

APPROPRIATION (RECURRENT 2015–16) BILL 2015
APPROPRIATION (CAPITAL 2015–16) BILL 2015

Second Reading — Cognate Debate

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean) [7.02 pm]: Before the dinner break, I was talking about the very significant amounts of capital that have been taken out of the Water Corporation's budget and basically saying that we have two scenarios. In my view, the one that looks to be most likely is that this money has been stripped out of the Water Corporation's capital budget to assist the government in reducing its overall state debt wherever it can. The implication for this scenario is that the Water Corporation will have greater difficulty in maintaining its asset base. This is consistent with the warnings in the strategic development plan that was put together by the board of the Water Corporation and tabled in Parliament in August last year. The other scenario that forms the government's argument is that a review of the Water Corporation's capital needs has led to a shift in focus from building new infrastructure to operating and maintaining existing assets and that this can be done without an increased risk of asset or regulatory failure. As I said, there are two scenarios. My challenge to the Minister for Water is that if she wants us to buy her argument that she can take all this money out of the capital expenditure for the Water Corporation, she needs to justify it or provide more information to the people of Western Australia other than a couple of lines in a budget. It is easy to say that the focus is moving from building new assets to maintaining existing assets, but it is harder to explain how that translates into the Water Corporation being able to do its job properly with its aging assets. In order to do that, I challenge the minister to release, for example, the \$954 million worth of projects that are listed at page 18 of the strategic development plan. They were projects that were deferred in the original strategic development plan. If they are projects that are of no consequence, she should have no problem telling us what they were or are. Similarly, in respect of the hundreds of millions of dollars of the asset investment program that have come out of this budget, she should tell us what projects and new assets the Water Corporation had intended to build that it now will not build across the forward estimates. If this is a rational, reasonable plan, she should be able to tell us that and explain why they are no longer necessary.

The budget papers state that the Water Corporation has revised its risk analysis in such a way that risk is kept at acceptable levels without the need for new capital expenditure. I call on the minister to release that revised risk analysis. The budget also refers to the Water Corporation having reviewed its asset investment program, and that it is that review that has generated these hundreds of millions of dollars in savings. I call on the minister to release that review of the Water Corporation's asset investment program. If that is the basis upon which she believes she can take hundreds of millions of dollars out of the Water Corporation's asset investment program, she should make it public.

If she is not prepared to make some sort of comprehensive explanation about this significant change of course in one of the most important utilities we have, people are going to say, "This claim that the Water Corporation has changed its focus is just words on a page; we heard what the Water Corporation said in its strategic development plan and how it needed more capital spent, not less." In the absence of the minister 'fessing up and providing that information, people will rightly think that it is just words and that this capital has been stripped out of the corporation for no other reason than to reduce the mountain of debt that this government has created.

The staff want to know; morale at the Water Corporation is very low. People do not believe that this government is giving the Water Corporation the resources it needs. This is a challenge to the minister: she can hide behind a few bland and glib statements in the budget papers or she can provide a comprehensive explanation to the people of Western Australia as to why there has been such a dramatic change in the way in which the Water Corporation manages its assets. When I have asked the minister questions about cuts in the Water Corporation, she has repeated on a number of occasions that the government has now droughtproofed Perth. For so many reasons, that is a very irresponsible thing to say. We have been trying to get the message through to the people of Western Australia that they need to conserve water. The Water Corporation is spending millions of dollars on its Fresh Water Thinking campaign to try to reinforce the need for consumers to reduce their water usage, yet here we have the minister saying that she has droughtproofed Perth. If I am not wrong, the Treasurer also said in his budget speech that the government had droughtproofed Perth. What a ridiculous comment to make! Apart from anything else, the last figures from the Bureau of Meteorology for household water consumption in Perth showed that over the last 12 months, there has actually been a two per cent increase in water consumption. For the first time in many years, the projection for household water consumption in Perth has gone up. There had been a steady decline over recent years because governments of both sides have worked hard to send the message to people in Perth that we need to conserve water, yet here we have this government all of a sudden declaring victory: "We've droughtproofed Perth." That sends a really bad message to the people of Western Australia—

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that they can now use as much water as they like. When I asked the minister to justify that claim in this chamber on 13 May, she said that, yes, the government will droughtproof Perth et cetera, stating —

I am very confident, barring the fact that we have a five or 10-year, once-in-a-lifetime drought, that we have made the appropriate investment to give confidence to the people of Western Australia that when they turn on a tap, water will come out.

She claimed that the government had droughtproofed Perth, unless we have a drought. That just reinforces how silly that statement was. I put a question on notice asking the minister to give the criteria she used to come to the conclusion that she had droughtproofed Perth and when she came to the conclusion that she had droughtproofed Perth. The answer I got back did not give any details whatsoever. I think the claim that the government has droughtproofed Perth is just part of the spin that it is using to justify ripping money out of the capital expenditure of the Water Corp. It is part of the spin to justify selling off the construction division of the Water Corp. It is just a term that has come out of media marketing rather than something that the Water Corporation itself would say. I asked the minister in this chamber whether the board of the Water Corporation agreed that the government has droughtproofed Perth, and she refused to answer that question.

I would like to talk about quite a few things relating to my electorate. In the time that I have left, the one issue I will raise is that the first disability justice centre is planned to open in my electorate in July this year. This is the centre that no-one in my electorate wants. We understand from the budget papers that it has cost the state over \$8 million to build. I understand also from questions in the other chamber that it will have running costs of over \$3 million a year—so, \$8 million to build and over \$3 million in running costs. It has a maximum capacity of 10 inmates. I understand that it will not have anywhere near that number of people in it because there are not that number of people in the prison cohort who would be eligible to go into it. It is ironic that that is the only facility in my electorate that I can identify that has any additional money, while funding to all the schools has been cut. It is a poorly thought out program. If the government had any sense, it would rethink that.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [7.12 pm]: I am very pleased, in debate on the Appropriation (Capital 2015–16) Bill 2015 and the Appropriation (Recurrent 2015–16) Bill 2015, to be making a contribution, once again, to another budget by the Liberal–National government. In doing so, I would like to address a range of issues, some affecting Mandurah and the Peel region and some others reflecting on the portfolio areas that I am responsible for as shadow minister. First, there is no doubt that families, pensioners and small businesses in my electorate will be called upon by this government to pay for its reckless stewardship of the budget. We know that they are being rewarded for the government’s absolute trashing of the economy with cuts to concessions for pensioners and across-the-board increases in water and electricity once again on top of what we already know has been a high-taxing Liberal–National government.

It is interesting to look at what has been offered to pensioners. With the capping of the local government rate at \$550—which I will be grieving about to the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering; Local Government tomorrow morning—on top of the additional increases to the basics that sustain life in terms of water, electricity et cetera, the wonderful gift that the government has given to seniors is free travel on public transport from 7.00 pm until 6.00 am weekdays. I can imagine that has been greeted with great acclaim by seniors in Mandurah and other areas where a train line is available, but I am absolutely certain that, given the choice between keeping the existing regime of council rate rebates and the existing water rate rebate scheme, keeping electricity and water increases at zero would be far more attractive and would be the choice of most seniors in my electorate and, I am sure, across the state.

At question time on Tuesday, the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering; Local Government was asked a dorothy dixer in this place about the various cuts announced in this budget. He said that we need to plan for future increases in population, particularly for those aged 60-plus. Then, in answering the question, he lectured the seniors of my electorate and others about being sustainable and about the need to rein in their budgets and their spending. The minister and this Premier have been very happy to lecture the people of Western Australia. The government has lectured the opposition and it has lectured other important sectors of our community about the need to take responsibility, to be sustainable and to live within our means, but it is advice that the government has not taken. The Barnett government has been very happy to lecture on all those things but it has taken no responsibility for the disastrous budget that was handed down last Thursday, nor has it taken any responsibility for its stewardship of the Western Australian economy since it took office in 2008.

It is now on record—it is a fact—that it was under this Liberal–National government that the state lost its AAA credit rating. Western Australia has been placed on watch for the potential further downgrading of its credit rating. It is under the Liberal–National government that state debt has ballooned from \$3.6 billion when the Labor Party left government in 2008 to a projected \$36 billion in a few short years. It is under a Liberal–National government that a record deficit was announced in the budget last Thursday—a record deficit of over

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\$2 billion. The Premier then had the gall, in defence of the indefensible—in defence of the disastrous budget handed down by the Treasurer last Thursday—to make comparisons between Sir John Forrest, Sir David Brand and Sir Charles Court. As the Leader of the Opposition so clearly and concisely highlighted in his address in reply to the budget speech this afternoon, this Premier ain't no Sir David Brand, he ain't no Sir John Forrest and he ain't no Sir Charles Court!

Dr A.D. Buti: Even Richard Court did not want him.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: He ain't any of those. For him, in my view, to arrogantly even seek to compare himself and his government with those governments is a mark of the level of arrogance that this Premier has now reached. I have said to a number of Liberal Party backbenchers in this place that they need to be very much aware of the growing discontent—in fact, the seething anger—that now exists in many, many parts of Western Australia about their leader, the Premier. The Premier believes that he is not responsible for the debt, for the deficit, for the downturn and for the job losses. He takes no responsibility, and he wipes them away with one-liners and comments that he then quite often claims to have never said. It is a budget of broken dreams and broken promises, as we know, but it is also a very sad situation that the state finds itself in.

Now, of course, in order to try to find a way forward, the Liberal–National government, with the National Party very much hand in hand, is dancing down the pathway to a fire sale of the state's assets. A number of those assets are the target of this government. The government now wants to sell off the family jewels. In many respects, the government has kicked the state in the family jewels by what it has done! We will see. Despite the fact that the Premier has said previously that it would not happen, and despite warnings from other states, including ex-Premiers, that this is not the way to go, we will see the sale of the TAB. Once the TAB is sold, it will not be a revenue raiser for the state in the future. We have seen the proposal to sell Fremantle port and other proposals to sell off the state's silver.

The Barnett government is telling seniors in my community—people who are vulnerable and on fixed and low incomes—that they will just have to grin and bear this medicine, while at the same time it takes no responsibility whatsoever. It is sad that this is happening and that it has got to this stage.

Unfortunately, backbenchers on the other side, when they could and should have been speaking out, have not been doing so. The member for Hillarys has a track record of being the conscience of the Liberal Party. We know that a number of years back he highlighted to this place the burgeoning debt trajectory on which the Barnett government is taking the state's finances and the overspending. However, this afternoon when the member for Hillarys got up and put his view, as is his right, and as is the right of every person in this place, we saw members from his own side, including the members for Wanneroo and Joondalup, attempt to shout him down. Why? It is because they know that what the member for Hillarys said two years ago, or more, and what he said last year in his budget contribution, and what he said this afternoon in this place, has all rung true. However, not one of the backbenchers, in particular in the Liberal Party but also in the National Party, has, it seems, stood up to this out-of-control train wreck that is the state of Western Australia's budget. Only one person has stood in this place and said it, and a number of members lampooned him. They lampooned him this afternoon when he stood in this place and outlined why the government and this Premier got it wrong. Truth hurts, I think. The truth that the member for Hillarys spoke this afternoon, and on a number of occasions last year and the year before, about the parlous state of the state's budget and the trajectory of the state's budget has come home to roost. Rather than listen to the valid points he made, government members lampooned, attacked and had a go at him. That is their choice; he is on their side. However, I reckon he will go home tonight—I am sure he is already there because he told me he was going home a bit earlier—and sleep well knowing that what he said this afternoon in this place is true, and knowing that he has been vindicated in what he said a number of years back about the stewardship of the state's budget.

Let us look at the hypocrisy of the now Treasurer, the seventh Treasurer of this government in seven years. We know that the former member for Bateman and now member of federal Parliament saw the writing on the wall about the parlous state of the state's budget books. Quite understandably, he did not want to be around to be saddled with the state's books, either as Treasurer or as potential leader of the Liberal–National government. The hypocrisy of the current Treasurer—we all know from his earlier musings as an economist and academic—is obvious because he knows in his gut that everything he is doing now is wrong and he knows why we are in the situation in which we now find ourselves.

In this budget, land tax will increase at the rate of \$120 million over the next four years. To be honest, we have not heard a whimper from the property industry, which was very quick to savage the Labor government when it was in power. That is disgraceful, quite frankly. Members of that industry bleated very loudly when the Labor government did not do what they wanted with land tax. We now see that land tax has been increased by more

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than \$820 million and there has been barely a whimper. Where is the responsibility on behalf of the sector? It needs to reassess its view of this government. But this is happening; a lot of other stakeholders are reassessing their views of this government. They are. That is why, when members knock on a door in Mandurah, the City of Vincent, the City of Wanneroo, Collie, Albany or parts of regional WA and mention the name Colin Barnett, I can guarantee that nine times out of 10 they will not get a positive response. That is because people there have made up their mind about this Premier.

Mr J.R. Quigley: Could you add Butler to that list, please?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Butler, yes. I know that the member for Butler has been out doorknocking heavily, because I rang him the other day and he was out there. Mention Colin Barnett at the doorstep and, I will tell you what, we will get a response. I see my good but vulnerable friend the member for Murray–Wellington looking at me. I have been receiving some interesting comments from the electorate of the member for Murray–Wellington, including from some fellows whose names I will not mention because I want them to keep telling me things. They are very strong traditional Liberal supporters who highlighted their disdain for not only the budget but also his leader. I know he has been attempting—he has probably done it pretty well—to distance himself a little bit. I think he had better distance himself a little bit more from this government. I do not know whether those fellows have got their baseball bats out yet, but I reckon they have taken the box out of the wardrobe and they have it ready. I honestly believe that. Some of the starry-eyed backbenchers of the Liberal Party should watch out because when the baseball bat comes out, many of them will not see it coming and the next time we see them after the election in 2017, it will be as members of the former members’ association of this Parliament.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I do and I do not want to be one of them. I will once I have decided to go on my own terms. I would not like to be one of those members, particularly one who did not see it coming and as we know, a few of them litter the history of this place. It will be devastating for them personally, and next time around they will understand what it means. I do not know how many times some of those Liberal Party backbenchers need to be warned—and some of the National Party members. I think they know it in their hearts, but some of them keep on jumping up and saying how wonderful the “Emperor” is and what a wonderful legacy he will be leaving for the state, when history will show that he will be one of the worst Premiers we have had, in my view.

In this budget are a number of “hiddens” that we will explore in the estimates process.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Some of those hiddens include issues associated with support in communities that are most vulnerable. One of the areas of community services is the provision of financial counselling services for people who need assistance. A number of members on my side of this Parliament have heard increasing concerns from providers of financial counselling. We need only look at the foothills around Kalamunda, for example, to know that there is only one financial counselling service available and only one financial counsellor covering a vast area of the foothills electorates of Forrestfield into Kalamunda et cetera. They are already under stress because there is only one provider and usually only one financial counsellor available. But those groups all report to us that people they have never seen before are fronting up at the door seeking their assistance. Why? It is because an increasing number of people are being caught in the poverty trap or the poverty spiral. An increasing number of people are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. The sad thing about Western Australia is that this is probably one of the most expensive places on earth. When vulnerable people on low or fixed incomes who are finding it difficult to make ends meet are living in a place that is one of the most expensive on earth, it is that much tougher. This government’s stewardship of the economy has got us into this mess, and people will be faced with another increase in electricity and water charges and a 10 per cent increase in the emergency services levy that is put on rates collected by local government. People will see that a cap on their rates means that an increasing number of them will pay \$100, \$200 or more a year on rates, which they did not pay last year. When the Minister for Local Government says that people will not pay that increase this year as it does not come in until 2016, he misses the point. I will raise that in greater detail tomorrow morning when I present a grievance to the minister.

It now costs the average worker who catches the train from Mandurah to Perth and pays a \$2 parking fee every day \$100 a week just to get to work; that is with the SmartRider concession rate. It still means they pay \$100 a week to get to and from their place of employment. We can now add to that a 2.3 per cent or 2.4 per cent increase in the zonal fare on the Public Transport Authority ticket, so that people at the end of the line in outer suburbs are starting to be priced out of existence in terms of their employment. Many people who travel to Perth for work are not necessarily on high six-figure incomes as some people assume. Many people who travel on the Mandurah trains work in retail, the service industry, industrial locations et cetera, and they are not on high

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incomes. When someone pays nearly \$5 000 a year out of their wage to get to and from work on public transport, it starts to impact on their livelihoods and on their budgets.

Point of Order

Dr A.D. BUTI: The noise level is one of just constant chatter and I find it very annoying. I do not mind members speaking, but it is just a bit loud.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Thank you.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is only the member for Dawesville, and I would have thought he would be concerned about this issue because many of these people live in Dawesville and catch the train to and from work. They will pay another 2.5 per cent on their fares and that means that some of them will pay towards \$5 000 a year on public transport. If the member for Dawesville is not concerned about that, it is his problem. I am concerned about it because I know a lot of people whom I see when I catch the train to come to this place —

Dr A.D. Buti: You're a great local member!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That may be the case, but the fact is that many of those people are now questioning their household budgets and how much it costs them to get to their place of employment. It is an issue for us. I believe that at some stage we may have to look at a system of capping increases to transport fares to those outer areas at the end of the line. If the government consistently increases fares and there is no wage growth to counter that or, indeed, if employment prospects decline, as we know they are under this government, it is a real issue for us and it needs to be considered very closely.

I turn to local government. We already know that this government undertook an appallingly failed process of attempted forced local government amalgamations in the metropolitan area that exploded in the face of the government, the Premier and the minister. We already know from various sources the comments that the Minister for Local Government has been making about the sort of sandwich he was given by the Premier in that process. This budget that has been handed down has a number of implications for local government. I mentioned the capping of rebates on local government rates and I will mention it again tomorrow when I present my grievance. That is just one part of it. Not only do we know that capping the rebate for rates will be an issue for a significant number of seniors and pensioners throughout Western Australia, we also know that the emergency services levy, which local government collects, will rise by 10.6 per cent. We also know that electricity charges will continue to increase. Remember, local governments pay the electricity bill for streetlights. We know that local governments, over the past six years, have had to fork out increasing segments of their budget just to keep the streetlights going for community safety in their neighbourhoods. We know that it has been the same with water increases. There is an impact on local government in the ongoing costs.

As we know, this government has treated local government with disdain, as has been said on numerous occasions. The relationship between the state government and local government is probably the worst for many decades. That distrust and sense of disdain has been coming from the top of this government—the Premier himself. It is little wonder that the local government sector and local government employees do not trust this Premier and this Minister for Local Government, because they have a track record of treating local government with disdain. They have abused any trust or willingness to participate as an active partner and that must change. The minister cannot simply, as he has tended to do since the reform process exploded in his face, brush it off as something that just happened. He must take responsibility. The mistrust and a lack of respect results from the way in which the local government sector has been treated. Taking the rebate capping as one example, we would have expected that the Western Australian Local Government Association would have been consulted or engaged on what might be the effects of such a cap, but it was not.

That is a very good example of the way this government and this Premier operate, but there are many other examples. This is a bad budget for families, small businesses, seniors, pensioners and people with children. It is a very disappointing budget for which this government should be condemned.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse) [7.43 pm]: I rise to speak on the Appropriation (Recurrent 2015–16) Bill 2015 and the Appropriation (Capital 2015–16) Bill 2015. This year's budget represents the government meeting the demands of a growing population against a backdrop of a challenging economic and fiscal environment. Since 2008–09, the government has ensured that we have police services, health care and one of the best education systems in the world. The Vasse electorate has experienced such growth and the Liberal–National government continues to take responsibility for investing in jobs and the needs of a growing population.

I am pleased to see in this year's state budget investment in new projects through the state government's royalties for regions program. Royalties for regions will invest \$4 billion over four years and will continue its pledge to revitalise economic, business and social development in regional Western Australia. This program has

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revitalised more than 20 towns in regional Western Australia since 2009, to the tune of \$5.2 billion, which is a credit to the Liberal–National government. I look forward to continuing to work with the South West Development Commission, local community groups and the Minister for Regional Development to ensure benefits for the towns of Busselton, Vasse, Cowaramup, Gracetown, Dunsborough and Yallingup, which make up the Vasse electorate.

As a state tourism hub, it is essential that we see continued investment through this program in this space. As the events capital of regional Western Australia, it is fitting that this region, headquartered in Busselton, received funding for five events through the regional events scheme, which is jointly funded by Tourism WA and the state government’s royalties for regions program. These events support the vibrancy of regional towns and add social and economic benefits to regional WA. It is about jobs.

It was fantastic to catch up with festival director Cindy Wiese and the City of Busselton’s Jacqui Happ who have been instrumental in delivering the recent fantastic event Jazz by the Bay. The event is in its third year this year. The event has grown significantly, with the 4 000 attendances last year expected to grow further this year. According to Jacqui, people are particularly excited about the festival this year because for the first time there will be two international performers visiting the Vasse electorate. Both performers are from the United States; one is from Portland and the other is from New York. They will be well supported by a large number of performers from Perth. Jazz by the Bay features local, national and international jazz musicians hosted at a variety of venues throughout the City of Busselton and the township of Dunsborough. The event includes ticketed and free events. Activities include a musical theatre piece outlining the history of jazz, a performance by an Aboriginal jazz artist, workshops and a free community concert. I look forward to opening this event at Clancy’s Fish Pub in Dunsborough next week.

Geographe Bay Race Week also received funding under this program. It is an annual sailing regatta hosted at Port Geographe Marina in Busselton. This week, I had the pleasure of catching up with Craig Godridge of the Geographe Bay Yacht Club at the Deck Marina Bar and Restaurant, which hosts this event, to congratulate him on attaining funding for this valuable program. I was also lucky to be part of the opening of the event in February this year. The week-long event includes an opening concert with a fireworks display at the Busselton Jetty. It attracts tourists to the region who spend and support local businesses in the City of Busselton. The SunSmart Busselton Jetty Swim and Quit Forest Rally are other fantastic events that have funding in the 2015–16 round of the regional events scheme. In total, 54 events across Western Australia will receive funding of between \$5 000 and \$50 000.

Eleven million dollars in regional marketing funding has been attained for the region. It is a welcome investment that is part of the Liberal–National government’s plan to increase visitor spend in the regions from \$3.5 billion to \$4.75 billion by 2020. Every job in the Vasse electorate is directly or indirectly linked to our tourism sector, and this funding illustrates the government’s commitment to this aspiration. An additional \$11 million has been provided to extend the regional tourism marketing program and there is much excitement across the Vasse electorate about what this funding will bring to the sector’s tourism goals. The funding completes the government’s 2013 election commitment to provide an additional \$24 million for tourism marketing in the regions to put our regions on the map as areas to visit and great places to enjoy.

The royalties for regions program has committed \$521 million to the Growing Our South initiative. It is hoped that the expansion of the Busselton Regional Airport will be a worthy recipient of some of this funding. This plan has been supported by the national Tourism 2020 plan and the South West Development Commission’s blueprint for the region. The state government also has a plan to increase the value of tourism and the current regional spend in this space, and the upgrade of the airport and the attraction of flights from the east coast directly into Busselton will help us to achieve that worthy goal.

The Liberal–National government’s investment to the tune of \$560 million in the social housing investment package is also a worthy investment in reducing the number of people who need a roof over their head the most. Importantly, \$85 million of royalties for regions funding will also be invested directly into regional areas. Although it has not been decided where these funds will be dedicated, ultimately it is expected that it will be beneficial to take the heat off the priority list in the Busselton region either directly through a boost to housing stock or indirectly through supporting seniors and families in need in other areas. Six hundred properties will be built, 200 spot purchases will be made and 200 leases will be undertaken by the private sector, which will be acquired according to greatest priority and best value for money in the best interests of our regions.

The Liberal–National government has invested in protecting our homes from fire. As many people will be aware, the Vasse electorate is an area that has faced the threat of fire. Recently, I toured the electorate with Bob Hagan and John Carter from the Department of Parks and Wildlife, where officers are undertaking prescribed burning in the Yallingup, Cowaramup and Ambergate areas. This year’s budget will see an additional investment of

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\$20 million in this space. This will assist officers to achieve their annual goal of burning 200 000 hectares, or 45 per cent, of state forest and national park areas in the south west carrying a fuel load of six years or more. It will also fund additional overtime positions and support the Department of Parks and Wildlife in expanding its capabilities. As the local member for Vasse, I have supported further burns in this region and I have encouraged the community to get on board by ensuring that their properties are safe. The priority burning areas in the region are around Yallingup in particular and the region behind Yallingup hill is also of great concern. This is why the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has prioritised sections around Caves House this autumn and the larger and more challenging section behind Yallingup hill for spring 2016. I have had ongoing discussions about these areas with the Minister for Environment and the people on the ground in the region who manage this issue. I understand that there is great planning and sensitivity associated with burning such an area, which is all the more reason why it needs to be addressed and supported as much as possible.

The Liberal-National government investment continues in programs such as the Country Age Pension Fuel Card. This budget represents a continuation of some highly valued programs such as this, and it is pleasing to see funding increasing in the forward estimates, with more than \$27 million committed to this program this year. This program makes a big difference to the lives of people living in my electorate. Eligibility for people living in regional Western Australia is based on factors such as whether they get the age pension, a carer's payment, the disability support pension or the Department of Veterans' Affairs service pension.

Funding for community support services such as the community chest fund and the regional grants scheme will also benefit community groups in the future. The Busselton RSL, the Busselton hockey club and the City of Busselton, through the investment in the Geographe Leisure Centre, have been some of the recipients over the past six months. It is great that the Vasse electorate has received its fair share of funding under this vibrant grants program.

I am aware of the government's significant investment in the health sector since coming into office in 2008; there has been a 71 per cent increase since coming to government. The \$8.1 billion spend on our hospitals includes an additional investment in Busselton Health Campus, which opened its doors to patients recently. I recently received an email from Dr Sarah Moore regarding the value of this campus and what it means to people working there and the people of Busselton. It reads —

As a GP obstetrician providing maternity services at the new Busselton Health Campus, I feel very privileged to be working in this fantastic new building. Since transitioning to the new campus, I have attended births, teaching drills and meetings in various areas of the hospital, and the experience has been wonderful. The design of the hospital makes it very user friendly for patients and staff, the clinical equipment is new and in working order, the Patient Entertainment System is very impressive, and the staff continue to make it a most enjoyable and rewarding place to work. I congratulate the administration and clinical staff on the incredible job they have done, and continue to do, to make the Busselton Health Campus a first class establishment.

The budget also addresses law and order issues, meeting the demands of a growing electorate with \$1.4 billion for police this financial year. We have already seen a 47 per cent increase since 2008-09. That means we are on track to recruit 550 extra police officers by the end of 2016-17. I am working towards increasing our police resources in Busselton to cover 24/7 police resourcing in my electorate to address the needs of a growing and demanding electorate.

The Vasse electorate is one of the fastest growing regions in the state. The City of Busselton's annual growth is 3.8 per cent; in particular, the Vasse town development site is an area of significant growth. As the member for this electorate, I would like to see investment within this locality for the acquisition of land for a South West Institute of Technology facility in the future. The government is supporting the growth of this region with a \$9.3 million investment towards the \$23 million Vasse bypass, which is an investment in realigning Bussell Highway to bypass the Vasse Newtown urban development.

Given the significant growth of Vasse electorate, the transport minister was in the region recently to make an announcement regarding improvements to travel within this area. The region has a very keen interest in cycling not only as a recreational activity, but also an alternative form of transport, which is a crucial element to liveable, sustainable developments within cities and towns. It is something this government supports, and it was pleasing to have the Minister for Transport in Busselton recently to meet with key cycling groups regarding enabling better travel in the region. It is also pleasing to see such endeavours further supported by this government as part of the Liberal-National government's \$72.1 million investment over four years into promoting cycling travel, which will improve safety and provide a bike network and connectivity for all Western Australians. This project on Busselton bypass is one of six across the state that has been invested in by the Liberal-National government, and it is part of the City of Busselton's greater plan to create a cycle highway from the new and rapidly

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expanding community of Vasse to the Busselton CBD light industry area and commercial area. The project covers 1.3 kilometres.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L. METTAM: It is red asphalt and is three metres wide and will allow commuters to cycle safely between the growing subdivisions of Busselton and the Busselton township. This dollar-for-dollar project will see the state contribute equal funding with the City of Busselton. It is one of six projects across the state to successfully receive funding of this kind in the budget, so it is a great credit to the City of Busselton and it is a great result for the people of that region that this project was supported.

The Vasse electorate will also receive a healthy investment in its waterways in this year's state budget. I thank the Minister for Water for her interest and support in this area. In response to Barry Hart's "Independent Review of the Current and Future Management of Water Assets in the Geographe Catchment, WA: Final Report" I raised issues during the by-election campaign last year that related to improving the health of the catchment. It was pleasing to see a ministerial task force formed following the election, as well as a \$200 000 investment to fund GeoCatch to support this. I am delighted to be involved in the minister's task force as the deputy chair.

This budget has seen further investment and support for waterways in Vasse, with investments in infill sewerage, which is fundamental to cleaner waterways and water infrastructure. Infill sewerage will be delivered to the homes around the Toby Inlet waterway at the southern section of that catchment. As many would be aware, infill sewerage projects install systems of buried pipes and pumps in residential areas to take wastewater to wastewater treatment plants for safe processing and disposal and away from our precious waterways. A further \$4.3 million has been invested in the wastewater pump station and pressure main in the subdivision of Provence. The Water Corporation is continuing the work of constructing a wastewater pump station, overflow contingency storage capacity and a pressure main to the Busselton wastewater treatment plant in order to grow and service the growing area of Provence. This project includes construction of a new pump station and nine kilometres of wastewater pressure main. Work is expected to be completed later this year and the total cost of the project is expected to be \$13 million, which is a valuable investment in this growing area.

Other projects across the forward estimates that are of benefit to the Busselton greater region include \$6.9 million to the south west emergency rescue helicopter service; \$4.6 million towards a Bunbury mental health subacute unit, which will support investment in the state government's suicide prevention strategy—that represents a 78 per cent increase in the mental health portfolio since coming to government—\$2 million for the south west ageing in place pilot; and \$5.8 million towards marine park management in the region, with the Ngari Capes Marine Park and recreation fishing pilot, which has been largely supported in the Vasse community.

This budget will also see a commitment of \$380 million in concessions and benefits for seniors in our community. Western Australia has had huge population growth in the past five years of more than 20 per cent and the number of seniors has grown by 32 per cent in the Vasse electorate. Western Australia is the only state in Australia that currently has no concession cap on its local government rates. Even with the cap that will be introduced, WA seniors will be still better off than other Australian seniors. The average concession cap on local government rates is \$227 in other Australian states, which is significantly lower than the \$550 cap Western Australia will have. One of the most exciting policy initiatives being investigated by this government is the opportunity to give a discount on stamp duty to seniors who are downsizing to a new house, which I appreciate would be highly valued in my electorate as well.

As a passionate advocate for education, I am pleased that the Minister for Education will be in the electorate next week for a forum with the local school community. I am also pleased with what this budget says about the Liberal–National government's investment in this space with the introduction of the student-centred funding model and the growth of the states' independent public schools sector. I am proud to say that all the public schools in the electorate of Vasse have invested in this model, which involves overseeing their own budgets with a greater degree of decision making at a local level. We have the best-resourced schools in the country, and I am aware that much has already been said about this in the chamber. In Busselton, upgrades have recently been completed to schools such as West Busselton Primary School, an issue which I campaigned on with the Premier and the Minister for Education during my election campaign last year. The Liberal–National government has responded to the needs of this school, which has now received recent upgrades to 11 of its classrooms, the replacement of three roofs and air conditioning, and upgrades to the undercover area and staff room, which has made a positive and vital difference to the school lives of people in this area. The shift of year 7s into high school has required much additional infrastructure investment. Cape Naturaliste College in Vasse is one of 29 schools that have also needed additional infrastructure to the tune of \$230 million across the state. From 2009–10 to 2015–16, the Department of Education's recurrent expenditure is set to grow by an average of 5.7 per cent per annum, which will see the level of investment in this space continue into the future.

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This budget continues to support and address the ongoing needs of the Vasse community. Last week I presented the budget to the Busselton Chamber of Commerce and it was very well received. Thank you.

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Mirrabooka) [8.07 pm]: I also rise to comment on the Appropriation (Recurrent 2015–16) Bill 2015 and the Appropriation (Capital 2015–16) Bill 2015. It is unfortunate that despite the Premier’s commitment to the people of Western Australia to keep debt below \$20 billion, he has failed to manage the accounts of the state and, accordingly, debt has spiralled out of control and will negatively impact upon the community in Mirrabooka as it is forecast to reach \$36 billion. Despite the promise to never deliver a deficit, budget papers also show that the Premier will deliver three consecutive deficits totalling more than \$5 billion. It is important to note that the state’s net-debt-to-revenue measure is forecast to reach 80.5 per cent in 2015 compared with the 19 per cent that was inherited by the Barnett-led Liberal government in 2008. I understand that net debt is the most commonly quoted and well-known measure of a government’s financial strength because it is part of everyday life for businesses and households. As the member for Victoria Park said in this place —

... in Western Australia the last 20 years have shown that net debt will always be lower under a Labor government.

During the excellent speeches of the member for Victoria Park and the Leader of the Opposition in this house, one government member at the rear of the chamber mocked their concerns by saying “What did the Romans ever do for us?”, suggesting that the opposition should be grateful that this government has led us into a financial crisis. This is contrary to commentary from, for example, *The Australian Financial Review* on 14 May 2015, which outlined how the Barnett government had spent everything it got in revenue. I will remind members that the revenue grew at unprecedented rates and that it was outspent. *The Australian Financial Review* said in its commentary on the budget that all key financial measures have blown out. As has been said previously in this house, that indicates that we have blown the boom. But back to the Romans. The member thought that we should be somehow grateful and quoted by interjection, “What did the Romans ever do for us?” I remind the member that the Roman Empire fell because overspending had stripped the Roman coffers, and its attempt to tax itself back into supremacy saw the wealthy flee to tax haven fiefdoms, unable to afford and finance the empire’s defences against those who would overturn their rule. The Roman Empire crumbled under severe financial crisis and it could no longer maintain its infrastructure; that is something the member may wish to reflect upon next time he interjects to ask, “What did the Romans ever do for us?”

As the shadow finance spokesperson so eloquently established, this Liberal government has created a debt monster that is out of control, thrashing around, consuming the future potential of our state and critical government infrastructure. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that, in blowing the boom, this government has failed to deliver the opportunities of education, training, employment and infrastructure that are vital to the Mirrabooka community—infrastructure that would have created the Mirrabooka town centre as a vital hub serviced by an efficient and effective public transport system that would relieve the congestion on our roads. A train line would have ensured that the community could access the benefits of a growing city; or, if the government had kept to its promise, light rail could have been delivered to the people of Mirrabooka.

The government first promised light rail to the people of the Mirrabooka electorate in September 2012, with a commitment to having a line from Mirrabooka to the city operational by 2018; that promise will not be delivered in 2018. The Premier arrived outside the Mirrabooka bus station and encouraged people to have faith that he would deliver this infrastructure to Mirrabooka; he also encouraged people to buy properties in the area because the light rail system would increase property values. The Mirrabooka town centre structure plan provided that the redevelopment of the Mirrabooka town centre would be characterised by the introduction of a rapid public transport system. The Department of Housing, which owns substantial areas of land in Mirrabooka, is still planning its development in the area on the basis of the Metro Area Express. City of Stirling major rezoning decisions were made in and around that land, where the final station of MAX was to be situated, in the heart of Mirrabooka. So much depended upon a promise to the people of Mirrabooka that has not been kept; so much could have been delivered into that area, and it needs the infrastructure that this government undertook to deliver.

I want to talk also about employment in Mirrabooka. I have raised this issue in the house before, and it is with deep concern that we see that the budget has not addressed the critical need to create jobs in this area. The assumption in the budget is that unemployment is forecast to rise to 6.25 per cent, which is very disappointing after the government inherited an unemployment rate of 2.7 per cent in 2008. With Balga–Mirrabooka unemployment sitting at 18.9 per cent while the unemployment rate for Perth was 5.2 per cent in the December 2014 small markets figures, the forecasts are very dire news. WA state government members’ assertions that government policy should not focus on specific areas when looking at unemployment seem to be rejected by the actions of other state governments and the federal government. The Tasmanian government has injected a lot of

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funds into regions affected by high unemployment and both the Victorian and New South Wales governments have strategies in place for regions affected by high unemployment. The recent Tasmanian budget shows that the government allocated \$3 million for jobs in its struggling north west. The Tasmanian government committed those funds after recommendations were made by a jobs task force in the state's north west. We need a jobs task force to address the growing problem of unemployment in this inner-city area, with unemployment of 18.9 per cent, based on the December quarter small area labour market figures, which increased from 16 per cent. That must ring alarm bells. Both New South Wales and Victoria have job plans, as does the federal government in the suburban jobs program, which supports state and local governments to plan and provide for increased local employment opportunities in the suburbs of Australia's major capital cities.

However, in the past two years in WA, the Barnett government has increased TAFE fees by 515 per cent and cut courses and apprenticeships. TAFE has gone from being an affordable way for students to learn and prepare for careers that suit their skills and interests to being unaffordable. The recent Auditor General report highlighted the significant cuts made to TAFE over the past two years, revealing that between 2013 and 2014, funding to training providers was cut by \$40.5 million. Tuition fees over the same period increased by 82 per cent and student curriculum hours declined by almost three million hours in 2014 compared with the hours in previous years. This is not good for the people of Mirrabooka. The 2011 census shows us that these people are traditionally trained at TAFE and traditionally work in those areas of employment. That is the majority of those areas. Further, as outlined previously, the 2011 census and previous censuses show that Mirrabooka has a very young population compared with other areas of the state. With WA's youth unemployment at 12.7 per cent in 2013–14, one can easily assume that youth unemployment is around 20 per cent in Mirrabooka, given that general unemployment is 18.9 per cent, as I have said. As we know, youth unemployment is a worsening national problem. I understand that programs such as Youth Connections, which saw 80 per cent of people who were in the program still working or studying six months later, were recently cut. The federal government defunded the program. This will have a negative effect on employment in Mirrabooka.

The human face of unemployment in Mirrabooka is illustrated by a gentleman who came to see me the other day, Mr Sanders. He came to Australia as a skilled tradesperson from Pakistan; he was a welding supervisor. He gained employment as a welder initially and then moved into his welding supervision qualifications. He worked in the Middle East to gain his qualifications. He has worked for seven years since arriving in Western Australia and now finds himself redundant and sending out 30 applications a week for work, with only a few responses. The human face of unemployment in Mirrabooka is an ethnic community worker telling me stories of people she deals with, saying they are being replaced by workers from the mines. Those people who are being replaced feel a strong sense that they have been disadvantaged because English is their second language. It is such a waste of potential that 18.9 per cent of the community I represent in Balga and Mirrabooka is currently facing unemployment. It is a waste of potential because, as I have said before, it reflects both the fact that it is a diverse community and a community of young people. It is a waste of potential when we meet someone such as Madhu Panthee, whom I met at a recent function at a Nepalese restaurant that was fundraising for the Nepalese earthquake victims. Here is someone who came to Australia with great skills. He is employed. He does not live in my electorate but I want to commend him and use him as an example of the way we need to look at people with great skills and capacities who come from overseas. Mr Madhu Panthee took the mediation skills that he learnt to mediate between Buddhists and Maoists in Nepal for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to Yuendumu in Central Australia, working with the elders in Yuendumu to deliver mediation and peace. It really gave me great heart when I heard him talk about what he had done to deliver that great project. He has now come back to Western Australia with his wife. When he first migrated, he came to Western Australia and then he went to the Northern Territory to find employment. He has now come back and started a small business. I use him as an example because many people like Madhu Panthee in the community that I represent have great potential because of what they have brought from overseas. That potential needs to be tapped into so that we do not have the sort of unemployment statistics that I keep raising in this house.

We should live in a community that builds on amazing skills that are brought to Australia. We should live in a community in which the budget supports small businesses to build on those skills. We should live in a community in which the budget delivers jobs to people who come into our community. The WA suicide prevention strategy was released this week. We should also remember that unemployment places people at greater risk of mental health issues and a greater risk of suicide. It is not just a financial crisis for those people; it is a health crisis. It is a health issue that we need to take into account.

The budget argues that the government is delivering jobs through the building of Elizabeth Quay and Perth Stadium. It says that 67 000 jobs will be provided across those projects in 2015–16. A question was asked in the other house about the methodology for that. The answer basically said that the methodology was based on the builder's experience—that is Brookfield Multiplex—at Fiona Stanley Hospital and it was based on estimates provided by the project manager. A thousand employees who were employed subsequent to its opening were

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“escalated” to consider the additional capacity of the new Perth Stadium. The modelling is based on assumptions, guesstimates and escalations. One always has to be cautious about modelling. I welcome jobs, but they need to be jobs that deliver real jobs into the community. There will certainly be jobs there, but I did not think I would see unemployment to the scale of 18.9 per cent in the Balga–Mirrabooka area.

The April 2015 edition of *The Monthly* contained an article written by Richard Denniss under the heading “How economic modelling is used to circumvent democracy and shut down debate”. He talks about some economic consultants that Rio Tinto used to try to sell a project that would have quite devastating effects on the village of Bulga in New South Wales. Rio Tinto argued that employment benefits would flow to the community. That was the way it was trying to counter those who opposed the project. In his article, Richard Denniss points out —

That’s where the modellers came in.

... economic consultants wrote a fat report nobody was supposed to read. It made the absurd claim, in its executive summary, that if the mine extension were approved it would create 44,000 jobs: a figure that is more than double the entire NSW mining industry’s employment level today.

The 44,000 figure is obviously a deception. The authors had redefined a job as a “person year” (i.e. a job for one person for one year) so that they could multiply their real job-creation estimate by the number of years in the life of the mine to get a bigger number. It’s a simple trick, and it only works when people are too busy to read a thick report.

We are not all too busy to read a small thing that was sent to us in a glossy format that says 70 000 jobs. But when I look at the answer to that question, I question the assumptions that underlie 67 000 jobs. I will certainly write to the Premier and others to get further details about where those jobs are being delivered. These days, whenever somebody buys something new or gets involved in an organisation or uses a state government or other service, they are always asked for their postcode so they can get an idea of where those things are.

[Member’s time extended.]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I suggest that it would be very easy for the contractors of these jobs that are being created and that are ongoing to give us an indication of the impact and where those jobs are going to, and how many jobs there are. That is really important, because if we are going to talk about creating jobs, we need them to be real jobs, and we need them to be jobs where it matters. It matters a lot in Mirrabooka and Balga, where there is an unemployment rate of 18.9 per cent.

I also want to talk about the recent submission by the state government to the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission for the state wage case. The state wage case comes around each year and covers a percentage of workers. It is somewhat concerning that despite the fact that this government is increasing its tariffs, fees and charges by 3.8 per cent, or by \$198.54 a year, the government’s submission to the state wage case for the lowest-paid workers—not workers on enterprise bargaining agreements, but the lowest-paid workers—is that they should have an increase of only two per cent. That will mean that the current minimum wage of \$665.90 a week will be increased by \$13.30 to \$679.20 a week. That submission from the government seems highly outrageous considering that there will be a 3.8 per cent increase in tariffs, fees and charges. That seems quite unfair when we look at some of the data around the wage price index, which shows that although there has been a softening in wages, it is still above the two per cent mark. I am looking for it now. I think the wage price index, which is measuring what other people are receiving in the industry, is around three per cent. It seems to me that this government really has no desire to look at those people who are the lowest paid in our community, those people who are unemployed in our community and those people who need our assistance in our community. It wants to make those who can least afford it pay, and then make those in the future pay through debt.

I will go back to average earnings growth, which sits at around 2.8 per cent for 2013–14, 2.25 per cent for 2014–15 and 2.7 per cent. Even if we go by the wage price index, that would at least give people something that is commensurate with what other people are achieving in the current wages market. For the government to then basically say that it wants to go only on the consumer price index, but it is going to raise its tariffs, fees and charges above CPI, shows the hypocrisy of such a policy.

I also want to talk about the schools in the area that I represent. I particularly want to talk about education assistants. Education assistants are key to involvement and participation in schools. However, there has been a severe cut in the number of education assistants in the schools in the Mirrabooka electorate. One of my family members is a principal in the country, and she was visiting a little while ago. She pointed out to me that often in schools the education assistants are the long-term employees, and they have the corporate knowledge to assist new teachers to understand how to apply the knowledge gained through their higher education qualifications. The importance of education assistants is even greater in areas where there is a diverse population because they

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have English as a second language. Ethnic education assistants especially have the capacity to support the additional needs of those students, parents and carers who attend the schools. The average turnover rate for education assistants in schools is seven per cent lower than the rate for cleaners and gardeners, and it is significantly lower than the rate for teachers.

I will talk about primary schools without saying the names of the schools, because often principals get really nervous. They have raised all these issues with me but they do not want it put on the record in Parliament that they are complaining. They are principals trying to manage a difficult situation to deliver to students. Primary school A has a student population of approximately 400 students, 75 per cent of whom come from a culturally and linguistically diverse background and speak a language other than English as their first language. Forty-six different first languages have been identified in this particular school and 10 per cent of the student population is Indigenous. The school is losing four ethnic education assistants, which equates to 1.8 full-time equivalent staff, and the incapacity to continue with one EEA at 0.6 FTE in 2016 is devastating to this school and this principal. The school has gone from one that can support the parents and the students from the diverse community who attend the school to one where school administrators and teachers cannot communicate with each other. The principal tells of a non-English speaking parent who came into the school a few weeks ago, and no-one at the school could speak Arabic—a function that one of the EEAs would usually undertake. The issues with the child were unclear, and at the conclusion of the conversation it was difficult to be certain that the parent had understood what had been said. The school did the best it could under trying circumstances. However, had the school had an ethnic education assistant, as it usually had before the cuts, it would have been able to better assist.

I spoke to some of these education assistants who were made redundant. One is a really respected member of the Iraqi community who coordinates the volunteers at a Saturday afternoon Arabic language school. She felt that she had little choice but to accept the severance. The administration had the strong belief that she would not get the same generous offer if she did not accept, and either way there was no ongoing employment for her.

Primary school B has a visually impaired child attending kindergarten. It went through a long, drawn-out process to get an education assistant allocation for the child, and even then that allocation was not sufficient. The issue for this principal is that the school is given a pool of money on the basis of the level assessed of the children at the school and the school currently has one autistic child in each year group. One child in year 1 has not been assessed at the level that provides a full-time education assistant. The child is autistic, non-verbal and with parents from a non-English speaking background but cannot have a full-time education assistant. The principal is particularly concerned because the 20 kids in the class deserve a quality education, as does this young child. An interpreter is needed every time the parents attend the school because there is no ethnic EA who speaks the language. This school's ethnic education assistant is Vietnamese and is well respected and loved by the school community. School reports can be written in Vietnamese for parents and it therefore creates a student-centred, parent-inclusive school environment that delivers a quality education. However, this Vietnamese ethnic education assistant will be taking a redundancy package and leaving the school in June, and the principal believes the school will be worse for it. Over the last year, this school with multiple nationalities has lost three education assistants, including one who had 10 years' service at the school.

The final school I want to talk about is one that lost four teachers last year: three education assistants and one deputy principal. It currently has one Aboriginal and Islander education officer on a redeployee list and a retained Aboriginal and Islander education officer for three days. The number of Aboriginal residents in Mirrabooka is above the state average and comprises around 10 per cent of the student population in many schools in the area. What was worse for this school was that it went through a tortuous process last year when it had to advertise its deputy principals. That is not good for school morale or for the way people feel about their school. One principal was determined and one deputy principal had to leave, and that was very upsetting for the school. Subsequently, after all that process, the school was given additional funding. All the schools got additional funding at the end of last year. It had gone through a tortuous process that had an impact on the school community, but it was not necessary. The principal is very hesitant to employ another deputy principal despite there being many issues at the school that warrant another deputy principal. However, it will probably go without another deputy principal and try to manage the school and use the funds in other ways to support the community and the students. Many of the issues in the budget are concerning, none of which are made better by the Premier yelling at me, "Don't you want a new children's hospital?" Of course I want a new children's hospital. I also want funding for Royal Perth Hospital that was promised—it is the hospital that people in Mirrabooka access—to make it a facility that can deliver to the community in the Mirrabooka area. I want also good public health benefits in the area that I represent in Mirrabooka. I want people to get access to services such as the Employment Law Centre of WA, which was not funded in this round of the budget. All it needed was \$400 000 to deliver great services and it did not get funded. We all probably refer people to the Employment Law Centre because people walk into our offices with questions about employment. It is a statewide service; it goes beyond

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Perth. It provides a great service to many people who have difficult disputes with their employer. Simple services like that did not get funded. Yes a children's hospital is important, but the budget is about priorities.

Other members in this Parliament put it very well. The member for Cannington pointed out that an enormous amount was spent on building an underground busport in Northbridge. A better priority may have been to fund the Employment Law Centre and spend money on delivering employment services, rather than spending money on sinking the busport.

MS M.M. QUIRK (Girrawheen) [8.37 pm]: Tonight I want to speak not on the state budget but what is shrewdly called “our budget”, thereby ascribing responsibility for it to all of us. If it is our budget then somehow for what is the ultimate inevitable outcome of poor and imprudent decision-making over a number of years, we are also strangely responsible. The notion is that if it is our budget, we have ownership of it. I will say that if it was our budget we would have cut up the credit card well before now. I intend to address a number of disparate issues this evening. I spent some time thinking about the common thread or theme that will tie these disparate subjects together. It occurred to me that this budget most closely resembles the shell game. The reason will soon become readily apparent. To the uninitiated, the shell game is portrayed as a gambling game, but in reality when a wager for money is made, it is almost always a confidence trick used to perpetuate fraud. In confidence-trick slang, the swindle was referred to as a “short con” because it is quick and easy to pull off. In the game, three or more identical containers, which may be cups, shells, bottle caps or anything, are placed face-down on a surface. A small ball is placed beneath one of the containers so the ball cannot be seen. The containers are then shuffled by the operator in plain view. One or more players are invited to bet on which container holds the ball. Typically, the operator offers to double the player's stake if he guesses correctly. When the game is played honestly, the operator can win if he shuffles the containers in a way that the player cannot follow. In practice, however, the shell game is notorious for its use by confidence tricksters, who will typically rig the game using sleight of hand to move or hide the ball during play and replace it as required. In much the same way, we are expected to fall for the numerous sleights of hand in the budget constructed to deceive and con, constructed to shift costs to other arms of government and constructed to evade responsibility for basic service delivery. The con is readily exposed.

First, in this context, I want to deal with fire and emergency services. After years of denial and blustering from the government, it is readily apparent that a large proportion of the moneys collected from the Western Australian ratepayers in the emergency services levy is not going to fire appliances, not going to training volunteers and not going to frontline efforts, but to the administration of the department. In other words the Barnett government is not sufficiently funding the Department of Fire and Emergency Services out of consolidated revenue, but heavily relying on the ESL to top up the shortfall. The key agencies' recurrent appropriation and expense movements listed in the 2015–16 budget fact sheet tells it all when it records a 52.4 per cent reduction in funding under the recurrent appropriation. In this context, I refer also to the unabashed footnote under this entry, which notes the following —

In 2015–16, some Fire and Emergency Services activities previously funded by the Consolidated Account appropriations will be funded from the Emergency Services Levy. Total recurrent expenditure on Fire and Emergency Services is budgeted to increase by \$25.2 million or 7.5% in 2015–16 (see Table 2).

For the life of me, I could not find table 2, but I think the point in the footnote is pretty unambiguous. I will shortly talk about the source of the so-called increased funding, but I think we need to revisit the origins of the ESL and why the government is raiding the ESL pot of money is inconsistent with the specific hypothecation that the levy created. It is like the shell game—a huge con. In the 2015–16 financial year, the ESL is forecast to generate revenue of \$321 million, up from \$289 million in 2014–15. This represents a 25 per cent increase for the average household in the emergency services levy or a rise of 10.6 per cent. We are told that ESL funding supports approximately 828 dedicated emergency services groups, comprising more than 1 400 career firefighters and support staff, and over 29 000 volunteers. The budget papers also assert that an additional \$17.3 million will be spent from this financial year to 2018–19 on the replacement of incident control vehicles, road crash rescue trailers and special purpose vehicles. In 2002 when this legislation was debated and second read by the member for Midland, who was then minister, the then Leader of the Opposition made the following observations —

We need to make sure that the Government does not use the system to save itself expenditure by using the emergency services levy to cover costs that it would normally cover itself. In other words, all funds raised by the emergency services levy must go into emergency services. As far as I am concerned, the question of whether there should be a cross subsidy is academic. That needs to occur to make the system work properly. At the same time, the Government needs to give the Parliament those assurances.

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The then minister, Hon Michelle Roberts, said in reply —

One of the arguments put forward by the Opposition is that this legislation is all about the State Government saving money. In round figures the State Government currently contributes \$40 million, and it will continue to contribute \$40 million. There is no cost saving for the Government in this legislation; it is completely budget neutral. It is not true that the State Government will be paying less money to emergency services. The Government will continue to make the same contribution that has always been made. There is no net benefit to Treasury coffers from this legislation. The only net benefit will be to our emergency service volunteers, primarily those in regional areas. Mr Speaker, I note that after giving the proposal detailed consideration, the shire in your electorate has welcomed the proposal, because it can see that its local emergency service volunteers will benefit.

...

Further to that, there has been some beat-up that somehow this is a government revenue-raising exercise. Clause 11(4) of the legislation requires that all the money collected from the levy be spent on FESA services. There is no possibility of levy money somehow being gobbled up into consolidated revenue and used for other purposes. I would have thought it would be an amazing thing for any Government to contemplate, even for a moment, collecting money from the community for emergency services and then spending it in some other way. I do not think the community would tolerate that; I certainly would not tolerate it. That is why the Bill contains a clause that deals with that and requires all the money collected to be put in the FESA account and spent only on emergency services activities.

The minister goes on to again make assurances about continuing the government's contribution at the same level, and she concludes by saying —

To suggest that it is going to raise bucket loads of money to be spent on other things is wrong. People can read the clause in the Bill that requires all the money raised by the levy to be spent on FESA services.

Even though the intention of the legislators at the time was abundantly clear, the government has chosen to interpret the words “for the purposes of emergency services acts or received by the authority in performance of its functions under the acts” extremely broadly, and the very thing that the then opposition cautioned against is now being done in spades by the same people in government. Having re-examined the parliamentary debate on the emergency services levy, it is interesting to note that at the time a number of members raised the issue of cross-subsidisation of regional areas by the metropolitan area levy collection. It was very interesting in reading that debate to note that there was no us and them; it was generally held that that was the fair thing to do. It is with some irony that, because of the looting of the ESL funds now, a range of core Department of Fire and Emergency Services functions are now listed as being funded by royalties for regions. These are listed on page 713 of the *Budget Statements*. They are fire crew protection, the south west emergency rescue helicopter service and the volunteer fuel card. It is not clear whether these funds will be deployed in the regions. What then does that mean for metropolitan fire and emergency services; for example, the \$1.863 million for crew protection in 2015–16? Does this mean that only regional appliances will be fitted out, and how would that be arranged? This is the very reason the analogy of a shell game is so apt. Money is moved when it should not be, and other amounts are transferred in to partially compensate for that sleight of hand. On the issue of crew protection, the then minister, Hon Troy Buswell, made an election commitment in October 2012 of \$12.3 million over three years. In the 2013–14 budget, Minister Francis announced that very amount. I ask: Why is it that additional funds are now required from royalties for regions? Is it perhaps that the original \$12.3 million allocated has been diverted elsewhere? When can we anticipate that the provision of crew protection for all appliances will be completed? It is certainly way behind schedule and, in the meantime, we are sending crews out on the fire ground without the full protections. This last fire season, for example, we saw a burnover and also issues concerning the location of vehicles, which would have been avoided had those crew protection enhancements been completed. I also notice in this year's budget the announcement of a second rescue helicopter. The announcement was for, I think, \$29.9 million under royalties for regions. It was actually in last year's budget as well and was announced by Minister Francis for \$27.6 million.

What has happened with the emergency services levy was certainly a concern that Mr Keelty had when he made his recommendations in his inquiry into the Perth hills fire. He made a recommendation that the Department of Finance take over the administration of the ESL. That has been resisted by the government and I think we now understand why.

Likewise, the Department of Parks and Wildlife has announced moneys for prescribed burning, not from consolidated revenue or the emergency services levy, but from royalties for regions. This will obviously dictate where the bulk of prescribed burning will occur. This is not necessarily undesirable, because the Department of

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Parks and Wildlife is in catch-up mode. However, there are likely to be areas in the peri-urban fringe of the metropolitan area that likewise have been neglected for years and should be actioned as a matter of urgency. I would not want the source of those funds—that is, through royalties for regions—to mean that that prescribed burning is not done in the metropolitan area. I think we need some assurances to that effect.

Another shift in finances that sought to obfuscate and deceive relates to the disbursement of moneys from the road trauma trust fund. I suspect my colleague the member for Midland might talk a bit about this tomorrow. The fund basically contains revenue that is secured through speed and red-light camera fines, and there is a significant stockpile of moneys that has not been spent and has accumulated. It has also become apparent that not all the money in that fund has been spent, despite a commitment to spend 100 per cent. It is arguable that much of the expenditure purported for road safety purposes is allocated to what I would call core business of either Main Roads or the police, and there appears to be little evaluation of road safety outcomes from the expenditure after the event. Despite the abundance of funds, last year the government cut \$1 million from the road safety advertising budget. Also, programs such as the very effective coalface RoadWise activities done by local government have been cut in recent years. We have had a terrible year on the roads, with fatalities and serious injuries, and there seems to be more politics and less science in how moneys are currently allocated.

The next confidence trick I want to refer to relates to the treatment of seniors in the budget. This has already received substantial publicity and I do not need to reiterate what has been said by a range of spokespersons and commentators. I do want to make the observation that seniors are not a homogenous group. We are talking about persons ranging in age from 60 to 100 years. It is sloppy policy to lump them in together without acknowledging that their needs and access to services vary greatly. The government has latterly discovered seniors, and we have been told that current payments to seniors and the elderly are not sustainable because of the ageing population. Last year when the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee completed a report on the implications of an ageing population, the government agreed to a handful of its recommendations. The government's commitment to seniors is very tepid.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The \$100 million cuts to concessions grants to Western Australia made by the Abbott government last year—which the state government did not top up, unlike all other states—were used as a pretext to review concessions. That is a sensible and prudent thing to do; however, the terms of reference were not made public, and seniors' organisations willing to assist the government in better targeting concessions to ensure that the outcome was equitable and fair were not consulted. In fact, it was done covertly. The outcomes evidenced by this budget lack logic and will definitely create hardship. It is apparent that the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering has been sidelined in the process. I asked a question earlier this year on notice, and was referred by the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering to Treasury. That was very unfortunate.

Most significant—we have already heard the member for Mandurah talk about this—is the capping of council rate concessions at \$550. It is estimated that that will affect about 45 000 households. When asked at a briefing yesterday what research had been undertaken to arrive at the figure of \$550, the Under Treasurer advised that that was a figure that cabinet instructed Treasury to act upon. In other words, no science, evidence or research had formed the basis of the decision to cap at \$550. As one senior said to me yesterday, "These figures are based on their budget, not on seniors' budgets." It is not clear to me whether or not this cap will also be indexed.

The City of Stirling has done some rough calculations. In the City of Stirling alone, currently around 14 500 properties get the 15 per cent pensioner concession; of those, just over 3 600 get a concession of more than the \$550 cap and will be worse off. The average increase for the affected pensioner would be around \$115 per annum. As we all say on these occasions, in isolation that seems moderate, but with a raft of other taxes and charges it does make things very difficult for seniors to manage. Our concerns on this terrible impost will no doubt be met with the argument, "Well, if the pensioners can't afford to pay it, they can defer their rate payments." But people who are used to, all their lives, paying as they go, not racking up debt, paying their own way and managing their affairs responsibly will certainly not like the idea of deferring their rates; nor will they like the idea that their heirs will inherit those debts. Another senior described this to me as "death duties by stealth". I ask those on the benches opposite whether they feel pleased about imposing death duties by stealth.

In another sleight of hand the government thinks it will assuage this awful policy decision by providing free public transport at night. The bizarre announcement that seniors can travel free at night on buses and trains is not a well identified need; it is simply a gimmick. Seniors complain about the starting time of free travel certainly in the morning because of the lack of parking when they get to the train stations and also the need to get to early medical or other appointments, but I have never heard one complain about not being able to travel free late at night. Frankly, if that occurs, more security will be needed on trains to assuage the concerns of seniors, so the decision is far from cost neutral. In a report released yesterday on ageing and driver safety, the RAC also notes

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that seniors have safety concerns about using public transport. It is very interesting that when the Public Transport Authority conducts its customer surveys it does not record the demographic details of respondents, so the PTA is not able to tell us what the attitudes of seniors are, particularly in relation to public transport. So I am always interested to know how the minister and the government can make assumptions about what seniors want from public transport when no information is specifically collected. Likewise, the recent decision about shared footpaths between pedestrians and cyclists is something I know seniors will have an opinion about, but no-one bothered to consult them. Senior Western Australians want to stay active, and for those who use footpaths, having to compete with speeding cyclists may deter some of them from taking that walk and further isolate them in the community.

This leads me to another series of decisions, which I also believe are part of the broader con—that is, shifting costs to local government. Again the decision about footpaths and shared footpaths between pedestrians and cyclists will shift costs to local governments which will put them under pressure to upgrade and, in some cases in new emerging suburbs, create footpaths when none were intended. That is a major cost-shifting exercise. Also, while the government has increased the hardship utility grant scheme allowance, a prerequisite for receiving those grants is to attend financial counselling to look at people's overall situation. Financial counselling services have been cut, and that will place pressure on local governments to make up the difference to continue to employ financial counsellors. That is a major problem.

I talked about library funding during debate on the Loan Bill. Book collections are under threat. Libraries are very important community hubs and local governments are expected to continue that service with fewer and fewer resources provided by the state government.

The major sporting facilities will also be difficult for local government alone to fund, especially those that are expected to be of a regional standard. Any cuts to community sporting and recreation facilities fund programs will mean that in an area such as Wanneroo, which is in my electorate and has high growth, facilities such as the Kingsway sporting complex, which is used by a young growing population, will be greatly impacted. In fact, the community sporting and recreation facilities fund was topped up by royalties for regions, so that means that now in fact there are a greater number of grants in the regions and fewer available in the metropolitan area.

Moreover, the waste levy has increased and that has meant significant additional cost to local government with no visible return. There is no incentive for local governments to reduce their landfill usage because the cost is not varied. There is limited policing on local roads leading to unchecked traffic issues such as speeding and hooning and the community expects local government to install traffic calming and engineering solutions which are invariably expensive. Again, this shifts the costs for the behaviour that the state government prides itself on being able to enforce and control but simply is not.

As I said in relation to the emergency services levy, the City of Wanneroo for example collects \$17 million with only about \$8 million coming back to the city for emergency services. Then there are issue of coastal erosion, beached whales, jetties and river walls—all areas in which the city no longer receives adequate assistance from the state government. All of this cost-shifting inevitably leads to one of two things happening—either decreased services or increased rates, with the council rather than the government having to wear the blame. This is literally a case of passing the buck.

On a local issue, I was very pleased to see funding in this year's budget for an east Landsdale primary school. However an issue has arisen there already that will delay the construction. Last week, the Department of Education failed to secure the approval of the development assessment panel for construction because plans outlined only half the amount of parking required. When questioned by the DAP, the Department of Education was unable to present any evidence on why the plans should be supported and the DAP rejected the proposal. This is a real problem because we all know that parking is a major issue at schools. The Department of Education was inadequately prepared when it went along to the DAP and tried to get away with half the amount of appropriate parking, which beggars belief because the basics to progress this school were not even complied with. The residents have been actively lobbying for a school there for some years and it is really unfortunate that this may well delay the school starting at the beginning of 2017. I will certainly be making representations to the Minister for Education to make sure that the next time the matter comes before the development assessment panel, the department is fully prepared to address the concerns.

Finally, given the parlous state of the budget, can I just say thank you to all of Western Australia's volunteers. The state would be considerably worse off if it were not for the substantial contribution of WA's volunteers. A study released last week, which was National Volunteer Week, called "The Economic, Social and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia", found that volunteers through their work contributed to their community a conservative amount of \$39 billion—that is a substantial amount of money. Frankly, that money is not in the state budget and if we had to pay for those services we would not be able to do so. If for no other reason than

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saving the already blighted economy, can I record my thanks to volunteers and remind them that volunteering means that they will live longer, happier lives.

MR F.A. ALBAN (Swan Hills) [9.07 pm]: I would like to make a contribution to the debate on the Appropriation (Recurrent 2015–16) Bill 2015 and the Appropriation (Capital 2015–16) Bill 2015. This afternoon I sat very quietly and politely and listened to the Leader of the Opposition. I was expecting one of those “to be or not to be” speeches that we often hear the member for Mandurah make—so full of passion and Shakespearean drama. I took notes of his speech because I still scribble on today’s paper. He led off with, “Today I will speak to members on what could have been”. His second most important point followed, “and we will talk about where we are today”. My interpretation of “what could have been” is that members opposite could have still been in government if they had not been a one-trick pony building only a railway line to Mandurah. We keep hearing about how the opposition kept such a good set of books. In my opinion, through my life’s journey, nothing ventured means nothing gained, and there was a lot of wasted time spent talking about things. The Leader of the Opposition talked a lot about his visions and plans and what members opposite were going to do, but they did not achieve anything in two complete terms. The other point he made was about where we are today. The answer to that is the same as the answer to the first point: Labor is in opposition because it did not do anything in government, and, in my opinion, it did not just lose government, it was dragged out by the ear by the population of Western Australia. However, the Leader of the Opposition went on in his speech and I expected to hear about his plan and vision for the future. He said something along the lines of, “We will create suburbs.” Thank God for that. Last time the opposition was in government it ran out of land, and land prices spiralled and the price of real estate doubled and our poor first home buyers and young people are still battling that. He said that we have no hope and that we are without inspiration. The fact is that this is a government that is doing stuff. We do not have to worry about what happens with the next government because predominantly it has all been done. It is going to be very, very hard to articulate a plan or a vision, because every single —

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: Particularly in the member for Midland’s electorate; we are doing all her hard lifting.

I will return to that a bit later, but first I will mention what the budget means for the electorate of Swan Hills. Without doubt the most important of our state government portfolios for the electorate of Swan Hills is transport. The NorthLink WA project, which includes the Perth–Darwin highway, the previously discussed Swan Valley bypass, and the Tonkin Highway grade separation, has state and federal government funding to a total of \$1.12 billion. It is estimated that more than \$38 million will be spent on the Swan Valley section over 2015, with an additional \$738 million scheduled over the forward estimates for 2016 and 2018–19. I have long supported this project, and while this year will include a lot of preparatory work, I look forward to the safety and economic benefits that this project will bring to my electorate of Swan Hills.

The long-awaited upgrade to Great Eastern Highway from Bilgoman Road in Greenmount to Mann Street in Mundaring is also included in this year’s state budget, with \$8.6 million in 2015 and \$3.4 million the following year. At this point I should note that both the NorthLink WA project and Great Eastern Highway upgrade were recently mentioned as part of the commonwealth government’s \$499 million package towards Western Australia’s infrastructure projects. I anticipate that further details on this funding, as well as the effect on Swan Hills–related projects, will come forward in the future.

As part of the pre-budget announcements, Minister for Transport, Dean Nalder, and Treasurer, Mike Nahan, announced a significant commitment to cycling infrastructure, with \$72.1 million over four years including \$34.4 million for four major projects. One of these four major projects is cycling infrastructure from Bilgoman Road in Greenmount to Mundaring, which will be concurrent with the Great Eastern Highway upgrades. My electorate will get not only a highway upgrade, but also a cycle path in the same area. Mundaring is known as the “hub of the hills”, attracting both cyclists and drivers due to its picturesque location. The cycling infrastructure and the state government’s commitment to the Great Eastern Highway upgrades will ensure that our roads are safer for all users.

I turn now to the state budget in broader view. This budget is about ensuring that the most vulnerable members of our community will receive the support they need. To that end, the state government’s no-fault catastrophic injury cover will assist those who suffer a catastrophic injury as a result of a car accident. I have been advised that approximately 92 Western Australians suffer from such an event every year and, while approximately 48 people are able to assert that another person was at fault, approximately 44 people each year are unable to apportion blame to another party. When this idea was opened to public consultation over a period of some 10 weeks last year it received overwhelming support, particularly from my electorate. Although there is a cost associated with this initiative, it will still be cheaper than almost all other states and territories, and will provide support for those who otherwise would have to rely on public health, disability services, personal insurance, friends or family.

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Additionally, the state government has announced a \$560 million commitment to deliver 1 000 homes by 30 June 2017. This will assist seniors and families on priority waitlists for social housing. This is an issue that affects not only my electorate of Swan Hills, but the whole state. I believe that this state government has primarily ensured that it supports those in need. I am particularly pleased about its commitment to social housing, especially given the current economic climate. The state's continued commitment to road infrastructure in the electorate of Swan Hills remains significant and ensures that residents in the area have seen major improvements on almost every route to either Midland, Joondalup or Perth.

I do not look at *Hansard* very often but on this occasion, I looked at a page. I noticed that yesterday the member for West Swan, the shadow minister for almost anything, said several times, "But they cannot explain how debt got to \$31 billion." She was saying that we cannot explain where our debt has come from. Not just for the member for West Swan's sake but also for posterity, because I am particularly pleased to be here at this very moment, I thought I would do some sums. I did some basic accounting at school, but maybe members can help me. This government has spent \$15.1 billion on roads and public transport —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member for Swan Hills. Are you quoting from an uncorrected *Hansard*?

Mr F.A. ALBAN: No; these are my notes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please do not quote from a *Hansard* that is uncorrected.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: Thank you. The government has spent \$4 billion on education infrastructure, including new schools and improvements to existing schools, \$5.6 billion on new hospital infrastructure, \$6.6 billion on water-related infrastructure, \$8.3 billion on power infrastructure and \$6.1 billion on more than 3 600 royalties for regions-funded projects throughout Western Australia. By my very rough calculations, that is \$45.7 billion, so close to \$50 billion.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: You should be the Treasurer, really.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I should have been. I have to admit that of all the subjects I took, accounting was not my strong point. I passed by only 53 per cent. That is an admission after 50 years.

I do not think we need to market this budget. Everybody in Western Australia must know, except members of the opposition, that we have increased our health budget by 71 per cent. The education budget has increased, notwithstanding the union's campaign. I do not know how it is making up its stories but I know it is struggling with its numbers, losing about 100 000 memberships a year, so it will have to do something. We have increased the education budget by 47 per cent. We have also increased the police budget by 47 per cent. They are remarkable numbers by anyone's terms.

I say to members of the opposition—I have listened to so many of their speeches in the past couple of days—we will all be ruined. It is doom and gloom. In reality, I am pretty sure I have seen the largest infrastructure commitment of any state government, undertaking areas of need by an impotent Labor government. In other words, if the Labor government had done its job and committed to the infrastructure projects that a government normally commits to over two terms, we would not have had to make so many commitments ourselves.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen, can you take the newspaper out of the chamber please.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: We have secured the future of our state's educational, health, police and social needs and our road infrastructure in what I consider to be a generational work commitment by any state government.

My electorate is extremely grateful and is a recipient of this process, not only the infrastructure that the government has put in place, but also initiatives such as the Midland hospital and the recently-announced Midland campus that have given the east metropolitan region such a morale boost. There is no need for Labor to worry at all; most of the work is already done.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr C.J. Barnett (Premier)**.

House adjourned at 9.19 pm
