

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

Seventh Report — “Age-friendly WA? A challenge for government” — Tabling

MS M.M. QUIRK (Girrawheen) [9.59 am]: I present for tabling the seventh report of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee entitled “Age-friendly WA? A challenge for government”.

[See papers 2397 and 2398.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Demographers often describe the baby-boom generation as though it were an indigestible mammal—maybe a rabbit or a really big rat—slowly moving through a python. That is our population. As this generation has aged, the baby-boom bulge has remade society in its image, first as a massive class of toddlers, later as rabble rousers in the 1960s, then as solidly middle-class heads of household and, soon, as the largest class of retirees the country has ever seen. The ageing of our state population is a demographic inevitability. By 2021 more than a fifth, or 21 per cent, of Western Australia’s population will be in the 60-plus age bracket. What are we doing about it? Throughout the western world, governments have been confronted with the need to plan for this social shift. Western Australia is no different and the question necessarily arises as to how and when governments will take the necessary action.

I want to briefly digress. One of the key advocates for seniors and the elderly in WA is the Council on the Ageing. At the outset, I want to acknowledge its valuable work and in particular congratulate it on the success of the various activities it organised during Seniors Week last week. Chief executive officer Ken Marston must be proud of its efforts. In this context I also want to acknowledge the fantastic service of my former colleague Bob Kucera. He recently finished his five-year term as president of COTA and, from my observations, the members of COTA always appreciated his straight-talking, passion and commonsense. Under his stewardship, COTA undertook some important work on key issues, and I wish Bob’s successor, Judy Hogben, well.

I return to the inquiry. We looked at other jurisdictions and what is held to be best practice to see how we can make WA more age friendly. We examined the state government’s 2012 policy, “Seniors Strategic Planning Framework 2012–2017”, to see how and whether it was being implemented. The committee soon realised, however, that the breadth and depth of issues confronting the ageing population warranted a more substantial investigation. We were indebted in our inquiry to having received a number of thoughtful and comprehensive oral and written submissions. I thank those who generously gave of their time to assist the committee. Generally speaking, there is a level of denial about the impact our ageing population will have. Good intentions are well and good, but not enough. There is simply no firm resolve to act, nor a collective recognition that this trend will have major economic and social shifts in our community. To compel the government to confront these issues in a timely way, we have recommended that the state government periodically produce a seniors’ report card so that progress on all key issues can be monitored.

The Community Development and Justice Standing Committee is of the view that our community can be enriched if planned for and embraced with a cohort of seniors and elderly who are healthier, more socially engaged and respected. Conversely, it is inevitable that if we fail to address the range of issues that have been canvassed in this report, individuals, family and, indeed, the whole of our community will feel the impact and consequent pressures in years to come. It requires leadership to enshrine age-friendly principles within our community. It also requires meaningful consultation and debate with older Western Australians themselves. A number of local governments have undertaken exemplary work in this regard and have been acknowledged internationally for their work. We have heard positive and encouraging accounts of what is being done in some communities. The City of Melville has been acknowledged internationally as a leader in the age-friendly arena. Likewise, Mandurah, which has the highest proportion of older people in the metropolitan area, is doing some wonderful things. The committee was impressed by the buzz of activity and the range of programs and services at Ac-cent, the local Mandurah community centre. The Wheatbelt Development Commission is also engaged in some innovative research and age-friendly initiatives, particularly in the area of housing and aged care. I should also mention the City of Cockburn, which received the inaugural age friendly award at the seniors’ awards during Seniors Week. I thought there was some irony that this award is under the aegis of the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering, who is also the Minister for Local Government and who, of course, is seeking to abolish that council. In the course of the inquiry, the committee was fortunate to visit two World Health Organization accredited age-friendly cities in New York and Manchester and to meet international experts in ageing and the creation of age-friendly communities. It is somewhat ironic that many of the changes these communities have instituted relating to accessibility are of equal assistance to others in the community, such as mothers with prams, and the disabled. The modifications required to infrastructure are often modest in nature.

In stark contrast, the allocation of resources at state government level has been risible. There appears, moreover, to be little coordination between agencies and key departments, demonstrating that these demographic changes

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 20 November 2014]

p8518b-8526a

Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Chris Hatton; Deputy Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Terry Redman; Dr Tony Buti

do not feature at all in strategic planning. Allocation responsibility between key ministers appears to be based on whether a senior is in good health or otherwise. Evidence such as that which indicates that Aboriginal Western Australians are five times more likely to fall victim to dementia than non-Indigenous counterparts should be a clarion call for immediate action by government. Similarly, the acute shortfall of suitably located and accredited aged-care accommodation will not go away by engaging in a game of brinkmanship with the federal government. In this respect, recent federal policy changes will adversely impact on the provision of such care. The community needs to be satisfied that the state government will fearlessly advocate to the commonwealth for a fairer deal on aged care.

The committee was constantly reminded that seniors are often thought of as one all-encompassing group, grey haired and bespectacled and cast in negative and derogatory terms. But the population of seniors is far from homogenous; it includes everyone from 65 to 105: the active, the frail, the well connected and the isolated. They are rich, poor, straight, gay, tech savvy and computer illiterate and speak many languages. Thanks to increased prosperity and better health, there will be more and more seniors every year for many years to come. They have much to offer their families and the community. For example, a large proportion of WA's volunteers are in their senior years. Many grandparents are actively involved in the day care of their grandchildren. Many have the wisdom of rich and diverse experiences to impart.

Early in the course of this inquiry, it became apparent that the Department of Local Government and Communities, which administers the framework, had little idea of how age friendly Western Australia is. It had not monitored the implementation of age-friendly initiatives by local government authorities and, in latter years, had not provided any financial support or incentive for local governments to do so. We heard evidence that the Department of Local Government and Communities did not have the resources to undertake research and it relied on local governments to do so. The policy capability of the Department of Local Government and Communities in the seniors area has seriously diminished in recent years. Oversight coordination of the framework strategies has been severely lacking and the department has not demonstrated the leadership required to implement an age-friendly agenda. The merging of the Department of Local Government and the Department for Communities 18 months ago seems to have been to the detriment of seniors. The issue of local government amalgamations has consumed so much of the new department and the Minister for Local Government's attention that seniors issues seem to have faded into the background. Various witnesses and submissions, however, brought those issues to the committee's attention. We were disturbed to hear about the lack of suitable social housing for seniors. We were also very disturbed to hear that insecurity of tenure is leading to increasing levels of homelessness.

[Quorum formed.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The committee was told about the challenges of living with dementia for not only the patients, but also their families and carers. In general, carers permitted the elderly to stay at home for longer, but the toll it takes on carers has to be given due recognition and respect. Various culturally and linguistically diverse communities have wanted to establish aged care for their communities but found the processes required almost impossible to negotiate. The committee heard that Aboriginal life expectancy is still about 10 years less than the life expectancy for non-Aboriginal Western Australians. This does not mean that they are not affected by diseases in old age—they just get them earlier.

Age discrimination is also on the increase. In the context of employment for older Western Australians, there was cogent evidence given that a specialised employment service, such as those that exist in other states, is certainly warranted.

Fundamental to the wellbeing of senior and elderly Western Australians is the imperative to stay active and socially connected. Major transitions, such as bereavement or the loss of a driver's licence, need to be recognised and supported in the same way as the transition from school to post-school options is closely monitored in the disability sector.

Another cause of social isolation arises when family members or carers misappropriate real property or money, in many cases leaving the elderly person destitute. People working within the sector are very concerned that inadequacies in the law relating to enduring powers of attorney can facilitate such financial elder abuse. The legislative framework in this area has been under review for considerable time; in fact, I would say too long. The notion of a helpline for elder abuse, recently funded by the government, is welcomed, but many elderly persons are reduced to being so fearful of their abusers and so ashamed of what has happened that they would never report it. Prevention is always better, which requires a number of strategies. For others, marginalisation or depression is overcome by being able to get out and about in the community. The committee found that sometimes even simple matters can assume greater significance for older persons. For example, the committee heard that pedestrian concerns are not being addressed and that seniors sometimes find it impossible to cross

Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Chris Hatton; Deputy Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Ms Rita Saffioti;
Mr Mick Murray; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Terry Redman; Dr Tony Buti

busy roads. Even where there is a signalled pedestrian crossing, the length of time allowed by the green man to cross the road is clearly not enough. We know that technically the capacity exists to alter the timing on these crossings, enabling more time to cross. A number of local government representatives gave evidence that they requested Main Roads Western Australia to do this in areas with high senior populations, but Main Roads has resisted those requests out of hand. It says to slow the traffic crossings down would further contribute to congestion. The committee's report mentions that the now Minister for Transport, in his election literature, promised that this very thing would occur in his electorate. It is somewhat ironic that his department is now resisting the very thing that he promised.

Crosswalks are only one piece of a deep-seated problem comprising many subtle environmental details that most of us never even notice, such as whether there is a park bench to catch one's breath or a kerb is cut for a walker. The pace of city living feels entirely different when a person requires an extra beat to read a road sign or when a person does not even have a licence to drive a vehicle at all.

As I said, the importance of physical activity, and suitable places to engage in it, was stressed to the committee. The Seniors Recreation Council treated the committee to a demonstration of exergaming. It is a highly successful way of getting older people active that is fun and engages even the most introverted seniors. Mall walking is proving increasingly popular. Done prior to shops opening, it provides air conditioned, safe, even, stable ground for groups undertaking exercise. The Council on the Ageing Western Australia Inc will expand this program.

Action should be a priority, if for no other reason than a larger part of the electorate is likely to express their displeasure at this neglect, feeling that, in the words of Anthony Powell, "Growing old is like being increasingly penalized for a crime that you haven't committed."

I acknowledge the thoughtful and enthusiastic contributions of my fellow committee members in the conduct of this inquiry: Dr Tony Buti, MLA, Deputy Chair; and Mr Mick Murray, MLA. Former committee members Mr Ian Britza and Mr Chris Hatton resigned in July this year, participating in only part of the inquiry.

Mr M.P. Murray: The trip!

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The failure to replace these members for this inquiry is an indictment on the Liberal Party. Playing petty politics —

Point of Order

Mr C.D. HATTON: The member in front of you, in reference to members on this side of the chamber, keeps repeating the word "trip", which is an indictment —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Balcatta, you cannot use a point of order as a debating point. There is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Because of that interruption, I will repeat myself. The failure to replace these members for this inquiry is an indictment on the Liberal Party. Playing petty politics rather than actively participating to examine such —

Several members interjected.

Point of Order

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: There are a number of Liberal members in the chamber trying to drown out the member for Girrawheen. That is unparliamentary and should not be tolerated.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: No-one is trying to drown her out; they are trying to correct the record. She is misleading the house in the statement she is making.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The Liberal Whip knows full well that he has plenty of opportunity to say whatever he wants in the chamber, but it is not his job to drown out the member for Girrawheen while she is giving a legitimate speech in her capacity as the elected chair of the committee.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. Member for Girrawheen, can you direct your remarks to the report, please.

Debate Resumed

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I make the point that the member for Carine indicated that I was misleading the chamber. I have no idea how he has any idea about the committee deliberations or what in fact occurred.

Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Chris Hatton; Deputy Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Ms Rita Saffioti;
Mr Mick Murray; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Terry Redman; Dr Tony Buti

I repeat: the failure to replace these members for this inquiry is an indictment on the Liberal Party. Playing petty politics rather than actively participating to examine such pressing policy matters is absolutely damning.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

Point of Order

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I was called to order this morning in grievances when I interjected once. Government members are interjecting —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for West Swan, I was calling the house to order. Thank you; I take your point. You do not need to continue. Members, I need to hear the member for Girrawheen in silence, please. Member for Girrawheen, please conclude your remarks.

Debate Resumed

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; I have four minutes.

Any assertion about how important seniors are to members on the government side of the house will now be met with a level of scepticism and disbelief. How government members can say they care about seniors without actively participating in what was a very comprehensive investigation is just unbelievable.

Of course, I must thank the very hardworking research staff, principal research officer, Dr Sarah Palmer, and research officer, Ms Niamh Corbett, for their diligent and professional support of the committee's work.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Collie.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston) [10.20 am]: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is member for Collie–Preston, please.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Apologies, member. Member for Collie–Preston.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I hate to miss the Preston bit.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Absolutely; I agree with you.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Thank you very much for the call, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, Leader of the National Party.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: At least I represent my area and I live in my area. Maybe that is something the Leader of the National Party should learn!

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Yes. It is about having a house and living somewhere does not make any difference.

I rise in support of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee report “Age-friendly WA? A challenge for government”. I thank the very hardworking chair, the member for Girrawheen; my other colleague Tony Buti, the member for Armadale; and staff, Dr Sarah Palmer and her helper Niamh Corbett—although sometimes we call her other names! I thank them very much for the work they did on what started out as a quick report. As we have just heard, as we got into it we saw the depth of problems for aged people and certainly for aged people with disabilities. That was something that was brought to the fore. In saying that, there is some good work being done that needs to be expanded and built upon. We need to do that because we know the demographics of what is happening with ageing baby boomers coming on. If we do not work with that, we will run into all sorts of problems as we go forward.

One of the major issues I had—not with the report itself, but with what was discovered—was that non-government agencies and not-for-profit agencies were competing. They were competing for jobs within different communities and in some cases, especially in the wheatbelt, agencies may have been located at a large centre, but three different ones would go to a small town to service one or two people each, instead of one agency servicing the six or seven people all at once. That is a huge cost to the community and it is not very smart of the agencies. I see that as empire building within those agencies and work should be done to make sure it does not happen. There should be allocated areas where a certain group can go and do its work without worrying about another group trying to take over. I see that issue in quite a few of the smaller country towns and I think it is a waste of the money that has been put forward to the aged-care groups and it could be used very well somewhere else, especially in the area of disability.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 20 November 2014]

p8518b-8526a

Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Chris Hatton; Deputy Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Terry Redman; Dr Tony Buti

The chair of the committee talked about accommodation, and, again, there are major problems in that area. There are some cases that I know of in which aged people, especially in Aboriginal populations, are living with a family of sometimes up to 15 people in the one house. It is very unfair on the aged people in that community. There is a lot of work to be done.

Going to the make-up of the committee itself, I was probably relieved in some ways that we did not have people playing politics within our group. We did not have those people there because they would not stand up for the aged of Western Australia. They left the room because they were under the riding instructions of the Premier. They did not have the heart to stand up, but they did have —

Point of Order

Mr C.D. HATTON: The member is not fulfilling his obligations of reporting on —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Balcatta, there is no point of order. Member for Collie–Preston, direct your remarks to the report, please.

Mr C.D. HATTON: He is discrediting.

Debate Resumed

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Yes, that would be exactly right. I am discrediting the people who would not stand up for the aged people of Western Australia. They left the room because they were directed by the Premier not to participate because they had had a tiff with the chair of the committee. How weak is that in politics when people who were elected and put in the committee to do a job leave the room, but before they leave, they take a trip around the world?

Point of Order

Mr C.D. HATTON: Once again, the member is not meant to be reporting on the members or ex-members of the committee. That is not reporting to the terms of reference.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Madam Deputy Speaker —

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Further to that point of order —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Join the queue. Member for Balcatta, if I hear any imputations of misconduct or inappropriate actions on behalf of the members being discussed, I will call the member. At the moment I have not, so there is no point of order.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I was just making the point again.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I actually thought I was in the queue.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, I know, but the member for West Swan was before you, so patience.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The member was behind me, so he should sit down.

I was just pointing out the interjections from the Leader of the National Party and I again ask that the government members be treated like the opposition members and be called to order when they interject on people on their feet.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for West Swan. I will endeavour to do my best on that front. In the fracas I did not hear where the voices were coming from. I expect all sides of the house to abide by the standing orders.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Madam Deputy Speaker, I think you have made your point very clear; it is just that while the member was putting a point of order, the member for Cannington was interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Churchlands. I really am able to conduct this position myself. I appreciate your advice, but I now return to the member for Collie–Preston.

Debate Resumed

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—and thank you for the protection, which I much needed!

I was alluding to the make-up of the committee, and that I am sure I am allowed to do. The make-up of the committee changed remarkably after a little tiff when the dummy spitters resigned from the committee and then criticised it because they were not there. That was after they went on a trip around the world. That is after they used \$30 000-odd worth of taxpayers' money and then did not contribute to the report. That is where I am coming from.

Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Chris Hatton; Deputy Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Ms Rita Saffioti;
Mr Mick Murray; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Terry Redman; Dr Tony Buti

Point of Order

Mr C.D. HATTON: Madam Deputy Speaker, once again the member has referred to another member who is an ex-member of this committee as a dummy spitter, and that is just not correct. It is not parliamentary language. I question it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Balcatta, I am listening out for imputation of improper motive and personal reflections on the sovereign, the Governor, a judicial officer or members of the Assembly. At the moment although I agree it is a fine line, I am not hearing that—so I do not take your point of order.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: On that point of order, I thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your ruling, because I did not believe that “dummy spitter” was an unparliamentary term. I think it is simply an accurate description of what occurred.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Cannington.

Debate Resumed

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I will try again. What I am trying to say is that the point has been made about people who took trips and then did not contribute to the final report. I think that is unparliamentary in itself.

Mr C.D. Hatton interjected.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Go on; stand up again.

Not contributing to the report after using taxpayers' money is a slight on this Parliament and this government. That is the problem I have with that. In saying that, how good it was to have parliamentary inquiry without the handbrakes being put on by a political group? We were able to bring a report to this Parliament that is unbiased—a truthful report with no interference.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! Member for Eyre and Leader of the National Party, we want to listen to the member for Collie–Preston in silence.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I will repeat again —

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Excuse me, member for West Swan. I have just asked members to listen to the member for Collie–Preston in silence, and that includes you. Thank you.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It is an unbiased and very truthful report. How can the government criticise that when it will not participate? There is no room for the government to criticise if it does not want to sit in that room and be part of that committee.

Mr C.D. Hatton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Balcatta, I call you for the first time. Please listen to the member for Collie–Preston in silence.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: What happens in committees in this political world is that if one shows weakness, one will fail, and that is what I believe has happened with the government. It has shown weakness by not supporting the aged of Western Australia, and that is very obvious. If the government does not want to be there, it is not going to support the aged.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! Order!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: This is a very, very important report. How do I know? Because I am already joining the subject matter of the report, given my age, and I see what is happening around me. Some people do not even make it to my age, and they needed help before then. Those matters are included in this report, but did we get any help from the government? None whatsoever. It sat there in silence, withdrew its services, took the trips and did everything possible to try to discredit the member for Girrawheen. That is what it was about. It was not about the aged of Western Australia—the people out in the communities who need help. The government has let down this Parliament and the parliamentary process. It is very interesting that no-one from the government bench has replaced those two members, but I am very happy to say that the member for Armadale has stepped up to the plate and taken the position of deputy chair, and I am very happy to support that. The vote was unanimous; there

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 20 November 2014]

p8518b-8526a

Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Chris Hatton; Deputy Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Terry Redman; Dr Tony Buti

was not a member who voted against that. It was a unanimous vote for the Labor Party, and what a great mob we are!

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

Point of Order

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask you to ask the member for Collie–Preston to refer to the content of the report, which is specifically what this process, under the standing orders, is designed for. The member is getting political about the committee positions and talking about a range of things other than what this standing order provides for, which is to report to the Parliament the outcomes of a committee report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Leader of the National Party. Member for Collie–Preston, you have only two minutes left. We have not heard much about the report from you, and I think the house would appreciate that.

Debate Resumed

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am talking about how the committee works as part of the report, and I take very seriously what the Leader of the National Party said, because we are now talking about a parliamentary process and a report that, in some ways, is probably far better than what we would have had if the government members had remained. The Labor Party is not going to take trips around the world for free —

Point of Order

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I believe that the member is not talking to the report. I do not —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Churchlands, can you refer me to a standing order?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: It is about relevance, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr M.P. Murray: Which number is it?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: You find the number. It is about relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. Member for Collie–Preston, please direct your remarks to the report.

Debate Resumed

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Obviously a raw nerve has been touched and the point has been made, and the point is that this government has let down the aged of Western Australia. It has let them down badly and it is my view that it should participate in the committee. On the other hand, I do not mind it not participating, because it means we can get the job done without playing politics, and provide an unbiased report on age-friendly Western Australia.

In conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, I again thank the very hardworking committee staff who assisted us and the very hardworking chair, the member for Girrawheen, for the over-and-above work they did, because we had to carry the load that the government would not.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [10.33 am]: I also rise to talk about the seventh report of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, “Age-friendly WA? A challenge for government”. I would like to start by thanking my fellow committee members: the chair, the member for Girrawheen; and the member for Collie–Preston. It has been a joy to work with them in producing this report. During the contribution by the member for Collie–Preston, I heard some members interject that this report was biased. It is hard to understand how they would know if it were biased if it has only just been released, and I challenge any member in this house to read this report and then come back and tell me that it is biased.

It was very disappointing that the former members of this committee—the members for Balcatta and Morley—could not remain on the committee, because I think they both had worthwhile contributions to make to it. I do not blame them; they were, of course, directed by the Premier or by the powers that be, and I think that they were both enthusiastic to make —

Point of Order

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer to standing order 92, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not know that it is written anywhere in the report that the Premier or any senior member of government actually directed that those members resign. I do not think that is in the report.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: On the point of order, I will read standing order 92, headed “Imputations and personal reflections”, which the member for Churchlands referred to. It reads —

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 20 November 2014]

p8518b-8526a

Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Chris Hatton; Deputy Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Terry Redman; Dr Tony Buti

Imputations of improper motives and personal reflections on the Sovereign, the Governor, a judicial officer or members of the Assembly or the Council are disorderly other than by substantive motion.

I do not believe that was what the member for Armadale was referring to in his commentary, so I think the member for Churchlands is referring to the wrong standing order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Cannington, I believe that this is becoming borderline because there is an imputation of an improper motive in that the member for Armadale has said that there was some direction to the committee members about their decision, so I ask the member for Armadale to be careful with the words he uses and to focus on the content of the report.

Debate Resumed

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will be, if members do not interrupt. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As I said, I think the members for Balcatta and Morley would have made worthwhile contributions, and it is a shame that they were unable to remain members of the committee for whatever reason. It is also a shame to some extent that they were not replaced, but as the member for Collie–Preston stated, the committee worked very well and I think we have produced an outstanding report. The chair worked overtime on this report, as did the staff of the committee, the principal research officer, Dr Sarah Palmer, and research officer Niamh Corbett, who have been outstanding and who were the engine room behind the completion of this report. I thank them immensely for their contribution.

Ageing is something that will affect all of us and, indeed, is affecting some of us already! We all know that the demographics tell us that we have an ageing population. At this point I would like to acknowledge some friends from Italy in the Speaker's gallery with the member for Bunbury. Italy, like Australia, is tackling ageing issues. I do not want to return to the politics of the government not having any members on this committee, but this is an incredibly important policy area and it is important for the government to engage in it. Although we have a strategic framework, which sounds great, one has to wonder whether the government is fully committed to ensuring that the seniors' strategic planning framework is being implemented.

I would like to focus on a couple of areas of the inquiry and report in my brief time. One is the issue of local government. We held hearings with local government representatives and it became clear that it would appear that the state government is pushing a lot of the responsibility for implementing its strategic planning framework onto local governments without providing them with adequate resources. That is what we were told by local government and we heard no evidence to the contrary. It is very difficult for local governments, who have many demands on their plate, to try to provide the resources and programs needed to ensure that our ageing population is properly serviced. That is one area that the government needs to look at very carefully in the report's findings, and seek to correct the problems that have resulted from the under-resourcing of local governments.

Transport is also an incredibly important area for everyone. I refer to an interesting quote from the report, on page 105, by Louise Asher, a University College London researcher, who stated —

Older pedestrians are more likely to be involved in a road traffic collision than younger people due to slower walking speed, slower decision making and perceptual difficulties. Older people who are hit are also more likely to die from their injuries than younger people. Having insufficient time at a road crossing may not increase the risk of pedestrian fatalities but it will certainly deter this group from even trying to cross the road.

I think that the Minister for Local Government would be quite aware of how busy Armadale Road in the City of Armadale is, and how difficult seniors and people with physical incapacities find trying to walk across Armadale Road between the railway line and South Western Highway intersection. The government needs to look at that very carefully and ensure that adequate safeguards are in place so that elderly people can walk across that area. It is a major barrier between the residential area and the central business district shopping complex.

Another area explored in the report is the health and wellbeing of our ageing population. We held an interesting hearing with the Department of Sport and Recreation, which has a pivotal role to play in trying to make our environment age-friendly. It has implemented a number of programs for the ageing population. It is a shame that the Minister for Sport and Recreation is not in this place at the moment, because it became clear that insufficient resources have been allocated to enable the department to adequately service the ageing population. I believe that the Department of Sport and Recreation is a key agency for the ageing population. If more resources are put into the Department of Sport and Recreation, maybe not as much money will need to be committed to the health department. The fitter the ageing population is, the healthier it will be. That was borne out by evidence presented by Professor Flicker.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 20 November 2014]

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Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Chris Hatton; Deputy Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Terry Redman; Dr Tony Buti

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! There are too many conversations occurring in the house. Member for West Swan, that includes you. Thank you.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Professor Leon Flicker from the Western Australian Centre for Health and Ageing stated that it is clearly the case that physical activity is incredibly important in the wellbeing of the ageing population. He presented some stark statistics that I think every member in this place should listen to: an inactive male senior has a 25 per cent greater chance of early mortality, and an inactive female senior has a 50 per cent greater chance of early mortality. They are alarming figures that any government that seeks to have a policy and framework for the ageing population needs to take on board. It is incredibly important that government takes this report on board. I find incredibly disappointing some of the interjections we heard during the contribution made by the member for Collie-Preston, saying that this report is biased. That is absolutely absurd, because the report has only just been handed down; how could those members say it was biased? I find it very difficult to understand how anyone could read this very considered and thoroughly researched report and not conclude that it is calling the government to action on a very important public policy matter in the Western Australian body politic; that is, how to deal with the ageing population. As stated in an article that appeared in *The Lancet* by Dr John Beard and David Bloom —

Finally, population ageing is not taking place in isolation. Other broad social changes are transforming society and these are interacting with ageing to affect social and intergenerational dynamics. Understanding the interplay between these trends is crucial if policy makers are to make the best decisions to promote the health and wellbeing of older people.

I think that is a very cogent recognition of the importance of this area of public policy.

One of the issues repeated to us in the submissions we received, hearings we conducted, and in our trips to Manchester, New York and Dallas for this inquiry, was the isolation of the ageing population; it is a real issue. The other issue that I think we need to address very, very carefully is the issue of elder abuse. Elder abuse is something that government and public policymakers have to consider, to try to find remedies and policies to reduce that heinous crime. There needs to be a comprehensive public policy framework on the ageing population. We all come into contact with the ageing population, either because of our own age or because we are looking after or caring for elderly parents. The demographics tell us that it is a major public policy area that this and probably previous governments have not given sufficient consideration to.