like a box office. People were lined right up the street. Three people were on the phones. We do not charge anything to attend. All the tickets went in 40 minutes. It just shows that seniors in the community are looking for things to do. We do not look after our seniors enough. I am talking about the state government, local government and the federal government. Seniors are out there. They have done all the hard yards over the years. When they get to a certain age, we tend to forget them. We tend to forget the contribution they have made. When I go doorknocking, the seniors I meet do not want to let me go. They just want to talk to me. They see me and they want to say hello and have a cup of tea. After I have had about six cups of tea and eight pieces of cake in one street, I go to the next street and I want to know where the toilets are. All these seniors want to do is talk to someone.

We have a great volunteer centre down in Albany. These are not really old seniors; they are people who were made redundant probably in their early to mid-50s. They are dying for something to do.

Mr M.P. Murray: They certainly are —

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes, they are.

Mr M.P. Murray: — dying.

Mr P.B. WATSON: They just want something to do, to stop them from becoming vegetables in their own home. A lot of people will not come out. A lot of people have issues with crime in the community, depending on where they live in Albany. Some people just do not go out at night. They cannot afford their power bills so there is not much they can do at night. A lot of people turn off their lights early at night because this government has whacked up their water and power bills, their rates and everything like that. They cannot afford to go out, even if they want to.

My mum and dad were in a seniors' village. They were very lucky because they could go up to the hall and see other people and do things. These days I know that a lot of seniors in my electorate cannot afford to go out. We can have only 460 people at our seniors' concert. Then again, we have a waiting list of nearly 100. The following year we turn those 100 over so they are the first ones accepted. We would love to have the concert in a bigger hall but we do not have a facility in Albany. We cannot really have it in the magnificent Albany Entertainment Centre that the Labor Party—Alannah MacTiernan and I, with the help of the Great Southern Development Commission's Bruce Manning—got for Albany.

Then the Liberal Party came along and took all the credit for it. A lot of seniors are volunteers in our community. There is a tremendous group of ladies at the Albany Red Cross. Looking at the volunteers in our community, seniors have been there for a long time. Some of them keep volunteering when they retire. Albany Sea Rescue Squad is an award-winning group. One lady at Albany Surf Life Saving Club is in her 80s. She keeps going along every week. This year, Albany Surf Life Saving Club was awarded the Western Australian Surf Life Saving Club of the Year. It missed out on the national one. A lot of seniors work behind the scenes there.

Before I forget, I would like to congratulate WA Senior of the Year, Graham Edwards, a former member of Parliament. As we all know, Graham Edwards is a tremendous Western Australian and a tremendous person. He overcame severe obstacles on his return from Vietnam. There is no more positive person than Graham Edwards, not only for what he has done for his community over the years, but also for his strength of character and the fact that he continues in his job at the RSL. He is a role model for everybody. He is a role model not only to the young people but also to the old diggers. He has always got a kind word for everyone. One would not meet anyone more deserving than Graham Edwards to become WA Senior of the Year.

The Senior Citizens Centre in Albany does a great job. People can get a good feed down there on Thursdays. I am sure when the member for South Perth or the Speaker visits Albany, they will head there for a cheap roast. They have a really good feed there. I do not know whether they could accommodate both men at the same time!

Mr D.A. Templeman: The member for South Perth would love to get his teeth on a bit of mutton.

Mr P.B. WATSON: He is a bit of mutton!

I heard the member for Girrawheen say that in 2020, 21 per cent of the population will be seniors. That is a real worry.

Ms M.M. Quirk: It is a challenge, not a worry.

Mr P.B. WATSON: It is a challenge. The Labor Party will be in government then. I do not know whether I will be a member then. We cannot keep saying, "Put seniors to the side; build Elizabeth Quay; build a footy stadium." We cannot spend billions of dollars when seniors cannot turn their lights on at night, they cannot put

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rugs around them to keep warm, and they cannot go out because they cannot afford it. The Over 50s Recreation Association in Albany does a great job, although they are a little hazardous on the roads riding their bikes!

One of the big issues is the downsizing of housing. A lot of seniors in Albany want to get into smaller housing, and not only the ones in Department of Housing accommodation. Seniors have had their families. If mum or dad dies, they are on their own in a three-bedroom house and they want to downsize. It is a big thing to sell the house, to pay the stamp duty and find something affordable, and have a bit of money left over. They could be told to go into a unit, but for most of them all their money goes into that and they have no money to live on. That is a huge issue.

Last Monday, a lady aged in her 60s came to see me. She said that she did not want to worry me, but she had had a few issues in her life. She had her own house but then she got depression and everything fell apart. By the time she paid all the bills and everything, she lost her house. At 60, she is not old enough to get the pension—that is 65. Now she has to live on unemployment money.

Mr J.E. McGrath: I thought women got the pension at 60.

Mr P.B. WATSON: No. The member is five years out.

Dr A.D. Buti: You're out of touch, member for South Perth.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Not everyone lives in South Perth, member for South Perth.

Mr J.E. McGrath: I live in Como; I cannot afford South Perth!

Mr P.B. WATSON: That is more luxurious. Mr Speaker, I need your protection.

The SPEAKER: Please, member for South Perth.

Mr J.E. McGrath: He is an easy target.

Mr P.B. WATSON: This is a very serious issue, member for South Perth.

A lot of women aged over 60 have not got the skills to go out to work. This lady wants the skills, but there is no training available for her to learn information technology. She does not know how to use a laptop or anything like that. Her children are interstate and they cannot afford to help because they have their own families. It is a real issue. We talk about unemployment and all that, but these people are slipping through the cracks.

Mr J.E. McGrath: There is a group in South Perth called Southcare. They have brought in a program that helps train older people how to use computers.

The SPEAKER: Can you discuss this with the member for Albany afterwards?

Mr P.B. WATSON: There used to be a program called First Click but the Liberal–National government knocked it on the head. Seniors could go along and learn everything about it. Seniors went into the Royal Australian Air Force Association Amity Village in Albany to do it. It was sponsored by the former Labor government but this government knocked it on the head. Do not come in here, member for South Perth, and say there is something in South Perth when such programs have been knocked off all over Western Australia. Shame! I do not know how government members sleep at night.

Seniors are living longer. In my younger days—a long time ago—I used to run in the morning from Swanbourne halfway down to Fremantle and back. I would not see anyone. I would maybe see the SAS boys running past with a full pack. Now, there are probably 200 or 300 people along that same area, because people want to live longer. These people who are now living longer want more things to do. Seniors sitting in their homes doing nothing want things to do. I do not think any government, including local government, is doing the right thing by them.

I know that the member for Collie–Preston and a few others want to speak on this motion. I think I might go a bit longer—no, I will not! We have some huge challenges, as the member for Girrawheen said. It will not diminish. I am a baby boomer. I am probably classified as a senior now, but not everyone can still work or earn a living at this age. If we do not look at it, it will sneak up on us, including housing, health and mental health. The member for Girrawheen said something about the mental health issues; the number of people aged 75 and over committing suicide.

Mrs G.J. Godfrey: Eighty-five.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Eighty-five is young. Some members in the chamber now are in their early 50s, so 85 is that not far away. We have to look ahead. We cannot just say that the baby boomers are coming. Both sides of the chamber have to look at this. This is a huge issue with seniors. They have done all the hard work. We remembered today the people who went away to war. A lot of them are still around from the Second World War,

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Korea and Vietnam. They have still got horrible things happening to them resulting from Agent Orange and post-traumatic stress disorder. We have to look after these people because it will build up right to the end.

I would like to congratulate all our seniors. I do not think the government is doing enough to look after them. It is all right having the Big Picture but the Big Picture should include everyone, not just the well-off.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston) [5.28 pm]: I also rise, like the member before me, to contribute by talking about what happens to seniors in Western Australia. Some is good; some is bad. The motion states —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for its lack of leadership and planning —

One thing I will talk about first-up is a situation that is happening in Collie. As there has been a lack of beds available in the aged home ValleyView, people have been kept at the local hospital. Unfortunately, it costs \$1 200 a day to be in the hospital. I have raised this with the minister as well. They tried to remove them by pressuring the families and asking them to take placements anywhere within 300 kilometres of their home base. Some of these people are in their nineties and have spent all their life in the community, and have worked very hard for their community. They sold raffle tickets to get the aged-care system up and running, and then to upgrade it. Unfortunately, when it is their time to go into the aged-care facility they are told there is no room for them and they have to move on and go somewhere else. It is appalling that we do that to people. I know of probably five people in this position, whom I respected very much, who sold raffle tickets every Friday down the street and badgered everyone to make sure they got a few dollars out of them for the aged-care facility. They have now passed on, but they did not pass on in their town of choice. Their families had to travel to visit them. Members can imagine the pressure this placed on those families. Recently I became aware of a particular family, whose father is relatively young at 70 years of age to have dementia. When he was in hospital, he was deemed a runner, so they could not put him into ordinary aged care, but no suitable care facility was available within 250 kilometres of Collie. That is something that we have to address, so that families can live out their lives in their own community, particularly in country communities. I take my hat off to the royalties for regions program, which has put money into some areas that are further out in the country and also some coastal areas. Even with that, the number of beds available will not be enough.

Recently, I attended the opening of an extension to the Donnybrook aged-care centre that provided an extra 15 beds. However, the waiting list for people requiring low care is 70, and those 15 beds do not take a great many people off that list. The waiting list for people requiring high care is 15. Members can imagine the stress that places on families and the impact on the next generation, who are looking at mum and dad and wondering what they will do.

Another issue is the ingoing required to enter what I would call the top end of town aged-care units, where \$350 000 has become normal. A lot of people who sell their house in a country town will not be able to raise that sort of money to go into the next phase of aged-care. It is something that we have to look at. We need either to build more units or to look at the ingoing. I know it is not solely in the hands of the state government and certainly the federal government has over the years tried to wind things back and has taken a different approach to the way it does things by changing the levels of care and bringing them back to a broader base. That has caused a lot of problems in the aged-care system, not only in Collie, but also Harvey, Waroona and the like because there are gaps between high care and low care, whereas previously there was a graduated system and the money was paid accordingly. In Collie, the aged-care facilities wish to take high-care patients only. Members would not believe, with the pressure around waiting lists and the like, that they shut a wing of the aged-care facility in Collie because they believed it was not profitable to have low-care people in the system as the federal government did not pay them enough. Recently, the annual general meeting of the local aged-care centre revealed a sad state of affairs and it looks like it is in the red for \$700 000. We are working closely with the new board on that issue and some people have taken it upon themselves to work hard to save the facility. I do not know what will happen if the facility goes bust. I do not know what will happen to the probably 40 people in that aged-care facility if it goes broke. Who will pick up their care? Is it the state government or the federal government? I will bet there will be an argument over which group has to fork out money to keep that facility going. We cannot put those people out on the street. They need funding and help. I asked the Minister for Health for that help, and he said that it was not his problem but was the federal government's problems. I believe it is everyone's problem. I am going across the political divide. Everyone in this chamber has an obligation to look after our seniors, no matter which side they are on. If we do not do that, people will be turfed out of hospitals. The Minister for Health said that the state cannot afford to keep Western Australia's elderly in hospital at \$1 200 a day, but he refused to provide a daily allowance to move them to an aged-care facility and allow the facility to be profitable. The proposed amount was \$500 a day, but even \$300 a day is cheaper than \$1 200 a day in hospital.

We need to look after our ageing population and consider what we can do for them. I was a member of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee that held an inquiry into ageing; the committee was

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chaired by the member for Girrawheen, beside me. I remember that in Melville, it was predicted that in the next five years there would be a shortage of 450 aged-care beds. By gee, they look after them very well out there, but there will be a shortage of beds. If that is occurring in a high-density area such as Melville, members will realise the difficult situation in country areas that do not have the population density and big facilities of the metropolitan area. I think Greenbushes has six self-care units for the aged, but no high-care units. Collie does not have too many available beds. So, what do we do? Where do we put our elderly? We have to bring them to the city, which puts more pressure on aged-care places such as those in Melville. People in Melville get angry because people from the country come down and take what they see as their beds, and their mothers and fathers cannot get places. We have to do a lot more work, but as I said I am happy to see some reasonable funding coming out through the royalties for regions program, and hopefully that will help.

I will move on because I have only a few more minutes and I want to share the available time around. The member for Albany touched on an issue that affects people in public housing. Some people have lived in public housing for 20 or 30 years; they might have a two or three-bedroom unit that is very well kept because they respect public housing. However, when their partner dies, the Department of Housing says they have two bedrooms too many for a single person and tries to move them out of the public housing. It is a huge upheaval for someone who has been in an area for a long time. Somehow we have to look at how we downsize at an earlier phase of people's lives and not a later phase. Some people might have grandchildren who have come back to live with them, but because they are not on the books as such, the department does not take them into account. I acknowledge that some people may be trying to chivvy the system a little by having kids or grandchildren staying in their public housing; however, a solution would be for the state housing system to put them on a joint tenancy agreement. It may cost them \$20 extra a week in rent, but by gee it certainly helps further down the line if grandma passes away. I think that probably happens more with Aboriginal families, and the department has accommodated that to some degree, but not totally. This is another area we need to look at as part of our growing ageing population.

The member for Albany referred to the seniors' concert that is held in Albany. Collie has the Cheerio Club, which has been running for over 40 years. Each year we have a huge party. Last year 350 people attended the party, and 200 meals were sent out. I say to those people—thank you! It is a tremendous effort. It is nice in some ways and funny in other ways that some of the people working for the Cheerio Club are in their seventies now and do not believe that they should sit down and get a meal served to them. The decorations are second to none and many different people open the Cheerio Club luncheon, including Kim Beazley and Geoff Gallop—they seem to be all Labor people; I wonder why? We have all those dignitaries from the Labor Party and at one stage we let one or two from the other side in to open the party just to show we were not biased. Certainly it is a very big day and I say thank you to the people who do that work.

The last person I want to mention is an individual called Merv Mancer who lives in the Bunbury region. He provides absolutely outstanding service to people in aged care. He has worked very hard—he is not a young man himself—over many, many years to help people out. He is still there pushing away and when there is an expo, as he calls it, the first person people will meet when they walk in the door is Merv Mancer. Thank you, Merv.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [5.40 pm]: It is great to follow the member for Collie–Preston who, of course, is a great advocate for his local community, as we heard in his contribution. The member for Mandurah, who is, of course, an outstanding advocate for his community, should be ready because I will try to make this pretty short to give him some time to present his concerns.

Regarding this motion, the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering will be interested in some of the issues that I raise because he also represents part of the community that I represent. The concerns that I express will, hopefully, also be the concerns that he may have in regard to seniors. As the member for Girrawheen would have articulated in her contribution, not so long ago the committee which we both are members of and which the member for Girrawheen chairs, the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, released a report on age-friendly communities in Western Australia. One of our recommendations dealt with palliative care for Indigenous people. In the government's response to that, which was received on 18 February this year, it stated that a palliative care project was to commence in October 2015. In the minister's response—if he gets time—I would like to know whether the project to deliver palliative care services for Aboriginal people, which was supposed to commence in October 2015, has actually commenced.

That brings me to the issue of palliative care in my community and, as I said, it would also be the minister's community in many respects. We have a dire need in the Armadale region for specialised palliative care hospice facilities. Some palliative care beds are provided at Dale Cottages and also at Opal Aged Care, which was previously the Armadale nursing home. There are supposed to be some palliative beds at Armadale hospital. However, according to the Armadale Health Service website, which is the hospital's website, only two beds are available for palliative care. I am sure the minister would agree that that is not sufficient. I know palliative care

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is not just an issue that is quarantined for seniors, but of course they are disproportionately represented in that issue. The closest purpose-built facility for the residents of my community for palliative care is St John of God Murdoch Hospital hospice, which is about a 35 to 40-minute drive. That has 20 beds, 13 of which are available to public patients. Of course, the demand for places at Murdoch hospital is incredibly high. The lack of availability of palliative care beds in my region is causing a lot of distress for seniors and their families. If one is not able to drive to Murdoch, obtaining public transport to Murdoch can take considerable time; it can take up to a couple of hours, which, of course, is very onerous for elderly people and people who are in distress.

By 2026, it is envisaged that the aged population between the ages of 60 and 84 years in the Armadale area will represent 16 per cent of the population, which will be about 21 000 people. Armadale has a current overall population of about 83 000 people and a projected growth rate of 76 per cent to just over 150 000 people by 2026. We are in desperate need of specialised, specific palliative care hospice facilities in the Armadale region. This is a growing area. Just as this government has run down the health services in the Armadale region, Bentley Hospital is the other example in the south-east corridor, and it is probably even more acute in palliative care. There is a desperate need for not only palliative care facilities to be upgraded, but also an injection of funds to establish a purpose-built palliative care hospice facility in Armadale. There is a palliative care facility in, I think—I am not sure about this—Kalamunda, but I am sure the Minister for Planning would be able to provide more information on that.

The issue of security, of course, is very, very important for elderly people. As people age, they often become more fragile and unsure about their environments and so forth. They can become very isolated if they feel that the community they live in has become unsafe. Of course, the Armadale region has a high crime rate so security and policing are very important issues in the community in general, and particularly for the seniors population. If anyone needs proof that the people in the Armadale region consider security to be very important, they only have to follow the commentary and debates that occurred during the Canning by-election. According to the two major candidates in the Canning by-election—the candidates for the Labor and Liberal Parties—the issues of crime and trying to reduce crime were very, very important. It is a shame that the Minister for Police is not here because she may mock, but she should not be mocking my local community, particularly the seniors. I have not come across one senior in my electorate—I am not misleading Parliament when I say this—who does not want a 24/7 public access police station in Armadale. There are people who live in Armadale who say that it is not needed, but not seniors. The minister may say that we do not need a 24/7 public access —

Mr J.M. Francis: My mother moves in in a couple of weeks. She might say it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will go and speak to her; the minister should not worry about that. She will receive a nice letter from me.

The Minister for Police may say that we do not need a 24/7 public access police station because that will keep people behind the desk et cetera. The fact is that elderly people are used to going to their police station and want to continue going to the police station. It closes at four o'clock! This government is in for increased trading hours for businesses, but all it does with the police station is decrease the time it is available for the public to access it. The reason that the police station needs to be open 24/7 is that when people have had a burglary or some altercation, maybe in the CBD district of Armadale, they want the ability to go to the police station that is just up the road and report that. If it is after four o'clock, there is a buzzer there for people to press, but if it is not a life-threatening emergency, nine out of 10 times they will be told to come back the next day or on Monday if it is the weekend—on the weekend, it is not open at all to the public—or if people wish, they can drive to Cannington. That is just not acceptable for the public of Armadale, but particularly for seniors. It is just not acceptable for the seniors in my area. The police minister can mock what she wants, but she does not live in the Armadale area and she does not speak to the seniors in my area. Many elderly people in the Armadale region feel under siege in their own home. Of course, there have been a number of reports of drug houses operating in the Armadale–Kelmscott region and many people have contacted my office with concerns about the regular flow of traffic to and from these homes. I know the local police are trying to do their best, but they are very under-resourced.

In respect to the 24/7 police station, the minister and the Commissioner of Police will say that there are always police officers at Armadale Police Station. Sometimes there are no police at that station, because they are out on the streets. Granted, they are out on the streets. However, something may happen in the CBD, and if someone physically attends the police station to report it, they may find that there are no police officers at that station. That is just not acceptable. It may take 10, 20 or 25 minutes for a police officer to arrive at the station because they are out in their cars. There should be some police officers, or some physical presence, at Armadale Police Station so that people can attend that police station at any time of the day or night.

I want to say one final thing about safety and security. The state government scrapped the safety and security rebate, which provided up to \$200 for seniors to install home intruder alarms, security screen doors, security

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window screens, security sensor lights and deadlocks. That rebate has been abolished. That is a crying shame for many of the seniors in my electorate and I am sure in most electorates.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [5.50 pm]: Mr Speaker, I will be driving the seniors' debate up to six o'clock tonight when we conclude private members' business. I want to make some comments about the reason this motion has been brought to the house. This is a serious issue. Seniors should not be seen in the context of being a burden to the community, a burden to the economy, a burden to future generations, and a burden to service delivery. We must have a mindset in which we see the ageing of our population, and the larger number of people who will be in the older cohort, as not only an asset, but an opportunity. We need to respect, understand and acknowledge the tremendous contribution that is being made to the community by people who are entering the next phase of their lives, some in retirement, and some choosing not to retire but to continue to work and have a mix of work and lifestyle enjoyment. We need to make sure that we plan for the future, knowing that we will have a larger number of older people in our communities.

As the member for Girrawheen highlighted very clearly, and I think particularly effectively, there are a number of good examples in Western Australia of the opportunities that an ageing population can provide for a community, a city and a regional area. There is no better example than in my own area of Mandurah. I am pleased that the member for Girrawheen highlighted the World Health Organization's acknowledgement of the local governments of the City of Mandurah and the City of Melville, which are demonstrating a clear understanding of how a well-planned and well thought out vision can create even more vibrant communities and ensure that people of all ages can participate effectively and enjoy the quality of life that they deserve to enjoy, which is how I think we should frame it.

Quite seriously, this motion is a call to action for this government. There are serious issues that the government needs to address to ensure that people as they get older are able to age in place and stay connected to their community, and are valued and seen as positive members of our community. Those issues include the review of concessions that was undertaken by this government, and the review by the Attorney General into enduring powers of attorney, and guardianship, as the member for Girrawheen highlighted.

This morning, at the Remembrance Day commemoration at Mandurah War Memorial, I happened to talk to Hilton Doust. Hilton is one of the best examples of active ageing that we could ever find. Hilton turns 92 next month. He still swims at the local pool every day. Until recently, he was taking annual holidays to Phuket, where he had established links and connections to the people in the local community. He is a tremendous bloke. Hilton is also representative of that generation of people who are very proud about not wanting to take from the community but always wanting to give. He is a returned serviceman and served this nation as a soldier in the Army in World War II. He talked to me this morning about his commitment to his loving wife and about how she has dementia and he wants to keep her at home. I asked him whether he was getting any help at home, and he said that every fortnight someone comes and does a bit of cleaning. I said to him, "Hilton, you've got to look after yourself so that you can continue to look after your wife." To me, Hilton is the epitome of that generation of people who so proudly do not go looking for a handout. If anyone deserves to be supported, it is that generation and those sorts of people.

Therefore, the comments of the members for Girrawheen and Collie–Preston about the need to make sure that older people are connected to their community, in which many of them have lived for decades, are very important. We need to deal with the special challenges of an ageing population in the context of good strategic planning, not in the context of seeing them as a burden. I therefore really appreciated the comments about and the acknowledgement of Ken Marsden by the member for Girrawheen. Ken, like a number of advocates for seniors and other people in the community, including people from a disadvantaged background, is all about recognising and unlocking the potential of older people. We should not label and, in a non-intentional way, almost degrade people because they are getting older. I listened to Ken yesterday when he entered the debate on radio about a Melbourne city councillor who had called for seniors who drive to have an S-plate on their car.

Mr J.M. Francis: It was an insurance company, was it not?

Ms M.M. Quirk: Yes, QBE.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There was a councillor in Melbourne as well. Ken was straight there, defending the seniors who drive, and highlighting that the premise that was taken by QBE—or by that person; I think they have probably sacked him by now!—is not only inappropriate but also not even statistically correct. That is an example of how some people are approaching the issue of an ageing Australia. We should see an ageing Australia as an opportunity. We should look at the good practice that exists in Australia itself. Yes, we can look at the great things that are happening overseas. However, we are doing some fantastic things in our own country and in Western Australia, and the member for Girrawheen highlighted a number of these.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 11 November 2015]

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I want to make a few last points before we conclude this debate and go onto the next business of the house. Enduring powers of attorney and guardianship is a serious issue. I have had a number of examples raised with me, and I raised one with the Attorney General myself about the Public Trustee, about the lack of monitoring and due diligence when it comes to the issuing of enduring powers of attorney. I have raised a series of questions with the Attorney General, for which I am awaiting answers, about the statistical numbers of enduring powers of attorney that have been issued in the last number of years. We will find it is a staggering number—it is increasing, and we need to look at that issue seriously. It seems nothing is happening with the report that sits on the Attorney General's table. The Minister for Seniors and Volunteering should take that up particularly, because I think it is a big issue.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.