

PREMIER'S STATEMENT

Consideration

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MS E.L. HAMILTON (Joondalup) [2.55 pm]: Prior to the break I let the chamber know about the wonderful things that are happening and have been happening in Joondalup. I was on the topic of education and training. I referred to our learning precinct and the fantastic training of WA's workforce that is taking place. Edith Cowan University is training our future healthcare workforce and has the largest school of nursing in the state, with approximately 3 000 students studying across ECU's two campuses in Joondalup and Bunbury. Our College of Electrical Training continues to provide the industry with the highest quality apprenticeships and post-trade training courses. The Western Australia Police Academy has doubled recruit numbers. The state government's recruitment campaign resulted in significant growth in interest in joining the Western Australia police. Our academy upgrades have enabled 34 squads of approximately 30 recruits to commence training before July 2024.

I take the opportunity to update the house on my recent success in securing \$600 000 from the Cook Labor government to develop a new BMX track for Heathridge. This exciting project will be delivered at Lysander Park, a large reserve that is shielded from major roads and connects to the neighbouring suburb of Connolly via an underpass. High-quality community and sporting infrastructure is important for our kids and families. The new Heathridge BMX track will provide a space to be physically active and foster social connection, especially for young people. I have already hit the doors and spoken to many residents living near the park and there is a lot of enthusiasm for this exciting project.

Earlier this week I joined local mums Anthea and Katy and their children at Lysander Park to share this exciting news. Their kids look forward to the new BMX track and cannot wait to take their bikes for a spin. Katy is a local small business owner of PromoMate and I have been working with her recently in producing Containers for Change tags for our local parents and citizens associations, to support their fundraising efforts. Four schools have taken up the opportunity and a few more have contacted my office to express their interest. The tags contain the P&C scheme's barcode and allow parents or other supporters to easily scan and direct the funds from their returned containers to the nominated P&C. Thank you to Minister Whitby for sharing this wonderful idea on a visit to Connolly Primary School last year with his Minister for Environment hat on.

I was also joined at the park by a local community champion, Margaret. Margaret volunteers her time at Beldon Uniting Church to run a community craft group as well as at the Joondalup branch of the Country Women's Association, amongst a host of other activities in which she is involved. Later this year, Joondalup CWA will celebrate its centenary at the state conference to be held at Joondalup Resort. I look forward to catching up with the lovely ladies for morning tea next week to discuss their plans and continue to offer my support for their organisation.

We have an amazing community full of groups and organisations that take innovative and collaborative approaches to support those facing often quite complex challenges, not only in the northern suburbs but also across the entire state. Community Vision is a not-for-profit organisation that for about 20 years has been providing a range of services to people of all ages and abilities, through home care, disability and family day care programs. Community Vision employs over 180 staff and services over 1 000 customers. One area of support on which Community Vision is focused is dementia. Globally, more than 50 million people live with dementia. That alarming figure is expected to triple by 2050. The work happening locally in Joondalup is leading the way for dementia care in WA. In a first for Western Australia, Community Vision has partnered with Dementia Doulas International to offer a brand new service to provide support to Western Australian families facing the difficult path of dealing with a loved one who is living with dementia. Dementia Doulas International conducted a training course with five Community Vision staff, all of whom are now qualified dementia doulas and able to provide individualised care, support, information, education, liaison and advocacy throughout the entire dementia journey, from post-diagnosis through to the bereavement stage. With a much deeper understanding of the dementia journey, they can initiate early future-planning conversations and incorporate creative ways to care and provide ongoing support to families. I acknowledge Community Vision CEO Yvonne Timson, who said —

By offering this service, we can better prepare families for what's to come and ensure it's a more loving and caring journey. Having trained dementia doulas means our customers have more choice, dignity and control over their lives, something I firmly believe in offering.

I also take this opportunity to make some quick shout-outs to the community. Thank you to Rhonda, who every year organises a collection drive for Share the Dignity at her residential village. Every year, my office is blown away by the number of handbags packed full of sanitary products that she manages to fit in her little car.

I also thank all my dedicated volunteers, who help share important information with our community. Whether on the doors or the phones or by delivering flyers or lending a hand in the office, the work of all my volunteers is invaluable.

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I give a massive shout-out to Terry Beahan, who last year was awarded life membership of WA Labor for his decades of service.

I look forward to joining my volunteer team as we invite local residents to my upcoming mobile offices and participate in doorknocks across the electorate. I also thank local residents who engage with me and share their views about what is important. I will host a large number of mobile offices and community events again this year, including a seniors' scam forum and my annual Biggest Morning Tea, which last year alone raised just over \$3 000 from the Joondalup community to support the work of the Cancer Council WA.

Continuing with my shout-outs, I acknowledge that last year, Joondalup's newest pub, the Iluka, won the illustrious award of having WA's best steak sandwich. There was some tough competition from other electorates, but having tried the sandwich with my office team, I can confidently say that the judges made the right choice. At the end of 2022, Chapters Bistro in Currambine was awarded best European restaurant by Restaurant and Catering Australia's WA Awards for Excellence. Joondalup really is a world leader in culinary excellence, from training the workforce at the local TAFE to our amazing local restaurants and cafes.

I note that a number of annual general meetings are underway across Joondalup at the moment. I give a shout-out to Joondalup Netball Association and Joondalup Family Centre, which will have their AGMs soon. I thank all community members who put up their hand each year and get involved and donate their time to volunteer in those organisations. Your work helps keep our community ticking and connected, and I want to say thank you. That includes dedicated locals like Peter Connolly, who was recently elected chair of the Connolly Residents Association. I had a bit of a laugh on the phone with him earlier this week; I said it was quite fitting, as he also has a business with the suburb name in it. It was great to chat to Peter. I look forward to again getting involved in the Connolly Residents Association's Easter fun day next month. I take this time to say thank you to the committee and the membership for providing support to, and advocating on behalf of, the suburb and its members. A thankyou also goes to the outgoing president, Adrian, and the committee members who have finished their terms. I really appreciated being able to work with them.

As a local mum of two, I know how important it is for children to develop healthy lifestyles through sport and recreation. It is a pleasure to support grassroots sport because it builds stronger, healthier and happier communities and nurtures future athletes. I will be returning as a sponsor for a number of local sporting clubs this year, including the Edgewater Woodvale Football Club, Joondalup City Football Club, Joondalup Districts Cricket Club, the Joondalup Athletics Centre, the Joondalup Netball Association and as the patron of the Joondalup Bowling Club. We are a government that is investing in Joondalup, the strategic centre in the heart of the northern suburbs. I am very fortunate to represent the Joondalup electorate, which is a strong and connected community.

Each and every day, I work for our Joondalup community, and I am very much looking forward to an exciting 2024!

MS M. BEARD (North West Central) [3.05 pm]: I rise today in response to the Premier's Statement and speak on behalf of and recognise the wonderful communities and towns in the seat of North West Central. This is a seat that spans 820 000 kilometres. I have clocked up thousands of kilometres on my car, as members can imagine. It is a very diverse region that is rich in heritage, culture and opportunity but also filled with challenges with the remoteness, distances and geographical locations of these communities in relation to the city and metro areas. I have said in here before that it would be great to take every member on a road trip with me because it is really hard to appreciate exactly where we live in the bush, exactly what it is like to live in the bush and what it is like not to have what people in the metro areas take for granted. People are under no illusion. They do not expect to have high-rise buildings, underground roads and bridges. I have said this before. But they do expect the basic services.

I want to acknowledge the many hardworking frontline health workers and the volunteers, whose numbers are diminishing in the regions. In some towns, we are struggling every day to have volunteers to man the ambulance services. In Cue, the two ambulance volunteers were both away on a weekend for a course. They put a call out to the town to look after themselves. They would then have had to have called the volunteers from another town many miles away if there had been an emergency. There is a struggle. It is similar everywhere, but it is exacerbated as we move further out. The police and emergency services do an amazing job. As the member for Central Wheatbelt said, they have been under immense pressure lately. I have no doubt that will ramp up again as we go through the summer season with cyclones, bushfires and so forth. They are often asked to complete the impossible, and they are often faced with complex issues and situations without the same level of support. Without these groups of people, there is simply no way our towns and regions could operate. They are the backbones of our communities. We need to recognise this, and I thank them for that.

It is also often forgotten that everyday mums and dads play an integral part in our regional communities. They work with contingency plans and step in and volunteer whenever they need to. One person who exemplifies resilience and determination in my electorate who I want to make a note of has worked tirelessly on the issue of rail lighting and putting beacons on lights. I travel a lot of miles and I travel through the country a lot late at night or early in

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the morning and the road trains that I see, which are three or four trailers long, are completely floodlit. People can see them coming from a mile away. If they get to a train crossing in the night, unless they have seen the beginning of the train or there is something that catches their attention, it is extremely difficult to see. I want to acknowledge the advocacy of Lara Jensen and Merrilea Broad from Mt Magnet and their families and supporters, who have continued to push this since the loss of Lara's brother and Merrilea's daughter. I think this is a reflection of what people in the bush will do until they get an outcome. That is something we need to get behind. It is imperative that we hold the rail operators to account and ensure the installation of flashing beacon lights and side lighting on locomotives to provide the necessary warning for motorists at those crossings. I thank them for their advocacy and encourage everyone to get behind them and support them in their bid to get an outcome on this issue, for which they have fought over many years.

There has been much to celebrate across my electorate. People have also been faced with challenges and have come through with flying colours. As the Leader of the Opposition said, there are still issues relating to the impact of cyclone Seroja in the regions that has made it really difficult for them, but people have got on with it, and I congratulate them for that. However, there is a general feeling that the regions are being forgotten and pushed aside. There is also a general feeling of anger and frustration in our communities that they have been forgotten and, in many cases, are underfunded. The communities in North West Central need many things, such as access to maternity services, improved health and mental health services, infrastructure, connectivity, water, power and roads—the list goes on. The basics in some of those places leaves a lot to be desired. People are becoming increasingly annoyed about that.

It is imperative to address the shortfall of housing and ensure that there is accountability and consequences for youth crime. I was intrigued that two days ago, and again today, the Premier stood in this place and spruiked the achievements of this government over the last seven years. Incredibly, he had this to say about our health system —

We are a government that prioritises the health and wellbeing of Western Australians everywhere. That is why this government is focused on delivering a world-class health system. We are strengthening our health system by investing in hospitals, increasing our health workforce ...

That is an interesting statement, particularly for me. It would be commendable if I could see the truth in that in the sense that the government promised at the last election that it would redevelop Tom Price Hospital. However, I see that in the latest budget it has been pushed out to 2026–27, as has the redevelopment of Meekatharra Hospital. They are really dilapidated facilities that people are waiting to be redeveloped. Paraburdoo Hospital services a large area. A lot of people in that area need health care but that hospital is disgraceful. The doctor had to move out of the rooms he was using and into a caravan, which I saw the last time I was there. He is servicing people from the car park. The locals are very unhappy about that and are looking forward to the hospitals being upgraded.

It is clear to the regions that since January 2021, services to the Carnarvon Health Campus have been reduced in some way, as they have in all the hospitals across the regions. Manjimup, Narrogin and Wyndham have all seen a decline in some shape or form. Not a week goes by when I am not contacted by members of regional communities who share their unfortunate experiences about the health system in the regions. The opposition has been bringing to light the shortage of nurses and midwives in the regions for years. In February 2022, the Cook Labor government closed the maternity services at Carnarvon Health Campus. That was to be temporary and it forced families to travel hundreds of kilometres. That goes to my point about people coming on the road with me to get an understanding of how far away it is. My seat covers 820 000 square kilometres. It is 500 kilometres to the nearest city and almost another 500 kilometres to Perth. For people living in Exmouth, it is another 500 kilometres on top of that. What I am trying to say is that when the Carnarvon Health Campus closed the maternity services, the impact was exacerbated. Since then, more than 100 women have been forced to go away from their homes to give birth, without the support of their family and friends. I do not know whether many people in here have experienced childbirth and have children. The difficulty is that people have to remove themselves from their normal environment for six weeks. It is two years on now and this regional community has had to deal with this second-rate facility. Midwives come and go and agency midwives float in and out. That makes it really, really difficult to provide continuity of care. Although telehealth is a fantastic resource, as women who have had a baby would know, when a pregnant woman wants to have a check-up, the doctor needs to do a physical examination. This situation is becoming really unacceptable, and the stress and anxiety it is causing families is enormous. This underscores a pressing need to address the shortage of midwives and obstetricians in Carnarvon. I absolutely understand this. However, if we can be creative in ways to expedite this, we could at least ensure that mothers who are unable to have their babies in Carnarvon could at least have their prenatal and postnatal check-ups there. One of the girls I spoke to last week has had only two check-ups during her entire pregnancy and she is terrified. I do not think that is good enough. An Australian Nursing Federation spokesperson said in December last year that nurses at Carnarvon Health Campus had informed her they were now expected to pick up some of the duties of the midwives. The spokesperson said that one nurse claimed to have been told they would receive a crash course in operating the cardiotocography machine, which is used to measure

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a baby's heartrate. I cannot understand how this is an acceptable outcome for regional patients, not to mention that it puts mothers and babies at risk.

The closure of maternity services in Carnarvon has resulted in mothers seeking more assistance from the patient assisted travel scheme. They are forced to travel away, which brings its own set of concerns. My number one priority is to get health right in regional centres, as that flows through to families wanting to move to, live in or stay there. People are leaving towns and that has an economic impact on regional areas. Everywhere I travel, one of the key points of frustration with health provision is the inadequacy of the patient assisted travel scheme. Back in the day, it probably served its purpose very well, but with cost-of-living increases and the removal of services from these towns so that there is no option but for people to travel, PATS seriously needs a review. Regional WA is the engine room of our state, and with its royalties underpinning record surpluses, we really need to look at how we can improve the situation.

In November, I co-launched a petition calling for a significant review of PATS and seeking a realistic reflection of costs for people in the regions who need to seek medical help in Perth. It involved six key pillars, including increasing the fuel subsidy for private vehicles, increasing the accommodation subsidy to better reflect the high cost of accessing accommodation and providing more taxi vouchers. We have an ageing population. Many people need carers and they need to take multiple trips when they get to Perth, so they need a taxi voucher each way. It is almost impossible for some elderly people, as I hear that the approvals process is becoming really cumbersome. We also need to extend PATS to include dental treatment. Doctors tell me that if someone has a dental issue and they do not get on top of it quickly, it can cause massive issues. There are no dentists or allied health services in the regions as such, so if a patient needs to travel, they cannot get to a dentist because that travel is not covered by PATS. Some people cannot afford it because they live week to week.

We also need to expand the patient escort and carer facility. I think is really important that we give greater assistance to patient escorts. In particular, patients travelling for childbirth, those from remote Aboriginal communities and those who are aged or disabled really need some form of support when they are lobbed into Perth. I often hear people say, "Go to Geraldton." Geraldton is 500 kilometres away and a lot of people do not realise that there are no flights to Geraldton. A senior will be put on a bus and they will lob into Geraldton at one o'clock in the morning, and they are terrified; members will have read about the social issues in Geraldton. They then need to find their way to wherever they might be staying, and some of them have no clue where they are going. One lady told me that a kind taxidriver had fortunately spotted her and picked her up.

Regional people in New South Wales are reimbursed 40¢ a kilometre; people in WA get only 16¢ a kilometre. People are cancelling their second appointments, which is not a good thing. There is a disparity in support for regional people in WA compared with other states that I believe the government needs to plug. That gap needs to be closed. How can a government that has reduced services in the regions expect regional people to cope without some form of adequate support to help them get to these appointments and make that process easier? A lot of these people are really unwell, and they have financial stress on top of it.

The WA government website states that patient assisted travel scheme subsidies are not intended to cover the full costs associated with accessing specialist medical services; they provide a contribution. But some of these people, some of whom are pensioners, have no choice, because the services no longer exist in their local hospitals or medical centres. Some specialist services that were previously available have been removed, and I think we definitely need to look at that.

The accommodation subsidy is woefully below realistic pricing for accommodation in Perth. Mothers have calculated that it will cost them between \$8 000 and \$10 000 for the period of six weeks they need to wait for their baby. I do not know how many people have booked motels in Perth, but it is pretty hard to find anything under \$250 a night, especially for someone who has small children to look after. It is near impossible and beyond the realm of possibility for many people. I will highlight some of the families I have personally helped down the PATS path in the last months. I will say that the Minister for Health's office was very helpful with one of the mothers who was due to leave in three days to go and have her baby and was still not clear whether she had accommodation or a flight. She was in a very bad state; she was extremely stressed. She has two small children and she had previously had a pregnancy that resulted in stillbirth. On top of that, she had had only two check-ups. She was in a fairly bad place, and the minister's office helped me out, so I thank her for that. However, this is just one example. Her personal health circumstances during her pregnancy were definitely not well catered for by the system in her town.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms M. BEARD: This lady was expecting her third child. She had to go to Perth; she had no choice because it was a high-risk pregnancy, but she started the process back in October knowing that she would be having her baby in March. She submitted the request in a timely manner, but it seems that three or four days before she was meant to

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go, she was left without any accommodation or flights. Her family have been subjected to an enormous amount of hardship and inconvenience because of the oversights within that process. I suggest that maybe it is time to look at the process and how it actually works within the system. We need to make that process easier. I commonly hear from a lot of these mothers and seniors who are travelling that they find it really hard to navigate the PATS system.

Tina is another lady who had come down at the same time as this mother. Tina was not prepared to wait to book through the PATS system—some people can do it; some people cannot—so she used her entire savings. She has two small children who were born in Carnarvon. This time, she had to go away; she was not aware of the process because she had not been down this pathway. She used their entire \$8 000 savings, which they had put away for when they came to Perth. They are not from Perth; they have no family here. These people who come down do not have the support that we take for granted. She also said that her pre and postnatal care was very skinny. She is also nervous because they either had no midwife or were changing midwives, she went to have a doctor's appointment and the doctor did not know about the appointment. There is no seamless process for these mothers who, at the very least, need care during their pregnancy before flying out to Carnarvon to have their babies.

This is not the first time I have raised these issues in this chamber. I understand that the minister has spoken to me about the workforce issues, which I actually understand, but some of these issues that sit in the background are really important and are things that should not be happening, with or without staff. We need the maternity service back, but even these girls who have to go away to have their babies are having a horrendous time.

I raised the issue of the patient assisted travel scheme in Parliament in August. Unfortunately, instead of answering the question and providing a solution for these mothers in Carnarvon, the Minister for Health responded by providing me with a history of the issue, which we all understand; we know what has happened. What we need to know is how we can make this easier for these people on the ground. This extends to seniors, mums and dads and all sorts of people who are travelling regularly.

I spoke to a senior last week who said that they had \$102.75 from PATS and he was only allowed two nights. He got stuck in Perth and had another two nights that he had to find funding for. He was distressed because he does not have the funds to pay for that. When people travel to Perth for these appointments, they will be called back for an appointment but PATS will give them only a very minimal amount, or there is a flight cancellation and they are stuck at the airport. They have no choice; they cannot just get on a bus and go home. The amount of \$102.75 is actually fairly skinny for people who do not have any additional funds.

I will quickly read something out. This is a person who is very well qualified in the medical space. He is an elderly man on a pension and he drove himself to Geraldton in his small car to have a knee replacement. With PATS the way it is, he could only afford to book a backpackers' hostel, and it had stairs. He said to me, "I can suck it up; there are people worse off than me." But he actually posted this on a Facebook page —

So dealing with PATS has become almost impossible since Tuesday I had been trying to get through to get something sorted out so I can get back to Carnarvon

He had to drive himself there; he was told that he had to go to Geraldton for this operation, there is no flight and the bus was not an option. He continued —

Beverly at Geraldton PATS has been the person I was dealing with before my surgery and the plan was to call her after the surgery to help organise getting me back to Carnarvon

For the three days I have been calling

Finally I got through to PATS Geraldton only to be told to contact PATS Carnarvon who told me I had to go back to PATS Geraldton

So now I am stuck at St John of God Hospital

Until a friends in Carnarvon can come and drive me back in my car

The only thing offered was I organise my own accommodation somehow in Geraldton and then I might be able to claim it back once I am back at Carnarvon but that not definite being on a pension makes this almost impossible

...

It is madness what has happened with health services in the country and regional aress

So many services no longer available and country and regional Hospital and country hospital no more than first aid stations also this puts a lot of stress on staff in our regional and country hospital as well as adding to the stress an anxiety for the patient

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That is just an excerpt of his feelings about this. He actually spoke to me about it, and I agree with him: the hospital staff are incredibly amazing people. They do the best they can, and in no way is this an indictment on any of the staff; I have absolute admiration for what they do. Locations closer to Perth have cars. I know a car is provided in Gingin through an organisation there and they drive down with volunteers to take people to Joondalup Health Campus or wherever they have to go. That is not the case in regional centres. It just cannot happen. This has to be looked at; there is no way it cannot be looked at.

Another lady found it tricky dealing with PATS. She needed to see her surgeon in Perth and PATS said, “No, you can use telehealth.” Her surgeon said, “No, I need to examine you.” She then flew herself; she booked her fares and accommodation, which she said was a stretch. They said, “You can go to a local physio for the check-up.” Her understanding was that that was because her surgeon’s address was within a building that is labelled “physiotherapist/specialist”, but he is a surgeon. These are glitches in the system that I believe can be ironed out, and need to be ironed out, to make it easier for people. She now has to try to recoup her funds and she is not sure whether she will get all or some of that money back. These are just examples of what has been happening with a lot of people.

Another person contacted me and said, “I rang them. I just felt like I was stupid because I didn’t understand the process.” Bear in mind that some of these people have never been to hospital. They have been healthy. They have a baby and they go there thinking that what will happen ahead of them will be an end-to-end scenario. Some of them pay the money and put themselves into financial difficulty, and then suffer that without getting it back because they do not know how to or whether they can; they are unsure.

The cumbersome paperwork and administrative hurdles that are associated with the patient assisted travel scheme are becoming overwhelming for many and they do not know where to go or how to approach it. It used to be done through a doctor. Apparently, patients now go directly to the PATS office. For some older people it is much easier to go straight from their doctor with their PATS form. These things seem to be small matters but they are large for many people. It is unacceptable that these mothers, who are already facing the physical and emotional demands of pregnancy and childbirth, are burdened with those enormous costs at that time in their lives. The logistical nightmare of the shortcomings of PATS for many of them is a big cross to bear. I do not believe that any mother should have to choose between accessing health care and financial stability or whether they should have a child, which is something they have discussed with me.

We cannot turn a blind eye to what is going on in this space. Whilst we have lodged that petition, and it was mentioned in a report, it is something along with the cost of living that is enormous and it will have a detrimental effect on many people if we do not improve the system. I understand the stable workforce but we need to find a way to allow people to have their babies back in Carnarvon and in the regions. It is unfair that they have that massive financial burden, as much as having to go away. They have to take their children out of school. One girl who is down here now tried to get her child into school. She cannot get her child into school for seven weeks because she does not live in the precinct, so she is stressed about that. She has two children and no-one to look after them when she is down here.

It is incumbent on all of us in this place to make sure that those in the bush have affordable access to health services, including maternity services. We are still waiting on some hospitals and infrastructure, such as Tom Price Hospital. That was promised at the last election but has been pushed out to 2026–27. Meekatharra Hospital is in the same boat. With the state’s surplus, coupled with the fact that a lot of its income is derived from the regions, surely we need some prioritisation if we are going to keep people living in the regions. Members need to talk to people on the ground to understand how this is impacting them and how far removed it is from what people living in the metropolitan area get.

Amendment to Question

Ms M. BEARD: I therefore move to amend the question before the house. I move —

That the following words be added after “noted” —

and that this house condemns the Cook Labor government for its failure to deliver appropriate regional health services across Western Australia including the provision of adequate PATS and regional maternity services for women who wish to give birth closer to home and with the support of their families and friends

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.34 pm]: I am pleased to back the motion moved by the member for North West Central to highlight the Cook Labor government’s abject failure to deliver adequate regional health services across our state. As I reiterated earlier today, Western Australians continue to experience some of the longest wait times in emergency departments in the country. Only 48 per cent of patients who attend our emergency departments are seen within the clinically recommended time. This is the worst rate of all jurisdictions in

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the country, and it is well below the national average of 65 per cent. Incredibly, of those, one in three patients deemed urgent, category 3, and only half of those deemed semi-urgent, category 4, are seen within the clinically recommended time frames. Our doctors and nurses are consistently asked to do more with less. Seven of the eight worst performing emergency departments in the country are here in Western Australia, and that is at a time when we are experiencing the largest boom in WA's history. There is only one common denominator in the crisis that is gripping our health system—that is, this government's mismanagement of and inability to deliver the health system deserved by Western Australian taxpayers, both regional and metropolitan.

How can anyone think that it is fair that people living and doing business in the regions, and facilitating the industries that are the powerhouse of the nation, are not provided with the basics of healthcare services? We all heard the member for North West Central refer to the story of a patient, to services no longer being available and to services going backwards. As the member for North West Central pointed out, regional services have been degraded to the point at which for the last two years, women living in regional centres, such as Carnarvon, have not been able to access antenatal care or have their babies at their local hospital. Imagine being more than 35 weeks pregnant and stranded at Carnarvon Airport for more than seven hours with your eight-year-old, who has autism, and your five-year-old, who has ADHD, after your patient assisted travel scheme flight to Perth is delayed and ultimately cancelled. That is the situation Kelly Hopkinson found herself in. Imagine being told that the next available flight is not until after you are 36 weeks pregnant, which is too far into your pregnancy for air travel, all the while knowing that the option of driving 900 kilometres to Perth is not available because you had already organised for your mother to drive your car to Perth so that the family would have transport in Perth for its six-week stay. The real kick in the guts is knowing that all this angst will come with a price tag in the thousands of dollars that will not be covered by the Cook government's miserly patient assisted travel scheme. No-one can think that that is a fair or reasonable situation.

However, it is not just maternity services and PATS that have been completely mismanaged by the Cook Labor government. I again refer to the drastic impact that delays in elective surgery have had on one of my regional constituents. Her story is representative of others across regional WA. Michelle Hansford is a very brave and loving mother of five children and grandmother of 10 children who has suffered greatly because of unacceptable delays in elective surgery. In 2017, she was diagnosed with aggressive stage 3 cancer in her left breast. In late 2018, Michelle decided to have right breast removed, a decision that was supported by clinical advice as a precautionary measure against future cancer. As I understand it, she was a category 3 patient, which means that her surgery should have been performed within the year. However, it did not take one year, and it did not take two years. Rather, it was three years before that surgery took place. In early 2022, following the surgery, Michelle was diagnosed with breast cancer in her right breast, which was removed in March. Michelle received feedback that this could have been avoided if she had undergone surgery in the appropriate time frame, but with the bungling of the health system and continual elective surgery cancellations, this grandmother has continued to face immeasurable health setbacks. This is not just about the impact of the wait times or the impact on livelihoods, but about the acuity and what that means for overall health.

In February 2023, during a routine check-up, Michelle received the devastating news that she had a malignant tumour in her neck. She made the brave decision to have her arm amputated in the hope that this would prevent the cancer from recurring. What an unacceptable outcome. She has been unable to continue the work that she had previously undertaken. This has had a significant impact on their cost of living and they have since had to raise funds to support her cancer journey.

I have also received correspondence from a local mother whose 14-year-old daughter suffers from severe mental health issues compounded with an eating disorder. This results in regular admissions to Perth Children's Hospital for feeding, followed by discharge safety plans that require monitoring and supervision at home 24/7. The family continues to need to travel to Perth Children's Hospital every few weeks for readmittance and on-ward feeding as she is unable to follow her management and safety plan due to her condition. There have been discussions about Bunbury Regional Hospital being available to accommodate the family by providing feeding. Unfortunately, this has never eventuated. However, when I have raised these issues with the minister, I am advised, according to my notes —

I would also like to reassure you that the State Government and WACHS remains committed to providing safe and high-quality health care for the community as close to home as possible, and will continue working with interested consumers and their families in co-designing services for the people who need them.

This simply illustrates that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. The government is committed to providing care closer to home, except when people live in regional WA. We heard today the announcement about maternity and midwifery services, which is quite different from the experiences that the member for North West Central has spoken about and the fact that those services have gone backwards under this government's watch, particularly over the last two years.

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It is not only service delivery, but also the provision of infrastructure that has been impacted in the regions. In 2017, the community of Geraldton was promised that its local hospital would get an expanded emergency department, a new intensive care unit and a new integrated mental health unit. Fast-track seven years and all that has been delivered are some car parking bays. The state Auditor General found that the Geraldton Health Campus upgrade had suffered the longest delay of any government project. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, presentations at the Geraldton Health Campus emergency department are at a record high, while staffing levels are critically low. Attendances at the Geraldton Health Campus emergency department jumped by 28 per cent between 2021–22 and 2022–23; however, only 55 per cent of patients presenting to the Geraldton Health Campus ED for emergency incidents were being treated in the recommended time. In comparison, data collated from peer hospitals of a similar scale and operation shows that those hospitals were seeing 74 per cent of patients in the recommended time. In short, health workers need more support, and, sadly, Geraldton is far from being an isolated case.

In September 2019, the state government promised to deliver a regional priority hospital maintenance blitz, announcing over \$37 million to fund urgent upgrades to hospitals, health clinics, aged-care sites and staff accommodation. However, many never saw the light of day. Of the 209 promised projects, a staggering 97 were never delivered. That is very poor.

Abandoned projects include a roof replacement project for Bridgetown Hospital worth \$1 million, essential fire service upgrades at Gnowangerup Hospital and the removal of asbestos sheeting in Paraburdoo. A \$1 million upgrade to Collie nurses' quarters never happened and the facility has now closed down. The WA Country Health Service is now forced to house 18 local health staff in hotels and motels. Again, this is simply not good enough. Just because someone chooses to live in regional WA and support our regional communities should not mean they have to accept substandard medical care. Again, at a time when WA should be enjoying the largest boom in its history it is unacceptable that we see health services go backwards and so many projects not delivered by this government. The overwhelming feedback across regional WA is that our health workers need more support. They do an outstanding job but they are not being supported by a government that has the capacity to do so. As the member for North West Central said when she quoted a patient experiencing significant challenges, so many services are no longer available. I will leave my comments there. I appreciate that the Leader of the Opposition would also like to contribute to this debate.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition) [3.45 pm]: I suspect that much of what I was going to speak about has already been said. I listened to the member for Vasse and she made some excellent points that I think I had written down to make as well. I certainly already made some of those points in my speech in reply to the Premier's Statement on Wednesday about the hospital program in which we saw the inability of the government to keep to the program. It let the program just disappear and much-needed hospitals in Bridgetown, Gnowangerup and other communities were left undone. I will not go over all the old ground we may have heard, but I will just look at the amendment to the motion. It states —

... failure to deliver appropriate regional health services across Western Australia including the provision of adequate PATS and regional maternity services for women who wish to give birth closer to home and with the support of their families and friends

Of course, regional health is a separate shadow portfolio. My upper house colleague Hon Martin Aldridge is shadow minister for regional health. The reason that works is that, as members know, all through the public hospital and health systems we have service providers. One of them is the WA Country Health Service, which along with others like the North Metropolitan Health Service et cetera, forms a discrete body that takes on the job of providing regional health. Interacting with that there is the provision of many of the tertiary services in Perth and the metropolitan area and, indeed, many of what people might think to be day-to-day services in some territories are provided in metropolitan areas even though the people who use them live in regional areas. As I highlighted yesterday, we see a growing tendency to centralise services in Perth rather than seeking to ensure that they are available in the regions where people live. That has a number of aspects to it. We have spoken before about the situation with maternity services in Carnarvon meaning that families have to move to either Geraldton, Perth or even as far as way as Busselton to give birth. Families will typically leave some weeks before the expected delivery date so there are no unexpected deliveries at the hospital in Carnarvon, where I understand even the emergency provision of midwifery services has not been able to be provided for a period of time. We see a dire situation in Carnarvon that needs to be addressed. That is not happening on its own. It was not that many years ago that services were available for local women to give birth to their children in numerous hospitals, but that has dropped away in numerous communities. Sadly, it looks like this government, if left to its own devices, will let that happen in Carnarvon as well.

We also know that the centralisation of services in the metropolitan area is a great risk to patients because it leaves them exposed to long travel periods. If someone requires follow-up treatment after a major operation or cancer treatment, they will have to either make multiple trips to the metropolitan area at great cost or find accommodation

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in Perth. That is where, amongst other things, the patient assisted travel scheme comes in, including for those women and families who have to move elsewhere to give birth.

The patient assisted travel scheme in Western Australia provides a fuel subsidy that is nothing short of a joke. The fuel subsidy is 16¢ per kilometre as opposed to 40¢ in New South Wales, as I understand it. That is just staggering. Let us look at the provision of hospital services in New South Wales compared with Western Australia. We find a much greater range of services available in those big centres like Dubbo or the larger regional centres on the coast of New South Wales than we typically find in Carnarvon or Moora or Katanning or one of the other regional centres in Western Australia. Western Australians have even more need to travel and an even greater distance to travel because WA is not a small state. Not every community is serviced by air, so a lot of people have to drive. That urgently needs review.

I am looking at a petition on the e-petitions site. The Legislative Council is a bit ahead of us in this regard and has had e-petitions for some time. The e-petition was launched in November, facilitated by Hon Martin Aldridge, to call for a review of not only PATS and the fuel subsidy, but also the accommodation allowance et cetera. I understand that that is now with the upper house committee that receives petitions and then determines whether an inquiry should be conducted. I think it is the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs. I might be wrong on that. Do not quote me. Hansard is quoting me! But whatever the committee is, it is now with it to consider. I hope that it undertakes a review into PATS to ensure that it is adequate. I know it is inadequate. It would be good if that could be looked at and the committee could come back with some recommendations to government on how that could be addressed.

Some of the other flow-on effects of centralisation is that it becomes very common for country centres to have to transfer patients from a small rural medical post, whether it be a hospital, a medical centre or even a Silver Chain post, to either Perth or Geraldton or a larger community. That puts a tremendous amount of pressure on the volunteer St John Ambulance services within that community. A town like Jurien Bay, for instance, year on year has the most patient transfers of any centre because no overnight beds are available in Jurien Bay. That is despite that having been funded by the previous government in a program that I had delivered. It had been approved by the cabinet and, in 2017, upon the arrival of the Labor government, that program was axed along with many other royalties for regions programs that we had initiated in that period. That means anybody who has to stay for an extended period is automatically put in an ambulance and taken to Joondalup Health Campus, most likely, or some other centre, to be looked after there.

Volunteer numbers in many communities are dwindling because of the demands on people now in their life and their life-work schedules. Many people may be working fly-in fly-out et cetera. They find it hard to commit to volunteering with the ambulance service. The level of expertise and training that St John Ambulance rightfully expects people who attend a scene to have means that it is a big commitment. I am concerned that in the future that will lead to ambulance services not being available in the local community. I am very aware that in the North Midlands communities of Carnamah, Eneabba, Morawa and Three Springs, for example, there is tremendous pressure on the local volunteer ambulance drivers and attendees because they are doing so many patient transfers to Geraldton or Perth. That is good for the subcentre's finances because it brings in money, and those centres actually have to make their own money. There is no big cheque book. The government does not subsidise those services. The government gives St John Ambulance money for Perth, but the country services are self-supporting largely, with the assistance of St John, but much of their money comes from the work they do. The more work the subcentre does, the more money it gets and the more it can afford up-to-date equipment and provide a service, but it is a double-edged sword. More work puts more demand on the volunteers and, often, they get to a point and think, "I signed up to assist a neighbour who might have had a heart attack or to go to a road accident or an emergency to help. I did not sign up to be a taxi service for the WA Country Health Service." WACHS needs to take a fresh look at how it transfers patients in the midwest and the south west land division where this is more of an issue. The areas further north are more likely to use air ambulances and we know that the Kimberley uses a different system compared with the south, which is volunteer based. There is some support with paid personnel doing some patient transfers in and out of those areas, but by and large, that service is provided by the local centres.

As I said, this is not just happening in the North Midlands. I am aware that one of the local doctors in Moora has been trying to bring together a group to discuss this very issue because getting volunteers to do the transfers from Moora to Perth is becoming very difficult. The Moora volunteers have had to help out at Jurien Bay from time to time, which is already 125 kilometres away before they even start the job, and take those patients to Perth because Jurien cannot find volunteers. That has been reported to me by my constituents. I do not have the logbook. I can only go by what people are telling me. That is a very serious issue faced by many country people.

I am also aware of a situation with emergency services and WA Health. Bunbury and Perth have access to RAC Rescue helicopters that can go to emergency situations, be it a road accident or some sort of an accident within the range of the helicopter. Those helicopters can get a patient back to Perth quickly within the golden hour.

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If a patient can be brought back to Perth as quickly as possible within the first hour after an incident, their outcomes are dramatically improved. This assists the Western Australian health system dramatically because the injury can be attended to sooner leading to possibly less intervention and better outcomes with shorter treatment times. Having access to those types of services more frequently would provide not only a recognised health benefit, but also an economic benefit for Western Australia. The Perth-based helicopters are unable to service locations such as Kalgoorlie, Geraldton or further afield in the Gascoyne because they are beyond their range. In the case of Geraldton, it is sometimes very difficult to get people back to Perth from an incident in the Abrolhos Islands or from an offshore maritime environment. There are very good reasons why a rescue helicopter, as a health service, would be of great benefit to the midwest, the Gascoyne, the goldfields and many other regional areas. It would provide not only an economic benefit, but also a health benefit for the residents and for people passing through those areas who may need assistance.

Again, the WA Country Health Service is a little bit unique in that as a government provider it has never been part of the Government Regional Officers' Housing program, and so it provides its own accommodation in regional country towns. As highlighted in my contribution on Wednesday, WACHS is falling behind and is accommodating people and nursing staff in hotels and motels and those types of arrangements rather than in more appropriate circumstances, and that comes at a very significant cost.

I turn to some written information I have here on this. Thanks to the perseverance of Hon Martin Aldridge, in November 2023 he was looking at WACHS staff accommodation and uncovered some startling information. It was confirmed that 66 staff were being housed in hotels and motels across regional WA. There were 29 staff in the south west, 13 in the Pilbara, 12 in the Kimberley, four in the wheatbelt, four in the goldfields, three in the great southern and one in the midwest, and that accommodation came at a very significant cost. In June 2023, \$402 000 was spent; in July, \$372 000; in August, \$409 000; and in September, \$377 000. A total of \$1.6 million in accommodation expenses, or \$4.5 million a year, was spent to house staff in what is basically not fit-for-purpose housing. Not all the hotels and motels are of a standard that we as members of Parliament may expect if we are used to the privilege of travelling in high-class accommodation at the taxpayers' expense. We would find that although this might be at the taxpayers' expense, in some circumstances it is very much not high-class accommodation. I am not going to name particular hotels or motels throughout the state and denigrate them, but some of them are not up to the standard of housing professional staff.

Dr D.J. Honey: For extended periods.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Not for extended periods. This is not necessarily overnight accommodation; this may be accommodation for a person who is undertaking rostered work, and someone else might come in. But there is no appropriate housing.

If we look at the housing stock that WACHS has across Western Australia, we see that it has 1 943 properties, which is a considerable number, but only about 115 properties are located in the south west, which is where we see the most hotel accommodation being used and at the considerable expense that I have outlined. This issue needs a long-term solution and an immediate change of mind in that we cannot keep on going like this, throwing good money after bad on hotel and motel accommodation. We know that in many communities that sort of accommodation is not easy to find. There are many communities now that might have a local project on. Even in the south west, which has not traditionally had big projects such as the mines and so on, projects are now occurring in the local areas. Similarly, the wheatbelt is not traditionally an area that has had mining camps or construction, but significant deposits are now being developed in those areas and there is a dire shortage of all sorts of accommodation. I know that trying to secure accommodation for myself as I go around the state is sometimes an issue, and I have to take whatever is available, including maybe travelling some distance to go back to another place to stay. Therefore, I know that that is very much an issue.

There is a cost to all these temporary solutions. Let us look at the Gascoyne and its midwifery situation. Since the closure two years ago, questions have been asked about cost, and around \$635 000 has been spent on travel and accommodation for the families, but that is often only a fraction of what families have to shell out. The real cost of not providing those services locally is probably much more than that, not to mention they do not have reassurance, because not every pregnancy runs to a plan. Just because someone says, "Four or five weeks before birth, head off to Perth", that is not necessarily what eventuates. That is an uncertainty and families would rather have reassurance. I believe that that situation needs to be rectified immediately.

Regional health is a tremendously important area. It has been a huge focus for me and my colleagues over the years. We introduced the southern health initiative, a \$600 million program to boost regional health. This government largely slashed many of those projects when it came in, including the one that I mentioned, which would have assisted Jurien Bay, and Chittering and Gingin, where there are no health services at all.

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MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley — Parliamentary Secretary) [4.06 pm]: I rise as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health to respond to the amendment moved by the member for North West Central that the following words be added —

and that this house condemns the Cook Labor government for its failure to deliver appropriate regional health services across Western Australia including the provision of adequate PATS and regional maternity services for women who wish to give birth closer to home and with the support of their families and friends

Unsurprisingly, the government will be opposing this amendment to the Premier’s Statement. I have a note from the minister’s office that she would have very much liked to address this amendment, but she is out of the chamber on urgent parliamentary business and so it falls to me to respond initially on behalf of the government.

Before I get into the points that I was going to make, I will address some of the comments made by opposition members in support of the amendment. I start with the contribution from the member for North West Central. This general statement applying to all issues—the minister’s office and the attitude of the office in responding to issues raised by members of this place on behalf of their constituents—is unambiguous. It is to the great credit of the member for North West Central that she acknowledged that in her contribution. She has been assiduous in raising concerns on behalf of her constituents with the minister’s office, and she rightly conceded that the minister’s office responded to those concerns and provided the necessary and appropriate assistance to those constituents in respect of those queries. I place on the record the recognition of Lara Jensen and Merrilea Broad, the Mt Magnet volunteers whom the member for North West Central mentioned, and I recognise the contribution that volunteers and non-government organisations make to our health ecosystem in Western Australia. We are the beneficiaries of a world-class health system, but that is in no small part thanks to the general community approach to the provision of health services and to looking after one another. That was such a hallmark of our community’s response to the COVID pandemic. That sentiment is carried through.

I note in passing that when I was a lawyer, my supervising partner used to say to me, “Never give free advice; only give advice to those who have asked for your advice”, but I have some gratuitous advice for members on the opposition benches. Their arguments would have so much more credibility if they could say the word “COVID”. Not one of them said the word “COVID” in their contribution. They talked about labour and staffing shortages, and the member for Moore talked about housing shortages —

Mr R.S. Love: Why do your members always refer to COVID?

Ms S.F. McGurk: No-one interjected on you, member. Not one person interjected on you this week.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Minister, I am more than happy to take the interjection —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: I am loath to do so. The previous time I took an interjection from the member for Moore he demonstrated his lack of intellectual capacity, so I am more than happy to take his interjection. The reason we mention the COVID pandemic is because it had a significant and material impact on the labour and construction market, the supply of housing and the number of people moving to Western Australia.

Mr R.S. Love: It is a blanket excuse.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition.

Mr R.S. Love: Every failure!

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Of course not. It is so weak of the opposition —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members! Please, Leader of the Opposition, you have made your contribution and it is the government’s turn to respond.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Not once was COVID mentioned by any opposition member. Do not take the advice—never mention COVID again! I will be happy to go to the people of Mount Lawley in 2025 and say “This is the way in which the McGowan and then Cook Labor governments have responded to that issue”. I will be more than happy to do that. The member for Moore will be so weak that he will not be prepared to mention it. He will say that it had no impact or effect on the state’s budget, economy, prosperity, labour market or the housing market, and he will be wrong.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: You have got your head in the sand.

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Since 2023, we have shepherded the Western Australia community, economy and society beyond the COVID pandemic. We have confronted unprecedented challenges. The failure of members opposite to acknowledge and respect that and give us credit does them no credit. It completely undermines the validity, integrity and credibility of their argument. My advice is this: grapple with that, recognise what we did and recognise the undermining that the opposition did of our COVID response and apologise for it.

I want to keep going. The member for Moore made a terrible contribution, but the member for North West Central actually made a worthwhile contribution. The member identified the need for more money for the patient assisted travel scheme and for accommodation, and she acknowledged that the Minister for Health assisted individual cases and identified staffing issues. She asked how we can make it easier for people on the ground and about the enormous stress on staff and patients in regional hospitals. The circumstances that we are confronting are the consequence of a global labour shortage and a staff shortage in the health workforce. This is a real challenge and a legitimate issue that the health minister is currently confronting. However, it is not a challenge or issue that is confined to Western Australia. If we look at any jurisdiction anywhere in the world, we can see that they are all tackling shortages of health professionals in the health workforce.

The problem with the proposition that the member advanced is that so much of what she is proposing to remedy that is dependent on the financial wellbeing of the state of Western Australia. If we are going to pay for more doctors and nurses, for the refurbishments of hospitals and for the construction of housing and essential infrastructure, we need to make sure that we have a balanced budget, are paying down debt and deficit and have reasonable GST receipts and returns for education and health from the federal government. Those are attributes that only the McGowan and Cook Labor governments have been able to establish and demonstrate.

The contributions that we are getting to our state finances from the beneficial GST deal that we negotiated, together with our mature stewardship of the economy and the negotiations that we have conducted—such as those by the Minister for Education—for better contributions to the state’s bottom line are fundamental requirements for us to make the investments in health that we need and want to make.

I will talk about maternity services at Carnarvon Health Campus, which was the main emphasis of the member’s contribution. We like to deal with facts, and the fact of the matter is that Carnarvon hospital ceased birthing services in February 2022 due to workforce shortages. Antenatal and postnatal services continue to be offered at Carnarvon hospital. The Cook Labor government and the WA Country Health Service are doing everything they can to return birthing services to Carnarvon hospital.

Members listen to the Minister for Health in question time, when she is making brief ministerial statements and in her public comments; the minister has been laser focused on providing birthing choices for the women of Western Australia. Unambiguously and without comparison to any previous Minister for Health, she is committed to this single focus.

Carnarvon women who need to travel to Geraldton or Perth to have their babies have their travel and accommodation costs met by the government. The government is picking up the tab. This situation is temporary and a direct result of workforce pressures. Attracting staff to live in regional areas and maintaining them there has always been difficult, despite this government’s putting in place competitive salaries and generous incentives. We are always looking at how we can work with WACHS, the local community and service providers to reduce red tape and create efficacy, so we can make the transition and journey simpler and easier for patients. A good example of that is how this minister picks up issues with emergency department access or the state health operations centre and tackles each issue by working line by line, chapter and verse, to interrogate each element to see how it can be improved for the benefit of the Western Australian community. That is what we are doing; that is our commitment.

I would like to reiterate just how impressive the work done by our WA Country Health Service is; sometimes this gets lost in the opposition’s hyperbole. The WA Country Health Service is the largest country health service in Western Australia and is one of the biggest in the world. It provides nursing posts, outreach services, health centres and bustling regional hospitals, and covers 2.5 million square kilometres. The WA Country Health Service operates six large regional hospitals, 15 medium-sized district hospitals and 50 small hospitals. It also has 32 health centres and nursing posts, four dedicated mental health inpatient units and 24 dedicated mental health services. Across the vast 2.5 million square kilometres of the state, the WA Country Health Service manages close to 170 facilities that have health teams based in the local population, and outreach services extend into WA’s more remote locations. The WA Country Health Service employs more than 11 000 people across the state—doctors, nurses, midwives, allied health professionals and support staff. A point was raised that this is an incredible undertaking by the staff, the professionals, of the WA Country Health Service. They are doing their best in difficult circumstances.

This really disappoints me: it is incredibly disingenuous for the opposition to come in here and talk about housing and staff shortages without acknowledging that this is not a uniquely Western Australian challenge. These are global challenges. I am incredibly pleased that the Minister for Housing is here because he has pulled every lever to try to promote and encourage housing supply. No-one could cavil with the fact that we face housing challenges.

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That is not confined to metropolitan Perth but is a feature across Western Australia. To level the accusation at us as though we have been ambivalent about providing housing to staff in the regions is incomprehensible, unjust and unfair. It does not speak to the credit or credibility of the opposition. It is incredibly disappointing. We are working; we are doing what we can with the resources that we have at our disposal. We have those resources at our disposal because of the sound financial management of the McGowan and Cook Labor governments. We are using the resources at our disposal to tackle those issues.

The member for Moore made a fundamentally terrible contribution. He drew an analogy between Dubbo in New South Wales and Carnarvon in Western Australia. I do not know whether the member for Moore knows this—I do not know if he knows anything, frankly. I do not know whether he knows that Dubbo is a town in central New South Wales of approximately 43 000 people. Member for North West Central, does Carnarvon have 43 000 people? Do not answer; she knows that it does not. I know that the member for North West Central knows more than the member for Moore. The member for North West Central knows that Dubbo and Carnarvon have absolutely no comparison. The town of Dubbo is more equivalent to the City of Bunbury than it is to Carnarvon. The town of Dubbo is approximately four hours' drive from Sydney. I ask the member for North West Central: is Carnarvon four hours' drive from Perth? The member knows that it is not. There is no comparison and it is disingenuous for the member for Moore to say we should look to Dubbo and compare the services that are available in Dubbo with the services available in Carnarvon. It is a fallacious argument and does him absolutely no credit. I am glad he has come back into the chamber to hear that.

He complained about the number of paramedics in our regions. We have more professional paramedics in our regions now than we have ever had. There are more paramedics than we had when the supposed—alleged—“party of the regions” was in government. We now have more professional paramedics in our regions. We have multiple midwifery group practices in our regions. We are leaving no stone unturned in making sure that we maintain and deliver our world-class health system, not only for the people of Perth but for everyone in Western Australia. To the member for North West Central's great credit, during her earlier contribution she said that she understood that the provision of services in regional WA is always going to be more challenging than the provision of services in metropolitan Perth. The regions do not expect the bridges, tunnels, houses, roads and hospitals and the rest of it. That is right; however, we will always do what we can to make sure that the delivery of those services into those towns is the best that it can be.

I say this: the people holding the government to account to make sure that the delivery of those services is at the best level it can possibly be—the people who are genuinely holding us to account and are demanding that the delivery of those services is as good as they can be—include the member for Kalgoorlie. She is a staunch advocate for her community and stands up to make sure the delivery of health services is as good as it can be in Kalgoorlie. The member for Albany is relentless in her advocacy to the Minister for Health to make sure that the community of Albany is well served by the WA health system and the WA Country Health Service. The member for Bunbury advocates on behalf of the City of Bunbury. The member for Geraldton, the member for Warren–Blackwood, the member for Pilbara and the member for Kimberley also advocate on behalf of their regions. For as long as we are privileged enough to have those incredible advocates on the government benches, we can rest assured that they will continue to make the argument to a minister who listens, who acts, who takes those issues seriously and who tackles the challenges faced by not only Western Australia, but also any jurisdiction in the world. The silver bullet that we have—that Victoria or New South Wales or the United Kingdom does not have—is our sound financial management. We can provide the pay and incentives and the lifestyle for opportunities for people to embark on a career in the WA Country Health Service and a career in WA health more generally. Sorry, let me go back a step. For the first time in Western Australia's history, the Premier of this state is a former Minister for Health. He was the shadow health minister during the course of the previous Liberal–National government and learnt all the mistakes that a government can make. He watched all the mistakes of the previous Liberal–National government while he was the shadow health minister —

Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski: Of which there were many.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Precisely, member for Kingsley. Of which there were many—ad seriatim. There were numerous mistakes. The story of mercury in Kalgoorlie today brought to mind the negligent management of the Perth Children's Hospital. The member for Cottesloe has gone, but I had a great conversation with him about the significant effects that heavy metals can have on the intellectual development of children. It brought to mind the despicable management of the Perth Children's Hospital project by the former Liberal–National government. For the first time, the people of Western Australia have a Premier who was a former health minister, and he passed on the baton to the honourable minister—my minister—who has taken up the challenge of continuing to provide a world-class health service to the citizens of Western Australia. She has done that by going through chapter and verse in a methodical, serious and thoughtful way each of the issues confronting the health system and the minister is working assiduously to alleviate those challenges. We are blessed to have the financial circumstances in which we can support those endeavours with the necessary resources. Now the Liberal Party is complaining that the minister —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Lilburne): Thank you, member. Your time has expired.

Extract from Hansard
[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 15 February 2024]
p171c-187a

Ms Emily Hamilton; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love; Mr Simon Millman; Ms Caitlin Collins; Mr David Templeman

Mr S.A. Millman: I had plenty more to say.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you for your contribution this afternoon.

Division

Amendment put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Mr P. Lilburne) casting his vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (5)

Ms M. Beard	Mr R.S. Love	Ms M.J. Davies (<i>Teller</i>)
Dr D.J. Honey	Mr P.J. Rundle	

Noes (36)

Mr S.N. Aubrey	Ms E.L. Hamilton	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms A. Sanderson
Mr G. Baker	Ms M.J. Hammat	Mr D.R. Michael	Ms J.J. Shaw
Ms H.M. Beazley	Mr T.J. Healy	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Ms J.M.C. Stojkovski
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr M. Hughes	Mr S.A. Millman	Dr K. Stratton
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Ms C.M. Collins	Ms E.J. Kelsbie	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr R.H. Cook	Dr J. Krishnan	Mr S.J. Price	Ms C.M. Tonkin
Ms D.G. D'Anna	Mr P. Lilburne	Mr D.T. Punch	Ms S.E. Winton
Mr M.J. Folkard	Mrs M.R. Marshall	Ms R. Saffioti	Ms C.M. Rowe (<i>Teller</i>)

Pair

Ms L. Mettam

Ms M.M. Quirk

Amendment thus negatived.

Consideration Resumed

MS C.M. COLLINS (Hillarys) [4.31 pm]: It is a pleasure to address the Premier's Statement and reflect on our positive agenda for Western Australia. As members of Parliament, we are here to make life fairer and better for Western Australians in our respective communities. In many ways, 2023 was the first year that we were able to reach for our goals without any major disruptions from COVID-19. This was a period of historic growth for our state.

In December last year, an article by Adrian Lowe in *The West Australian* painted the picture quite nicely. The article stated that WA was leading national growth. National economic growth was only 0.2 per cent in the quarter; meanwhile, the WA economy lifted by 2.4 per cent over the same quarter. Our state Treasurer was quoted in the article, and she confirmed that state growth post-COVID was now at 18.6 per cent, proving that WA continued to be the national economy's engine room. This is an incredible set of numbers for Western Australia. Our population now sits at 2.85 million and grew at 2.8 per cent over the last year. During that time, we enjoyed a 3.8 per cent unemployment rate.

There is no doubt that this influx of interest to our great state brings its challenges. We heard the Premier emphasise in his statement that 2024 will be another year of delivery and, importantly, delivery of more housing and cost-of-living support for Western Australians doing it tough. Some of my constituents in Hillarys reached out to me last year regarding their concerns over rental increases and housing supply. It was a real pleasure to have the Minister for Planning; Lands; Housing; and Homelessness address this group of Hillarys residents at Parliament House late last year to discuss the great work undertaken by the government to ensure there is a roof over people's heads. I thank the minister for being so generous with his time. The residents were left feeling impressed by the minister's compassion and passion for his position, and also grateful that this complex portfolio is in safe hands. This government is pulling every lever, as we have heard, to increase the supply of housing, which includes around 1 200 new dwellings receiving approval per month. The costs of construction are well and truly stabilising, and we recently announced the establishment of an interest-free loan facility to help residential builders complete unfinished properties. This will assist with both housing supply and affordability.

The median house price in Perth is around \$670 000—far more affordable than the \$934 000 price tag in Victoria and the eye-watering \$1.1 million in New South Wales. Australia is a land of opportunity, and I believe that the realistic opportunity to own one's own home is attracting a lot of interstate workers to Western Australia. I recognise again the fantastic work from the Minister for Housing to deliver 4 000 social homes to the Western Australian housing market, of which 1 700 are already delivered and a further 1 000 are under construction.

Mr J.N. Carey: It's more than 1 900 now; thank you.

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Ms C.M. COLLINS: He has corrected me; it is more than that!

I will talk a little about the cost of living. Rising interest rates mean that people all over Australia are struggling with cost-of-living pressures. Tackling cost of living has been this government's number one priority. When it comes to addressing cost-of-living pressures, the Cook Labor government's record stands in stark contrast to that of the previous Liberal–National government. I will outline some of the ways in which we are taking the edge off people's household budgets. We paid \$1 400 in household electricity credits to every household in Western Australia. We have reintroduced the seniors' safety and security rebate and boosted the seniors' cost-of-living rebate. We have capped public transport fares so that West Aussies pay no more than two zones and launched fare-free Sundays on public transport. We provided free public transport over the summer holidays, and we have just announced free public transport for all Western Australian students. To alleviate the burden on renters, we have introduced the WA rent relief program that gives tenants at risk of eviction up to \$5 000 in direct rental support. We have doubled the KidSport voucher program to help cover the cost of kids in sport, and we have kept water and power fee increases to well below inflation. I remind members that the Liberals and Nationals nearly doubled power and water fees while in office. We have not only reversed the Liberal–National fee hikes in TAFE, which were up to 570 per cent, but also made more than 130 courses fee-free. I am very proud to be part of a government that is tackling cost of living head on.

I move on to investment in education. I continue to work closely with local schools in the Hillarys electorate to make sure that they are in the best position to deliver high-quality teaching and learning. I was very fortunate last year to have the Minister for Education, Hon Dr Tony Buti, come out to the electorate to host an education forum. This was an opportunity for him to hear about the challenges that the teachers, board members and parents and citizens associations raised as part of their important work as educators. I also enjoy welcoming local students here to Parliament House, as we all do, and I am excited to bring in new groups in 2024 to educate them on what goes on in these chambers. It is a nice reminder of my time as a politics and law teacher prior to this career.

We have a number of school rebuilds that impact students in my electorate. Acting Speaker (Mr P. Lilburne), in your electorate of Carine we have Duncraig Senior High School, which services Hillarys and Padbury students. This school is known for its excellent academic outcomes and its reputation has brought greater demand and student enrolments. Construction began this year on the \$41 million redevelopment delivered as part of the state government's \$1.5 billion infrastructure program. It is exciting to see that this school will soon have a permanent capacity rise to over 1 850 students. The \$20 million redevelopment of Hillarys Primary School continues to progress really well, and kindergarten, year 2 and year 3 students are already enjoying the new facilities this year, including a new bike track. February saw some amazing work with the demolition almost completed, and the land and site have been made much safer after extensive asbestos was removed by qualified specialists on the grounds. I thank the entire school community and the wider Hillarys community for staying safe and following the school directions during this period. Obviously, there was the inconvenience of having a rebuild while they were there, but I am sure they will very much enjoy the new buildings.

With regard to investment in training, the government really is setting up Western Australia to succeed in the long term. Part of this involves recognising the skills we need for good quality jobs and a workforce that can capture the opportunities that are ahead. Our government has made more than 130 TAFE courses free of charge, but we have also strengthened the apprenticeship system by expanding the wage subsidy scheme and creating an additional 150 apprenticeships and trainee places in small and medium businesses. This is not just about ensuring that WA does well; it is about ensuring that WA workers can easily achieve their full potential and be part of our state's success story.

Across the country, Labor governments are getting on with the job of transitioning our energy systems and securing a safe future for future generations. When I made my inaugural speech in this chamber, I spoke about the mental health pressures on young people and the years of stagnation and climate inaction inflicted by the coalition. In 2024, it finally feels like this narrative is changing, and a pathway out of the darkness is much more evident. This pathway requires modern technology and complex job-creating, state-building projects, and we are delivering. This year we saw Kwinana Battery stage 2 put in place, WA's biggest energy storage system. The Cook government is investing more than \$3 billion in renewable energy generation, transmission and storage as part of its commitment to energy transition, and we are delivering cleaner, more reliable and more affordable energy for our future.

Western Australians owe the community of Collie deeply for that community's enduring role in keeping the state's lights on. This year we saw the Collie battery project progress, and we know that large-scale battery storage delivers the biggest bang for buck for Western Australians. These projects create good quality jobs and bring the cost of energy down as we leverage our world-leading solar generation to achieve greater energy interdependence.

Every bit of carbon we put into our atmosphere must be accounted for, and as part of this, the carbon that is absorbed by our trees is now a crucial part of our international efforts against climate change. That is why it was very important

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for WA to lead the nation with the commencement of the native forests logging ban. This will protect more than 400 000 hectares of karri, jarrah and wandoo forest that would otherwise likely have been logged.

The Minister for Environment, Hon Reece Whitby, introduced the Climate Change Bill 2023 late last year to formalise our commitment to net zero emissions by 2050. That will build on our work in the environment and climate action space, including exiting state-owned coal-fired power stations and reducing state government emissions by 80 per cent by 2030. The Cook Labor government is committed to building a sustainable future for all West Aussies.

On a more local level, I would like to talk about an issue relating to the environment in the Hillarys electorate. My constituents feel very passionate about their beaches. The stretch of coastline in my electorate has, objectively, some of the most beautiful, pristine beaches in the world. Members can imagine the sheer horror when the City of Joondalup released its draft coastal hazard risk management and adaptation plan last year, in which it was proposed to build 17 groynes between Hillarys and Mullaloo. This would have meant a groyne every 350 metres. Members can picture the long stretch of white sand along the coast suddenly being obstructed by those huge rock structures. The decision to scrap that proposal is down to a huge community effort led by passionate locals. This community win is absolutely down to that grassroots campaign, which truly demonstrates the meaning of people power. I want to thank Kim and Ben Allen for their knowledge of, and commitment and dedication to, this cause. They harnessed social media to bring about awareness to the community. Their Stop the Groynes group has more than 5 500 members, and we soon saw “Stop the Groynes” stickers all over the electorate—on bins, cars, signs and on the sides of houses. Hundreds of local showed up to the workshops held by the local council to voice their concerns and to ask questions.

I give a shout-out also to the Mullaloo Beach Community Group for managing to get thousands of people to sign its petition week after week. We even saw candidates running for council on this very issue. My office and I worked incredibly hard to encourage people to make submissions because without that their voices simply would not be heard. We delivered thousands of letters, called hundreds of locals and held mobile offices in Mullaloo and Kallaroo to chat to as many people as we could about the importance of making a submission. In the end, more than 5 600 people commented on the draft proposal, with an overwhelming 98 per cent saying that they opposed the groynes. The message was clear. The community wanted research into alternative ways to combat erosion on our coastline that were less obstructive than groynes. The city agreed to consult with the community, and it will revise its coastal management strategy, so I thank the councillors for listening to the community on this one.

No state government in Australia invests more in health care per person than the Cook Labor state government. We are redeveloping Joondalup Health Campus through a \$270 million investment. The new world-class mental health unit at Joondalup Health Campus is now open. That unit has doubled in capacity and is recovery focused. The 102-bed unit is four times the size of the previous unit and sets a new standard for mental health facilities across the state. We have also invested \$452.7 million into our emergency departments. Ambulance ramping has been reduced by 21 per cent in the past year. We have introduced nurse-to-patient ratios, making sure that every patient in WA gets the care and attention they deserve, and we have delivered a record number of elective surgeries and procedures to reduce elective surgery waitlists. I am proud to be part of a government that puts its patients first.

Constituents in the Hillarys electorate are employed in a range of industries, but the electorate’s understanding of the importance of tourism in Western Australia is well developed. A highlight last year was hosting Daniel Ricciardo in Mullaloo as the state government launched its fantastic Western Australian road trip initiative, Drive the Dream. This campaign is being rolled out across Europe, the United Kingdom, Southeast Asia and Japan and will empower visitors to embark on a road trip across our coral coast. On top of this, we have secured a range of direct flights, including from Shanghai to Perth, which will make our beautiful coastlines more accessible to China’s economic centre of more than 26 million people. The government has secured direct flights from Tokyo, Johannesburg, Singapore, Bangkok, Phuket, Paris, Rome and Ho Chi Minh to name a few. This year Western Australia will host the World Travel and Tourism Council Global Summit, allowing us to show off our amazing way of life and build international interest in destination Perth.

[Member’s time extended.]

Ms C.M. COLLINS: What has been the southern suburbs’ loss will soon be the northern suburbs’ gain. All communities in Perth’s north are excited by the prospect of a Western Australian film studio being established in Malaga. An amount of \$100 million is being invested into establishing a world-class, modern facility with all the tools required to tell amazing stories, just 10 minutes from the electorate of Hillarys. Respected WA arts and culture writer Mark Naglazas recently interviewed a selection of Perth’s artistic leaders about the project. These luminaries were excited by the studios having the room to grow and succeed in the northern suburbs, the proximity to the Swan Valley and northern metro resorts and accommodation options along the coast. This studio will help prevent the loss of WA’s home-grown artistic talent because they have to travel east or overseas. It will help to establish a base to tell our stories and hear familiar voices when we boot up Netflix or when the lights dim in a movie theatre. I cannot wait to see what incredible stories this asset generates for our great state.

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Lastly, I turn to community safety. This issue is often raised with me, particularly because Hillarys Boat Harbour is an entertainment precinct. In his Premier's Statement, the Premier said —

Our protected entertainment precincts have been in place for a year now, keeping dozens of violent offenders out of popular destinations.

Hillarys Boat Harbour was named a protected entertainment precinct a year ago. Since then, a number of individuals have been issued with a short-term exclusion order from the boat harbour. Given that community safety is one of my top priorities, it has been important to work with the relevant stakeholders. The boat harbour is run by the Department of Transport. Last year, it worked in conjunction with the Western Australia Police Force to try to combat the hooning and antisocial behaviour that was happening in the car park near one of the licensed premises. As part of this work, I ran a campaign to advocate for extra CCTVs in the car parks. The DoT delivered \$300 000 to upgrade the CCTV system. This meant installing an extra 24 cameras in the northern and southern car parks, including automatic licence number plate recognition. This CCTV commitment complemented other strategies to improve the area, such as liquor licensing compliance, increased police foot patrols and enforcing the protected entertainment precinct legislation.

“Hoon” is a term I hear all too often; indeed, it is a term that my constituents love to raise with me. I decided to refer to the definition of “hoon” in my contribution. I recently had a meeting with the officer in charge of Hillarys Police Station, during which he enlightened and educated me about what the term means. I had the wrong definition in my mind. I thought it referred to hearing cars and motorbikes—a large number of vehicles—screeching down Hepburn Avenue and exhausts backfiring. That does not fall within the legal definition of “hoon”. It may be semantics, but it is important to understand driver behaviour that may or is likely to result in convictions and vehicle seizures for offences related to or defined as hoon behaviour. It is very important that there is an understanding of what it is because the perception amongst the community is very different to what is enforceable. Often community perception relates to the number of vehicles on the road or the loud noises that heard from car and motorbike exhausts when, in reality, “hoon” refers to the loud noises that come from the screeching of tyres or the reckless and dangerous driving that could result in an accident.

One of my 2021 election commitments was to deliver three mobile CCTV “hoon” cameras to the City of Joondalup. Unfortunately, I do not determine where the cameras go. Often people say to me that they really want me to put a camera at the end of their street where a lot of hoon activity is happening. The City of Joondalup, the local police and I have been working with the community because without them reporting these situations, the police cannot put a camera in a street simply because they have asked me for it. We are trying to work on this education campaign so that cameras are located in the appropriate places.

As I mentioned, I have regular meetings with the new OIC, Adrian Fuller, about these issues. He recently reported back to me a number of new initiatives to counter some of these issues. They include increased marked and plain vehicle traffic patrols, the installation of a discrete camera, the deployment of field intelligence officers and message boards to encourage the reporting of hoon behaviour, highlighting vehicle seizures on social media to deter offending and requesting that Main Roads install strip-speed measuring equipment. Lots and lots is happening in this space, and I am confident that we can combat the hoons. The residents of Hillarys should feel assured that we are working hard on this issue.

It really has been a privilege to serve in the forty-first Parliament of Western Australia, and it has been an even bigger privilege to serve in a WA Labor government that is doing what is right for Western Australia. With that, I commend the Premier's Statement, and I thank the chamber for its indulgence.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr D.A. Templeman (Leader of the House)**.

House adjourned at 4.55 pm
