

Mr John Hyde; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Watson; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Peter Tinley; Ms Janine Freeman;
Mr Chris Tallentire; Dr Mike Nahan; Acting Speaker; Mr John Day

PUBLIC LIBRARIES — FUNDING

Motion

MR J.N. HYDE (Perth) [4.31 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for its callous, unfair funding cuts and lack of commitment to community libraries, and for failing to recognise the essential work that libraries carry out across Western Australia.

Of course the timing is absolutely exquisite. Fearing the onslaught of a private member's motion this afternoon, the government has rushed through a cabinet decision. There were not even the stenographers or the computer-literate laptops there. Instead they were scribbling out on bits of torn-off paper a resolution for some extra funding.

Ms M.M. Quirk: They had a whiteboard handy, member.

Mr J.N. HYDE: That is right; they could not even get a whiteboard with a fax printer; they had to go to the rolex and use bits of paper. Using the “playbook of politics 101”, the government thinks, “Let's throw in a diversion.” What a silly, silly diversion has come out. The minister has been around the block a few times in government and in opposition. He should have checked very carefully his advice, because he will find there was no cabinet decision to delete funding for the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

Mr J.H.D. Day: I did not say there was.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Now he is denying it. It is classic “playbook of politics 101”—“Let's put in the red herring.” When we drill down to put some flesh and bones to it, the Minister for Culture and the Arts denies it was done.

Mr J.H.D. Day: No; I didn't deny it.

Mr J.N. HYDE: He is either denying or agreeing. The minister knows very well that the commitment was made by the previous Labor government, as it has been by his government, that WASO funding would be provided from the government. Quite rightly, until there is a venue and the feds have signed on and the symphony orchestra has a venue, the government will not throw over money, unlike the Liberal government did for Global Dance Company and a few other arts activities in the Liberal playbook. Let us get rid of that red herring. I am delighted that the minister has agreed that he did not say that the Labor government had cut that funding.

Let us go to the core of this motion about libraries. Why are we in this situation in which the Barnett government cut 40 per cent of funding to libraries around the state in the last budget? Today the government has been dragged screaming and kicking to death's door. We did not even have to rely on a budget leak this time, but I am sure there will plenty of other leaks about the arts. The government did not need a budget leak; it fell on its sword, so even before the budget is out we have a valid leak. Any time between now and 20 May, if a member opposite says, “We can't tell you what's in the budget, you'll have to wait to budget day”, the government has provided the precedent. Of course, if the government had any real steel, it would not be waiting for the next budget; it would have announced today \$4 million for the past year as a top-up to replace the money it cut. The government has cut funding; it has not replaced that money. It is still \$4 million behind the mark.

Let us look at a few of the other issues associated with this. As an opposition, we condemn these cuts, as will the many hundreds of librarians and thousands upon thousands of library supporters around the state, including the Western Australian Local Government Association and the Ethnic Communities Council of WA, because it is the culturally and linguistically diverse communities that are very much victimised when there are cuts to library funding.

Last week I was in the Port Hedland library and on Friday I went to the Bunbury library. Bunbury of course benefited under the Gallop government from a \$2 million commitment.

Mr G.M. Castrilli interjected.

Mr J.N. HYDE: It had an excellent mayor at that stage. He should have stayed in that job and not taken the slippery downhill slope! That mayor was able to access \$2 million. Let us hope that when the Port Hedland community comes to the minister asking for money for its \$27 million to \$29 million new library, it will get \$2 million from the government, as will many other communities. Libraries are very important parts of community building. It is all very well to talk about a member supporting the north and a member supporting communities such as Port Hedland, but we must understand the crucial role libraries play in communities such as Port Hedland, where people have difficulty getting not only housing but also access to computing facilities and education. When a number of fly in, fly out workers are not working in Hedland, they are not down at the pub; they are undertaking community pursuits. They are in the local libraries trying to upgrade their qualifications, so

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they are looking at learning activities. The library plays a pivotal role in that. As the minister will also know, given Port Hedland is a regional centre, there are many outlying communities from which people come into Port Hedland. While they are in the bigger town, they use resources such as the library. That is happening all over Western Australia. It is one of the important aspects of the library framework agreement. The minister's government has been tardy. He should have locked that down and negotiated it a year ago. If he had signed off on the library framework agreement a year ago, he would have had to come up with the money or confess that he was working on the \$5.1 million hypothesised funding level. By dragging out the framework agreement, he had a bit of cover until earlier this year when it became obvious to people within local government, as they were grappling with their budgets, that the \$4 million cut was a reality that would continue in the future.

I draw the minister's attention to the most recent analysis by SGS Economics and Planning of the City of Greater Geelong, which has also invested in a huge new library. Why do local councils and even people such as the former Mayor of Bunbury know that it makes sense and is important in capacity building and skills enhancement and in keeping a cohesive community to fund libraries without question? SGS Economics and Planning did an objective analysis and discovered that for every dollar invested in a library in regional Australia, the economic benefit is \$7.46. Even conservatives who are not concerned about the cultural wellbeing and the real community benefit of libraries can appreciate the economic benefit of \$7.46 return for every \$1 invested. The Ethnic Communities Council put out a briefing paper called "Public Library Funding". This paper analyses the importance of libraries to the culturally and linguistically diverse communities in WA and details the responsibility for library services. We have had a tradition in this state of a partnership between the state government and local government. Libraries are more than about books. What libraries are doing these days is amazing. On Friday I went through the Bunbury public library—a new building—which has gone from providing two internet stations to 16. When I looked at the demographic in a regional library on a Friday morning in that regional city—it happened to be in school holidays so kids were there, but that also meant that the normal school, kindergarten and playgroup reading sessions were not as busy—it was chock-a-block with what those of us in tourism towns call grey nomads; that is, people who travel around Western Australia. If we look at it in a holistic sense, we cannot have a tourism policy with tourism silos, education silos and culture and the arts silos; a library brings everything together. If we look at the demographic, it is very much a culturally and linguistically diverse community that uses libraries. People have access to different languages. Importantly, library users get access to the internet and to digitally delivered services. Many of our libraries are now history centres as well and they are creating a wonderful opportunity for communities not only to learn about and value history but also to celebrate the diversity of their local communities.

The other aspect that we will be watching most carefully now, and it seems to be another line in the Liberal Party playbook, that the full details of the Library and Information Service of Western Australia financial contributions will be revealed "later on". That is where the opposition wants to ensure that there is not sleight of hand going on, because the State Library and LISWA play a very important role in training, in delivering a number of digital services, and in providing advice and a range of other activities to the local libraries that are under the auspices of our 144 local government councils. It is no good the government saying it will be restoring the level of the Labor government's funding for books and resources if, at the same time, it is cutting down on the resources of LISWA that go hand in hand. I am eventually going to get the minister to reveal what happened with the \$4 million Ignite funding for digital enhancements at the State Library. We want to know where that money has gone and what it has been spent on.

I have put questions to the minister, and I am still awaiting answers regarding the radio frequency identification—RFID—rollout. RFID is the future of libraries. The moment we have RFID, every library book in the state will have an individual ID. This means that library users can return books after hours with minimal handling. During the day a book can come through a chute and can be re-shelved and become accessible to another library user within minutes. We need to discover where the \$4 million for the Ignite package has been used, and what the government's real commitment is to RFID. It is no good restoring the Labor government's full funding for books, given that in the two years since the unfortunate loss of government the price of books has gone up considerably and, importantly, with our ageing population, we need a diversity in book stock, particularly with big print; that is, with the growing number of seniors, and the ageing demographic of our community, people's dependence increases on not only regular print books but also large print books. It becomes even more important that we have efficiencies and economies of scale because the library staff and their wage increases are still being funded by local councils, and the actual electricity costs for local libraries and the freight costs of books are going up across Western Australia. Libraries face all these increases as well as the Barnett government's increases in electricity, gas and other essential services; these all have a carryover effect. By enabling an efficient RFID system in library systems throughout WA, we can have greater economies for local libraries that pay back with a better delivery of services to every local community, to book readers and to people accessing information. Of course, if a change of federal government occurs, we will then have everybody under

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30 who is unemployed not getting the dole and not getting assistance from a mean and nasty federal government. These people then will be depending on local libraries and other local communities to get jobs by doing their CVs and all such things.

We see cutbacks in other areas; let us discuss what has happened with district high schools. By losing teachers and other resources, and by not having a district high school available, those students who may depend on the School of Isolated and Distance Education and other activities will be physically using learning spaces and getting assistance in their local libraries. When community services are withdrawn in regional Western Australia, the fallback on many occasions is local libraries. This is another added area. We want to ensure that the funding that has been cut will be restored, but also that no cuts will be made in other areas.

Individual councils will look at how the government is now negotiating the carve-up of the restored Labor funding within the framework agreement. There were anomalies within the framework, and there are a variety of opinions from librarians and from local councils about how the divvying up amongst the 144 councils should be achieved, how the role of regional libraries should be viewed and what assistance they should be getting from LISWA. The government is giving a small extra incentive for libraries such as Bunbury that have a regional responsibility, but clearly the regional responsibility in Bunbury is different from regional responsibilities in Port Hedland and other more remote regional centres where there is considerable distance between the regional local libraries they are serving. We need a commitment from the minister on the LISWA details and the funding there. We need a commitment regarding the regional frequency identification tags. We would also like a bit of vision from this government: instead of being dragged screaming and shouting on arts policy by an interested opposition and by stakeholders, there should be some vision from the government.

A good place to start on vision for the Liberal-National government would be in the coordination of library stock throughout the state. It is not only local government libraries. We have an enormous number of school libraries, technical and further education libraries and libraries in a variety of professional institutions. We need to be able to use an RFID system. We need a database so that if somebody in Port Hedland or Derby wants a book, the poor old local library need not send out 87 different emails or faxes to different organisations asking whether they have a book on an esoteric area of water engineering. We need vision from this government about how it will deliver digital access to library materials throughout the state. If so, we would create economies of scale and more access for local communities here in Western Australia. The minister has today dodged a bullet in quite a crass, albeit understandable, way. What puzzles this side of the chamber is that it has taken him so long to act; really, it should have been in November or December, when the full ramifications were made available, that we had the reversal. Of course, that would have meant that the minister would have had to stump up within the first six months the \$4 million missing from this financial year.

A number of members on this side of the chamber want to speak in this debate to make the minister aware of the contribution local libraries make to local communities, and of the importance of a Treasury commitment to Labor's suggestion of consumer price index funding and to ongoing service delivery for our libraries. That is the information services role that LISWA should play. A government that is committed to the arts will have some vision for the delivery of library services in Western Australia.

Even though the minister acted three hours ago, it is still appropriate that he get a bit of a hurry-up on this issue, and that he display some humility and *mea culpa* without a red herring; that would enhance his reputation for being one of the more sensible and progressive members on the government side. We are delighted that as soon as the ink was dry on the state budget, after the Treasurer had knocked the minister back on so many arts activities, the opposition was able to put forward \$4 million for the minister in the face of absolute silence from the National Party.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mr J.N. HYDE: That is right; there were some Facebook comments about where the book stock had gone and papier-mâché cows in Margaret River. The National Party's silence on libraries has been deafening; we have been going around regional Western Australia.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

Mr J.N. HYDE: If the government wants to make some time for debate on public art policy, we will debate it. We look forward to the National Party showing its commitment to regional art through more than the mere symbolism of a fibreglass cow or two. I can assure members that public art in Western Australia is a lot more three-dimensional and cohesive and has a lot more depth to it than a fibreglass udder. Every time an important arts issue is raised, such as libraries, it is important that the National Party's position is not just about fibreglass udders and that it understands the complexity of the issue. It needs to understand that if we are actually dinkum

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about a creative Western Australia and reaping benefits from the boom, we have to support and fund our public libraries to an appropriate level.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [4.53 pm]: I am very pleased to make a contribution to this debate this afternoon. I thought the contribution made by the opposition spokesperson for the arts was actually very complimentary and conciliatory, and I think I should change that focus. I am pleased that the minister made his announcement this morning; however, I took umbrage during question time at the accusation of scaremongering. I found that quite frankly offensive, because it is the role of oppositions and, indeed, communities to respond to grave concerns when it is felt that important elements of the community are under threat. The minister acknowledged as much on Geoff Hutchison's radio program about two weeks ago. Geoff Hutchison said to the minister, "We've had lots of calls and people are not happy about this." The minister's response was that those people had a right to put forward their points of view. They have done just that in their hundreds of thousands. It is the role of the opposition and of communities throughout the state to have their voices heard. That is not scaremongering when there is the threat of a significant reduction in the funding of libraries throughout the state of Western Australia. I will highlight what that would have meant for the City of Mandurah's two libraries—the one in my electorate, in the centre of Mandurah, and the more recently opened library in Falcon, in the Deputy Premier's electorate.

I took umbrage at that accusation, which is probably why the Speaker had to call me to order a couple of times this afternoon during question time. I object to the term "scaremongering" being used as an excuse by the minister for his mistake. It would have been more appropriate for the minister to have said, "Look, we made a blue. Yes, we recognise that communities value their libraries very much and that slashing funding by 40 per cent was a bad proposal, and we will correct that." That is how he should have done it, but he did not. Instead, he had to call an emergency cabinet meeting this morning, after the Premier flew back from Canberra—"Quick, we've got a crisis! Premier, while you've been away, we've had a crisis! We need to call an emergency cabinet meeting this morning! Premier, don't leave the state for too long, please, because when you leave the state for too long, crises erupt in all facets of government, and you have to come back and call an emergency meeting!" I am sure that this issue was on the top of the agenda and that the commonwealth health funding issue was probably second! This is another example of the Premier having to step in to save the scalp of one of his ministers! Minister, I am not being facetious!

This is, however, a serious issue. During the past two and a half weeks, I have been to the Mandurah library for a couple of hours every morning, inviting people to sign the petition I presented this morning.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Did you wear your pink suit?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, that is actually a relic now! I could tell the Premier who gave me that suit; unfortunately, he has passed away. It was actually the wedding suit of a fellow who used to watch one of the acts we used to perform. To be totally honest, the pink suit no longer fits; it is a little tight around the nether regions, so it is very difficult to struggle into! The Minister for Local Government knows the act I refer to; he has seen my partner in crime, who probably would fit into the pink suit. To answer the Premier's question: no!

I have been out the front of the Mandurah library for a couple of hours every morning for the past two weeks, and I have never in my recent career been as amazed by a response to a single issue as I have been by this response. People of all ages were very concerned about what the slashing of library resources would mean for them. I am sure members have visited their libraries. If they have not done so recently, they should do so and watch the steady flow of people in and out of them. If it is like the Mandurah library, what they will find there is a steady flow of mums and dads with their toddlers. The Mandurah library and the Falcon eLibrary offer amazing activities. The kids are read to and a range of activities are provided to them by the staff. The staff do terrific things. All the important early year aspects are encouraged and nurtured through activities for young ones. The students use our libraries specifically for research of particular activities in their studies. The libraries in my area are absolutely critical for students. We also have people of all other ages who use our libraries.

I must say that the City of Mandurah, as some members would know, has a significant number of people over 60 years of age, and the library is more than a place they go to get their books, DVDs or other library resources. It is also a critical community hub for them to connect. It is very important in communities that people have the opportunity to continually connect with their community and be valued and feel valued and be part of their community by participating in a particular way. A number of older people told me that the Mandurah library is almost their lifeblood. They said that it is a place they know that they can go to connect with a local free resource—I stress that word "free". Certainly with this government's continued policy of slapping Western Australians with increases in taxes and charges, the libraries are one of the few free resources available to the community. The older people who spoke to me when they signed the petition told me that the library is a place

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where they go to connect with their community, meet up with other people and access freely the things that interest them.

Libraries have changed. When I was a kid in Northam, the library was a silent place. There was not a boo out of anyone. One would not find a lot of kids engaged in reading, storytelling, clay or activity-based stuff. Now, thankfully, in libraries throughout Western Australia that is no longer the case.

I want to highlight to the minister why this funding and indeed the work of the libraries in Mandurah are critical. I will focus on the early years and the Better Beginnings Family Literacy program, which is a very important program. My son Jack has been through it and it is available to children in other parts of the state. It is a program that is funded through some corporate funding. Rio Tinto is involved in the WA Future Fund, which provided \$230 000 in partnership funding for the Better Beginnings pilot program through 2009–10. Mandurah is one of the libraries involved. What happens is that mums at the local hospital receive a yellow calico bag, which contains an introduction for their newborn to the world of literacy. That child, with mum, dad or grandparents, has the capacity and ability to be involved in a range of activities throughout the early months and years of his or her development to get positive, well role-modelled early literacy exposure. The Leader of the National Party would know, being a father of young children —

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Absolutely, but *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* comes a bit later. The Leader of the National Party, like many members, would know how critical it is in those early years for children—babies and toddlers—to be continually exposed to good, positive early literacy experiences. The Better Beginnings program ensures that children and their parents are able to access in an ongoing fashion the resources and activities available in local libraries that are based on positive, early literacy modelling.

It is those sorts of programs that are under threat when there are cuts to library resource funding. That is the decision that was made, but it has been reversed. We should always protest about such threats. To protest about that to heighten the awareness within the community, whether it be through petitions, letter-writing programs, public or local debates or email campaigns is not scaremongering. It highlights what that sort of funding cut would mean to the development of young Western Australians.

I proudly tell members that I went to my libraries to encourage as many people as possible to sign the petition, and to encourage as many people as possible to share through their various networks via email and other avenues their disgust at what was proposed. I am proud to say that I strongly support that program of protest. It was those sorts of protests and community-based actions that put the pressure on the minister and the government to reverse the decision. The minister can say, “We weren’t going to do it. We looked at the budget and re-jigged it.” We know that the minister was going to do it and he would have allowed it.

However, people such as Geoff Hutchison on 720 ABC and other media outlets, including *The West Australian*, continued to highlight what the minister was proposing. Local governments throughout Western Australia highlighted what the 40 per cent cut to their library budgets would mean to them. Local governments protested. Librarians protested. Local writers protested, and they continue to highlight the importance of libraries, not through self-interest, although they benefit from libraries. However, they very clearly highlighted that it was a proposed attack on literacy in our communities.

I am proud and pleased that there are in my electorate a number of wonderful writers who live in and work from Mandurah. One of them is an internationally renowned romance author, a wonderful woman named Anna Jacobs. I do not know Anna’s politics. I was not interested in the politics of the people who signed the petition. In fact, I knew many of them were not of my political persuasion and did not support me at the last election. I know that they felt so strongly that this issue was above politics. The reason that they signed the petition was all about having a say and being heard.

Anna Jacobs, an internationally renowned romance writer, said some very important things that summed up better than I can what libraries mean. After hearing about the funding cuts she was disgusted and she was reported in the local newspaper as follows —

“I think it’s short sighted ...

“Libraries do so much more than lend out books —

That is a critical issue. Libraries do a lot more than lend out books. They do a lot for the community socially. Anna Jacobs was also reported as follows —

“I love libraries —

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The following is a beautiful comment —

“It has nurtured my soul as a child.”

Many young people have their souls nurtured by being actively involved in libraries.

Apparently there was an attempt to slash library resource funding in the United Kingdom. About that Anna said —

“They ... have been trying to do this in England and when people stood up against it there was a back flip in the decision, which is what we’re hoping to do here.”

We have succeeded, and, I might add, very quickly. I think the campaign in the UK went on for a year. This campaign was probably over in less than a month. I know that the minister received a lot of flak and a lot of attention over this proposal. That is one of the reasons he has done a backflip in this instance.

Mr J.H.D. Day: I have not backflipped on anything.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister has. He knows that he has been under pressure. I wish I had the transcript from the radio interview with me. I have never heard a minister sound so uncomfortable when being probed by a radio journalist. Not only was the minister embarrassed, but also he reminded me of Dr Smith from *Lost in Space*, who, of course, was an intruder on *Jupiter 2*, although the minister does not look much like him. Dr Zachary Smith infiltrated *Jupiter 2* and set about doing everything he could to set *Jupiter 2* off course. The Swiss Family Robinson—or the Robinson family as they were known—and the cast comprised Mr and Mrs Robinson, Don, Judy, Penny and, of course, the robot and William. Debbie was a monkey, not one of the daughters! The minister reminds me of Dr Smith, who infiltrated *Jupiter 2* and tried to set everything off course but was always foiled at the end of the day, usually by the robot. I could say that the Premier was the robot. He came in after his wonderful health meetings in Canberra and said, “Danger! Danger! Danger!” He ensured that the minister changed his mind. That is what happened. The minister did a backflip. Dr Smith did a lot of backflips but he was always caught out, and the minister has been caught out. The minister’s radio interview with Geoff Hutchison was the most uncomfortable interview I have heard. I was uncomfortable listening to it! When I was listening to it while driving to an engagement that morning, I was squirming in my seat, and it was not from what I ate the night before! I was feeling the minister’s discomfort. I felt sorry for him because I knew, just by the way he was speaking—I feel an extension coming on.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I felt the minister’s great discomfort. The minister’s backflip is welcome. It shows that the community can have a say and be heard. It shows also that the good community campaigning by the Labor Party, local government, community members, artists, writers and people involved in a whole range of things meant that the people’s voices were heard. They can have an impact on the government, even if it means calling a special cabinet meeting on the morning before a private member’s motion was to be moved by a very astute opposition spokesperson and a very astute opposition. I say, “Hurrah!” to all the people in my community who signed the petition and I congratulate my local library. I acknowledge the tremendous work of my two local libraries under the head of Mr John Hughes, who is the manager of libraries, learning, arts and culture at Mandurah. I like the fact that the word “libraries” is very clearly identified in that title by the City of Mandurah. The connection of all those things is absolutely integral to the development of a vibrant community. A vibrant community values libraries and the adequate and appropriate resourcing of libraries, because those communities will put in place positive programs to ensure a high rate of literacy among the community. I acknowledge John Hughes, the manager of libraries, learning, arts and culture at the City of Mandurah and Ms Debora Dearman, who is the team leader at the Mandurah library. I thank her for not kicking me out the front of the library when I was there every morning. I also thank the team leader of the Falcon eLibrary and Community Centre, Ms Teena Miller and her team. Many other staff work with those people. If members have not been to their local library recently, they should go because they will be amazed by the hive of activity that takes place in them. We will look very closely in the budget, certainly during the estimates, at what other things the minister might have tried to slide under the door without us knowing.

Mr J.H.D. Day: You are the expert on that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Sit down, Dr Smith! We will make sure that the minister’s portfolio is well and truly scrutinised because he has already tried one shifty on us but he has not got away with it; he has had to backflip. He has shown that when a bit of heat is put on him, he folds; he melts. That is what he has done today. Well done for doing it. I hope to see the minister do a few more backflips. He might want to try out for the Australian Commonwealth Games team that will be going to India. He is good at that.

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Well done to the people who stood up against the proposed cuts. The people who signed the petitions, emailed and wrote in have succeeded. It was a strong community campaign. I congratulate the media outlets, who also saw that this was an important matter and gave airtime to this campaign. It has worked.

Mr J.N. Hyde: It shows the value of a civil society and how empowered a civil society can become through well-funded libraries.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Absolutely. I am very pleased to have made this contribution. I think it has been an outstanding contribution, if I say so myself! I hope to make many more contributions in this place over the coming years.

MR P.B. WATSON (Albany) [5.16 pm]: It is very hard to follow a very good speech, but fortunately I do not have to do that! My local library is the hub of the community. When Hon Sheila McHale was the responsible minister, funding was going to be cut from the regional areas. I got on the phone to the minister and she came good. Fewer books were to be given to the regional areas but when Hon Sheila McHale came to Albany and saw how much the community relies on our local library, she funded it accordingly. I have been lobbied very extensively by a group called the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. It is probably disappointing for the minister that the group will not sit in their pyjamas at the front of Parliament House and read their books, which it was going to do before the minister's backflip. I watched some athletics on the weekend and saw some people doing very good backflips over the high jump. The Liberal-National government would have fitted in very well at the weekend.

Albany has a tremendous local library. Adults read to young children there, programs are run there, and young and old people study there. There are a lot of writers in the Albany region. Jon Doust is one of the 12 finalists in the Walkley Awards. We have children's writers and some people who come to Albany for the lifestyle to write books and are a very valuable part of the community. I am very disappointed that we had to force the government to change its position on this. In my community the government is considered to be mean and heartless. We are still waiting for the seniors' money to come through. Gas, electricity and water prices are going up. All those utilities are things that people accept as part of their day-to-day living. Seniors and young people go to their library because it is a getaway for those who do not have much money. They cannot afford to either buy a book or go to the movies and so they go to their local library, which is a meeting place for them. They can read anything they want to there and it is a place of tranquillity for them. This mean and heartless government was going to take away the funding for those libraries. I applaud the minister for his backflip. I know that he did it because of the public pressure. We heard today that a special cabinet meeting was held. I am sure that was a bit of a furphy—unless the minister wanted to curtail all the petitions that members have received from their communities about the heartlessness of this Liberal–National Party government.

The library in the City of Albany is a very important and integral part of our community. I congratulate the librarians, the volunteers at the library and the book clubs that use the library. Quite a lot of books are launched in Albany. Whenever a new book is launched in Albany, it is done at the library. I will be watching, the same as the member for Mandurah, to make sure that the promise that the minister has made today is followed through in the budget. I know that the community of Albany will be very pleased if that happens.

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [5.20 pm]: I want to add a few brief words to this very illuminating discussion about the role of libraries in our communities. A very large community centre is about to be built in Maylands, funded by the City of Bayswater and the state government. A library facility may indeed be part of that facility, so this issue will be a matter of some importance to my community. As would be the case for other members, I have received many letters and emails from concerned citizens in my community who use libraries in the metropolitan area and who were greatly perturbed by what they saw as the undermining of their access to this community facility. When this cut in funding for libraries was first mooted, I found that very disturbing. I say that because libraries form an integral part of the social capital of our communities. Libraries play a very important role, particularly for schoolchildren. I have very fond memories of going to the library with my mum, picking up a few books to read on the weekend, and dropping them back to the library. I think that is one of the reasons that I became so interested in literature and English as a student and went on to become involved in policy writing. The people in my electorate who have come to talk to me about libraries have said that a library is not just a facility that delivers a range of books for people to read but is a centre for community activities in our neighbourhoods. The same sentiment has been expressed by other members who have spoken on this motion this afternoon. In the past, when I was involved in promoting community activities, I had great success by contacting the public library network and asking the libraries to disseminate information. That is a free service that libraries offer. I was always truly amazed by the number of people who go to our libraries on a daily basis and collect the information that I and other members might want to get across. The services that are provided by libraries cover all the things that take place in a community—from a fete, to a fundraising activity, to an

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educational event, to entertainment. A library really does become a central hub for the community. Anything that detracts from facilitating the flow of people through our libraries will have a negative impact on the social capital of our neighbourhoods. I am, therefore, very pleased that the Minister for Culture and the Arts has seen fit to reinstate the funding for libraries at the level that existed previously. That certainly underlines to me that libraries are recognised as a central part of the ebb and flow of the spirit of our communities. I am sure that this funding will be well used, particularly by the members of my community.

MR P.C. TINLEY (Willagee) [5.24 pm]: I would like to inform, as much as add to, the debate, and to support the shadow spokesman for culture and the arts in pressuring the government to consider what it is doing. As we know from our professional lives, not often is an action taken or a decision made that does not have a second or third-order effect. The Western Australian Local Government Association has made some comments about the government's decision to not fund the library materials acquisition program to its fullest extent. I will quote from my notes —

“WALGA has told once the increased cost of library materials has been factored in, funding in the current year is the same in nominal terms as the funding provided in 2001/02, despite significant increases in the cost of library materials, a 14.2% increase in population and an 87.6% increase in State Government revenue”.

That underscores the actual extent of the problem. I have been considering the heat that the Minister for Culture and the Arts must have been feeling since he made the decision to cut funding to the libraries of Western Australia. In considering that, I did not have to look too far, because people were coming through my door to talk to me about this issue. In fact, I have a petition that I was going to table tomorrow. However, in light of the backflip by the minister, I am not sure whether I should be presenting that petition, so I am hoping to get some clarification from the Clerk on that matter.

This is a significant issue in the electorate of Willagee. There are two libraries in my electorate, one in the suburb of Willagee and one in the suburb of Coolbellup. Those are two of the lowest socioeconomic groupings in the state. Many of these people are elderly, and they rely on the library and the associated services to make a significant contribution to their social amenity. Libraries provide people with a safe and non-judgemental environment to which they can go from their place of work, their home or their place of recreation. A lot of people think that libraries are just about books. Obviously libraries are about far more than that. I remember as a young boy being carted by my mother, along with my seven brothers and sisters, all in the one sedan—at the time I think the seatbelt laws were a bit different—to join the library. That is a tradition that I have kept with my own boys. I have dragged them to the library and have made them sign up, so they are now all card-carrying members of their local library. They been introduced to the great tradition of a library. That tradition now goes well beyond books. It goes also to electronic material, and to the internet. Libraries are a fascinating place. But they are also a human experience. I do not know the number of times that I have taken my kids to our local library for a storytelling. Although a library is a place of books and of the written or printed word, the oral tradition that is handed down in our libraries is an absolutely essential component.

It is interesting to look at some of the facts about libraries. The member for Perth, our spokesman for culture and the arts, has said that, regionally, there is a one to seven economic benefit from libraries. At the more conservative end of the spectrum, in urban areas, libraries return over \$3 in value for the community for every \$1 that is invested. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, libraries are the second most-visited cultural event in this country after cinemas. Over 900 000 Western Australians are members of a library. That is an interesting fact. There are more than nine million visits to local libraries each year. From that point of view, I can understand the pressure that the minister would have been under to reverse this decision. A large number of people phoned or came into my office about this matter. It was overwhelming. Of course I was compelled under those circumstances to visit the libraries to check on what was going on. It was for those other reasons. I started to quiz a number of people I knew around the electorate. I said to them that they did not look like avid library goers, and they—mostly men—said that they were not.

Mr B.J. Grylls: What does an avid library goer look like?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Not like the minister—nor like me, that is for sure. I think we met the scholars on the way home!

They identified the fact that the library was under threat. It was not the fact that they might be personally disadvantaged, but it was about their kids and the fact that an institution that none of us really often considers but that forms part of the fabric of their community was actually under threat. I suppose it might be psychological or deep in their emotions, but they felt that their community was being threatened. The figure of 900 000 Western Australians as members of libraries does not mean that they are the only ones who visit libraries. Never-ending groups of school kids and others use them. We can also look at the geographic location of libraries. The two in

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my electorate of Willagee—one in the suburb of Willagee and one in the suburb of Coolbellup—are not in isolation by themselves but next to the local IGA shops, the community centre and a community school. In fact, a little bit of a geographic study around the library shows a whole range of densely packed different demographics. This is my own estimate and not an official number, but, for example, around the Willagee library, I estimate that over 1 000 elderly people are in different sorts of care, such as aged care, independent aged care or independent living. I would estimate that over 1 000 people would be in the 70 to 75 year age group. They are all there because they are obviously located in a hub approach to all the amenities and services, and they are within walking distance of their library. They too started to feel a little threatened when these cuts to funding were becoming imminent.

I went to the Cockburn library, which services more of a younger demographic with younger families. I looked at how people use their library. It is a significant piece of infrastructure, both actual and temporal, within the community. It hosts a dazzling array of people in different groups. There are book clubs, writing groups, and talks and presentations on cooking, wood turning, alternative energy and health topics, all of which are backed up by the materials that are provided by the library. They also have meet-the-author events. Could members imagine the circumstance in which an author was offering to hold a function or reading in a library and the library staff were embarrassed because the library could not provide any stock of the book from the author. There are film clubs; crime clubs; an English conversation group, which is principally for people with English as a second language and it is a great resource for them; a dead poet society, which is not a group that I personally would be found at I suppose; and a range of poetry groups. There is also the home library service, which is an essential component in the seat of Willagee, for the delivery of material, especially large print and talking books, which are at the more expensive end of the library materials because they are specially produced and they have to be delivered. The reason they have to be delivered is that the people who use them are disadvantaged and disabled and cannot attend a library.

What all this summates to, I suppose, is that libraries keep people connected and create resilient communities, providing opportunities to meet and interact. A library is not just about withdrawing a book or sitting quietly in a quiet spot and reading a book; it is about access to the community. It is a vibrant place. It is also an opportunity for community workers to find a middle ground, or a demilitarised zone, if members want to call it that, for some of the troubled youth that they find. I am thinking of a particular example of the librarians at the Willagee library providing surrogacy for five young men who aimlessly wander around the district. They have been able to engage those five young men in a self-fulfilling way; in other words, they have introduced them to the idea that a library is not just a stuffy place filled with printed material but a vibrant, active place that is the hub of a community.

I endorse the minister's backflip on this funding. I thank him gratefully for it. I also support wholeheartedly and thank the shadow spokesman on the matter. I am also deeply indebted to the librarians and the friends of the library of the Willagee electorate, because of their activism, which was quite surprising in the face of these damaging cuts.

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Nollamara) [5.35 pm]: I rise to support the motion and also to note that there has been a 40 per cent reduction in funding for public libraries, but I welcome the recent announcement by the minister that future years will have an increase in funding. From my perspective, I have both personal experience and the aspect of representing the community of Nollamara on libraries. I have a 14-year-old son who has a love of reading. I think that comes very much from the fact that we joined libraries at a very young age—an experience that many people would have had. I was a part-time worker and a full-time carer. I think we joined six libraries because there were times when we read certain series and it was not enough to go to a library, request the next part and wait for the two weeks that it would take to come. We would drive across to Dianella library, up to Karrinyup library and through to the Wanneroo library, so I think I have visited any number of libraries as I went through a period of time with my son having a great appreciation of reading.

I will not talk about the contentious issue of the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy, but I would like to say that I was a proud parent when NAPLAN test results showed that when my son sat the test in year 7, I think it was, his reading ability was well above the average on the graph and took him into the area of exceptional reading. I like to put that down to the fact that we spent a lot of time visiting libraries, reading in libraries and attending library readings and he got the love of what it was to be engrossed in a book, and he still has that love to this day.

I heard of this recently when Mem Fox was interviewed on ABC 720 Perth radio. I heard her passion for early childhood reading and her passion for the better beginnings that the member for Mandurah spoke about. She made what I thought was an amazingly bold statement, which was basically that parents are best off reading to children before they are one year of age, and at least by the time they are two years of age. If children have not had an appreciation and had the exposure of being read to by the time that they hit primary school, schools need

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to do intensive reading. Such education will have such an impact on their cognitive behaviour and thought processes that it will impact upon them for the rest of their education and their life because of their capacity to retain and process information, build arguments and, I suppose, be a part of a community that has such great expectations now for education and the capacity to read and learn. The midst of a public campaign on the cuts to library funding was an apt time for Mem Fox to be on the radio talking about the importance of reading. I concur with all my colleagues that it was an issue that raised people's passion and brought out the voice in our community to say, "No; this is something we truly have a commitment to." I too put out petitions and people rang my office for petitions, and I went out talking to people about the matter. I was also amazed that, outside my day job of representing constituents in the seat of Nollamara, when I went to a friend's fiftieth birthday on the weekend, it was almost the most frequently raised topic with me. Clearly, my friends are all aware of my job. One of the mums from a local school had a letter to the editor of *The West Australian* published, which is one example of how it impacted on us in both our personal and professional lives. Her letter is a good summary of some of the issues that have been raised by people. It is also a timely illustration of the concerns in our community. I understand from an email I received that there will be an announcement about something that will happen in the next couple of days to launch a project to encourage children away from the television and into the bush. I looked at it and thought that I could not make it, so I did not read it as closely as I probably should have done. My friend's letter, headed "Books essential", reads —

My heart sank when I read about the state government's intention to subject our already depleted libraries to further funding cuts. I am, and have always been, a book lover and a library user. I am also the mother of three young sons who, like most of their peers, would choose to spend most of their waking hours absorbed in electronic entertainment—computer games, PlayStation or iPod video. Thank goodness they still read books that engage their minds in stories about growing up, families, love and hate, being a hero or being a loser. Books that educate, stimulate thought and provoke questions. Books that make them feel things and connect them with a human experience across time, age and culture.

Our local library sits within the community recreation centre where we go to play sport and exercise—other things that keep us healthy and vital. When the kids were toddlers they sat on cushions listening to story time and now they will grab a title in the latest series on their way to a game of soccer or flop in a bean bag with a book in the young-reader area. When funding cuts result in fewer books, less technology and poorer spaces, libraries will eventually become irrelevant. The message to our kids will be that reading books is not worthwhile.

No-one would argue that the healthy development of our children should be a public priority. Undermining free access to books and the spaces devoted to them denies it. Don't let that happen.

I am glad we are saying that we will not let it happen. In some ways the minister has provided us with a great opportunity to debate what is a very important public matter. I note the member for Willagee's remarks and the data he referred to on community participation in libraries. I read the letter from the Australian Library Information Association, which provided the facts that almost 900 000 Western Australians are library members and make more than nine million visits to local public libraries each year, as the member for Willagee pointed out.

The Australian Library Information Association also said in its letter that public libraries are attended more frequently and by more people than any other cultural and sporting venue. We have had a huge debate over the past few years about football stadiums. Having a netball background, I often wonder why we are not having a huge debate also about a netball stadium because, frankly, a lot of women and their daughters play netball. We have a great new basketball stadium, which in itself is a good thing. However, if we think about those things in terms of community access and availability, they are less frequented than one of the most important facilities in our community and that is the library. I think libraries build healthy communities and we need healthy communities. They build a capacity for people to come together in an environment that fosters a sense of collegiate and relationships.

The libraries in the electorate of Nollamara are the Mirrabooka library and, in the Wanneroo area and the Koondoola–Girrawheen library. They are vibrant and full of people from diverse backgrounds. They offer an opportunity in a space in which everyone's objective is the same—to learn, to grow and to find out information. They are places where we rub shoulders with one another and identify our sameness, not our differences, and that we are part of the same community. They are places where we break down some of those barriers that can occur in diverse communities, and ensure that people know one another in some way. Often, activities happen on a regular basis, such as reading groups that parents turn up to with their kids or elderly people accessing the facilities.

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I notice also in the letters to the editor of *The West Australian* that Sue Hutley, the executive director of the Australian Library and Information Association, wrote about ALIA's despondency and disappointment at the 40 per cent reduction in funding for public library resources. She talked about the economic benefits of investment in libraries. It seems logical and makes sense—the Smith versus Jones logic—that libraries would offer that benefit, given what we all know and how we have all had different exposure to and experiences in libraries. Sue Hutley's letter refers to a report that reads —

Investment in libraries generates economic as well as social, cultural and environmental benefits. ALIA supports a recent Australian library report which found that for each dollar spent on public libraries, \$4.24 of economic benefit is generated

If we are looking at a dollar spent on a library, we can multiply that by almost five times to see the economic benefit to be gained from it. Libraries are an extremely important aspect of our community for the benefit they bring certainly in the areas I represent in Mirrabooka, which has a large culturally and linguistically diverse community. The capacity to access the library is very important. The City of Stirling uses the library on a regular basis to run various programs. I was lucky enough to be involved in one of those when it ran photographic workshops for a number of young culturally and linguistically diverse students during the school holidays. The children were taken out to take photographs and they were then able to develop and process them. Obviously the development process is electronic so it was done on computers. Through the library they were able to do the work that goes with the production, design and enhancement of photographs to a technical quality that reflects, I suppose, professional development. They have used the library on other occasions for other programs that they have run. It is interesting that libraries are acting almost as outreach into the community and the community is coming into the library for those programs. Again, it is that community hub aspect. There is also the home library service. The member for Willagee ran through a very concise list of the things that libraries provide to the community. One service that I commend is the book club service. Having been a member of a book club for 20 years, our book club members get the 10 books we need to read in various ways. With this job I am finding it more and more difficult to find the time to read. The discipline of having to read for book club is good, but the discipline of knowing I have to read it for book club and get the book back to the library in the due time is an even better discipline.

I did a search on one of the issues that I wanted to raise—as we all do now with the wonders of the internet—which is librarians and libraries being an important aspect in gender equity in our community, in particular pay equity in our community. The librarians case came after a large and very detailed investigation into pay equity in New South Wales, and, from that, the Public Service Association ran the librarians case in the New South Wales Industrial Commission. That case stated that all these people are out in our community working in all these roles; if we compared apples with apples—that is, librarians work, responsibilities, roles and decision-making responsibilities with public servants—we would discover that we are underpaying a whole bunch of people. Guess what? Those people are predominantly women, and that situation contributes to the pay gender gap in our community. It was interesting when I did my little search on the internet that I found an article by Dr Alan Bundy, the president of Friends of Libraries Australia titled “Sex, Lies and Politics: Public Library Funding Futures”. He states in the article —

“In *Libraries in Australia*’ Biskup —

Another author —

identifies gender and status as one of seven issues which have long continued to exercise the attention of the profession —

[Member's time extended.]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: To continue —

it is an issue which continues to affect the perception, valuation and funding of public libraries, at least as much as it still affects areas such as primary school education, child care, nursing and other caring and serving professions.

As stated pointedly a few years ago by a public librarian

Our council is run by old men who generally don't use the library themselves and whose thinking doesn't extend much beyond roads and rubbish. The never seem to have problems in finding large amounts for a new grader but ask them for a small amount to benefit the whole community through the library, if it is given at all it will be with a patronising comment ‘you've done very well this year but don't expect any more next year’. They just don't seem to

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realise what a community uproar there would be if the library closed, or that it's the most heavily used council service they provide.

It is really important to reflect upon that. If we think about libraries and their users, it would be really interesting to look at the gender make-up of users. I think that would be really fascinating. Does that mean that we are happy to have a big argument about whether we will fund a football stadium, but we do not have the same argument—unless they really attack library funding—about the proper funding that we need for one of our biggest community resources? Dr Bundy goes on to say —

There are other factors which public libraries need to recognise in the quest for funding, and do something about if they can.

I thought this was a really good and interesting aspect to consider how we look at libraries. He says that expectations of people about their libraries are often too low, and that this is because of an unawareness about what they should provide and what they do provide. We need to work at increasing the public's expectation of what should be provided through libraries and how that should be funded.

Dr Bundy says that few people in the community know how cheaply run their libraries are and how their funding is determined, and if they knew what their libraries were receiving, people would say they are a priority. As all members know, when we talk to our constituents, we get the classic line: "I don't mind paying taxes if it is going to health or education, but I really hate it if it is going to weapons." It is something like that! This is another thing. I am sure that if we raised that debate in the community, we would find that libraries are one of the areas that are most important to people. I think that is what this debate has demonstrated. Dr Bundy continues —

- it can be difficult to persuade library users, a majority of whom are female, to ask for more and to complain about poor hours, services, buildings, facilities and resources.

Dr Bundy states that they need to know that access to a good public library service in the twenty-first century is their right. It is not a privilege; it is their right in our community! He says that we need to realise that library users are its owners; they are not the customers. They should not have to be grateful. They own it. It is their public resource and they should be asking for it to be funded properly and to be delivered to them in the way they need. Dr Bundy also says that there is a bit of a problem with librarians. He chastises them by saying they have to stop having a poverty mentality or a hair-shirt mentality or a philanthropic view, "I'm here for the community." Librarians need to stand up and say, "This is not good enough!" I think both our community and librarians have done that in the face of the proposed cuts.

I welcome the opportunity that the Minister for Culture and the Arts has given us to be able to raise this important community issue. I welcome the hastily convened cabinet meeting that resulted in a press release today announcing that funding will be provided in the next few years. It would be nice if the government reinstated the funding that was cut in the past financial year. I welcome that library funding will follow the consumer price index. However, I also question that decision, because the CPI is based on a basket of goods. Why not just take the relativities of increases in relevant areas such as books and the wage price index, which would have an impact on delivering services and ensuring good human resource services on the ground. However, CPI indexing is better than nothing.

I understand there is still call for more funding. There is a belief that more funding is needed. That is what I understand from reading the documentation from the Australian Library and Information Association. If nothing else, this debate has shown us that the community would welcome properly funding and fully resourcing our libraries to deliver the service they expect, want and need.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [5.58 pm]: There have been some excellent speeches tonight on this topic. There is no doubt that the issue of libraries is dear to the hearts of many. This gets to the essence of the love of knowledge and the love of learning. They are great gifts that we can give to our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews and to all in our community. How do we feed that love of learning? That is where we get to the issue of libraries. Libraries are a key component in feeding that love of knowledge and learning. There is no doubt that libraries have changed and evolved. They have made a very successful transition into the information age. While initially it could perhaps have been thought that a lot of the information that traditionally would have been accessed by the library could now be found on the internet, libraries have become an essential hub of learning in our community.

In my electorate of Gosnells, the City of Gosnells runs an outstanding library service. Through the debate on this motion, which I support, I have learnt just how meagre the funding supply is to our libraries in the City of Gosnells. When I see how small the funding supply is, I realise what an outstanding job they do. It should also be said that in this technological age the costs must be higher. Libraries have to supply and update books and make sure that new magazines, periodicals and newspapers are available. They also have to provide all that goes

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with the information age—DVDs, CDs and all the new technologies that are essential to learning in the twenty-first century. The new age of technology really is something that libraries have managed to make their own, and they have done it successfully by being hubs and gathering points for different community groups. The Knowledge Centre in Gosnells hosts an array of different groups. A group that I am particularly fond of and that I visit occasionally is a group of French speakers—community people who meet in the library to access the latest news from France via newspapers that are delivered to the library and to pursue their desire to improve their French language skills. That is just one example of a community group activity at the Knowledge Centre in Gosnells. The Thornlie Library is another excellent facility that provides all sorts of services. It is quite beautiful the way that the library is located quite close to a skate park; it is a hub of community activity where young people can enjoy the skate park and be exposed to the opportunity to learn in the library.

There is a lot of research to show that it is very important for children to see their parents reading; this is especially the case for young boys. If a young child, even as young as two or three, sees his father reading, the chances are that the boy will develop a love of reading at a very early age. Good literacy skills provide access to knowledge, and it is absolutely essential that we convey that passion for and love of learning, and the desire to read, to young people.

The international oil company Shell recognises this and has, through various programs, sought to help communities that are less advantaged by promoting the idea that parents must help their children with reading, and that they must read to their children to convey the pleasure that one can gain from quietly sitting down to read a book, magazine or even a newspaper. Shell has worked with the Smith Family and others and it really has been an enormously successful program; I think the company is to be commended for that. However, we cannot leave support for this aspect of libraries to the corporate sector; it is at the core of government work. Our state government has responsibility for making sure that every citizen has the opportunity to access learning, and for that reason I am relieved that the minister has changed his position on the funding of libraries. Only a few days ago it looked as though we were heading towards a serious funding cut. We had gone from \$10.8 million down to \$7.9 million in the current financial year, and the future was looking pretty bleak but, fortunately, the minister has listened to the community's voice on this issue. The rallying of community support for libraries was very impressive.

There is so much evidence from around the world to support the view that libraries are an integral part of the way in which communities increase knowledge levels. As has already been said, libraries are among the most visited community cultural centres, not only in Australia but also in other countries. When I was living overseas, libraries were essential places for me to go to learn and keep in touch. I was quite amazed to learn that in a country like France, where there are so many places of international cultural renown, where people might go to see art, libraries were still the most visited cultural centres. While I was in France I used the free language laboratory services in the French library system. I was able to sit down and record the way I was pronouncing words and then hear the way a native speaker would pronounce them, and perfected my language skills in that way. We need to ensure that our libraries have the resources to be able to deliver those sorts of language laboratory facilities, just as they do in France and other European countries, because the accessibility of libraries in those countries is outstanding. There are many other places where people can go to learn—technical and further education colleges and other private education institutions—but libraries are remarkably accessible for all.

As I have said, I am relieved to hear about the minister's change of heart. I am delighted to support the member for Perth's motion. However, I think we should take this debate as an opportunity to realise that the present level of funding for libraries is simply a starting point. It is something that we need to enhance many times over so that we can help Australia progress towards being a country that has a thirst for knowledge, a love of knowledge and a love of learning, and that we nourish those essential things through frequent visits to libraries. Libraries are absolutely essential hubs within our communities.

DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton) [6.07 pm]: I would like to add a little to this debate. I guess the theme of the debate is funding cuts to libraries; but the real theme is: "What cuts?" We have heard a succession of set speeches about the importance of libraries and most of them have been delivered with passion and in detail and, I might add, with a great deal of accuracy. Anybody who has raised children, has conducted research or is involved in the community will know the importance of libraries. When I say that libraries are important, something my daughter would say would be, "Dad, duh! Of course they are." They are one of the core aspects of government. What are we debating? Why would anybody cut services at libraries? We have heard members of the Labor Party speak passionately and, I think, honestly in support of library services. However, passion and support does not mean much without the government providing financial support. That is what we are dealing with here.

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When in government the Labor Party, despite having \$2 billion surpluses, was unable to adequately fund libraries on a long-term basis. Some of the people opposite who spoke so passionately in favour of libraries were not in this house at the time, but their party was and it was in government. Look at their track record: what did they do? If we look at the library service overall, the government provides a number of things including the State Library of Western Australia, internet facilities and other services. It also provides every year to local governments an agreed amount that is allocated and determined by the Western Australian Local Government Association, for the purchase of library books and other facilities. That baseload has been stuck at \$6.5 million for a number of years; it has not been increased regularly. I am sure people opposite talked to librarians, who would passionately say they need predictability. Books are an asset and they become due; they wear out. In particular, children's books wear out very quickly—in about 18 months or so. Older reference books become dated and other books have a life of about three to five years. Therefore, there is an issue of ongoing funding for books. As people opposite passionately said, these things go up in price. There is a variety of other services—big print, internet, and other things—that libraries have to provide; they always have to purchase them.

If members on the Labor side are so passionate about libraries, why did they not give them the money? Funding was stuck at \$6.5 million for three to four years. Right before the election, when this issue started coming up—remember the previous government had a \$2 billion surplus going into that election—admittedly, it did give local libraries a supplementary sum of \$4.4 million for the purchase of books, and the libraries were pleased with it. It was nothing new; it was a pre-election amount. The libraries were pleased and they used it. Where did the previous government get the money from? It stole it from the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Why would a government that is interested in arts, culture and libraries and which has a \$2 billion surplus take the money from a trust fund for the symphony orchestra? That money was set aside to purchase and build a practice facility for the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. What kind of brain-dead government was this? Again, this was not a cash-poor government; that government had a \$2 billion surplus. Did the previous government tell the libraries that is where the money came from? No. When I did, the librarians were absolutely shocked because librarians like libraries and they also like other cultural facilities and they know that the symphony orchestra is as important as libraries. Of course, we do not need as many of them, but symphony orchestras are as culturally and educationally important as libraries. The librarians were shocked. I went around my libraries and told the librarians to ask the Labor Party why it did not fund libraries. Why did the previous government take the money from WASO? Why? When we look at the forward estimates we must remember to judge people by what they do, not by what they say. Judge politicians in particular not by passion, caring and being able to read set scripts, but by what they did when they had the reins of government and the budget. What did they do? They stole money from WASO right before the election, and what did they put in the forward estimates?

Mr D.A. Templeman: It is all economic rationalists like you —

Dr M.D. NAHAN: The Baldrick of the Labor Party over there comes up with another bright idea. We goofed up in government but Baldrick over there, the member for Mandurah, was in cabinet —

Several members interjected.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: What did the member for Mandurah say about —

Mr D.A. Templeman: I'll take that as a term of endearment! Thank you very much.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Is that a good idea?

Mr D.A. Templeman: I could give you a bit of history about what he does.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: What did the member for Mandurah say in cabinet when he failed to provide funding for libraries? What did he say? What did he say in cabinet when cabinet decided not to fund long-term libraries and to take the money from WASO?

Mr D.A. Templeman: I'll tell you what we didn't do is hold a secret or an emergency cabinet meeting to reverse a decision!

Dr M.D. NAHAN: What the previous government did was it took the money from WASO —

Mr J.N. Hyde: Did not!

Dr M.D. NAHAN: You did!

Mr J.N. Hyde: No! Prove it! You can't! This is Liberal sludge!

Mr D.A. Templeman: You're up to your neck in it, member for Riverton!

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Mr Chris Tallentire; Dr Mike Nahan; Acting Speaker; Mr John Day

Dr M.D. NAHAN: No I am not! The member for Perth is up to his neck in it. He is the shadow minister. He swans around all the arts groups—"Look at me! I love you, I love you!" Delivery: nothing. When it counts, the member does not deliver.

Mr J.N. Hyde: I look at \$4 million today that you cut!

Dr M.D. NAHAN: What did we do? The main theme of this debate is funding cuts—what funding cuts?

Several members interjected.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I went to my library today —

Mr D.A. Templeman: I bet it was the first time you've been there!

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Pardon me? You must be joking!

Mr D.A. Templeman: No, I reckon it would be. They do not know who you are at your library.

Mr J.H.D. Day: They certainly did know who he was, I can assure you of that.

Ms J.M. Freeman: Obviously, it was a press conference then with him at his library—is that right? So you went with him, minister?

Several members interjected.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: My local libraries know me; I assure members opposite they know me better than their libraries know them, but that is to be judged by others.

However, what is the issue here? Are there funding cuts? None —

Mr D.A. Templeman: What about these librarians from the Riverton Library who said, "Don't cut my library. I vote for my library"? Now I know why there was a secret cabinet meeting this morning.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: There was not a secret cabinet —

Mr D.A. Templeman: Because they were fearful of the member for Riverton losing his seat over the libraries! The librarians in this photo I'm holding are the ones who deserve credit for bringing this back into the Parliament—Amy Ho, Elise Dowey, Annette Buchanan and Judi Wilmott. They are the champions! They are the people's poets! Congratulations to them.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Is there a Speaker in the house?

Mr J.N. Hyde interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): Member, if you want to encourage people —

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I was not.

Mr D.A. Templeman: He called me Baldrick!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me, I call you to order for the first time, member for Riverton. You do not ask the Speaker whether there is a Speaker in the house. I call you to order for the second time and if you disregard the Chair then I will throw you out.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I asked the Speaker to give me some assistance so I can speak.

The ACTING SPEAKER: You encouraged these people on the other side of the house; you cannot have it both ways. You challenged the member for Mandurah, you called him names, and I let it go. If you cannot take it, sit down.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: The librarians at Riverton Library were very concerned, as they would be. They were informed by a variety of people, including the Western Australian Local Government Association, that there were drastic cuts, and they were justifiably concerned about those cuts, as I was and as were all people around me. No-one cares more about the libraries than the Liberal Party.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Dr M.D. NAHAN: We will be judged by our actions rather than our words. Members opposite were hoping that we would cut them, they told people that we would cut them; they went around and got petitions going and told the librarians that there will be drastic cuts and said, "We're your heroes." When the librarians found out that the previous government did not provide long-term funding for it, which they knew about, and that it did give them a

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pre-election sweetener by taking money from WASO, they knew what members opposite were on about. So what did we do? What did the minister do? The minister went out and in the budget context and for the first time not only substantially increased the allocation for library services' purchase of books, but also indexed it and put it into a long-term commitment. That is something the librarians had been arguing for for years. Do members opposite know what? The librarians will be overwhelmingly pleased with the initiative. We will willingly rest on our record against that of the previous government.

The government has also decided to fix up another Labor mess and replace the \$4.4 million stolen by the previous cash-rich Labor government and put it into WASO. It has actually found the money for not only the libraries but also the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. The Labor government took money from WASO and put it into the libraries. This government has not made any cuts to funding, but in real terms it has not only increased the funding but also indexed it. It will go to the forward estimates, which is something Labor did not do. It also found the money for WASO to find a future home.

Mr J.N. Hyde: Where is the money being spent?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: It is in a trust fund. Is that too complicated for the member for Perth?

What is the essence of the debate? Firstly, on funding cuts, there are none. Who supports libraries? Not those people who pontificate on the benefit of libraries. That is easy. What counts is the money that is put forward when it is needed and the Liberal Party has delivered to libraries and the libraries will be overwhelmingly appreciative.

My local library has a campaign to support libraries. I am very confident that the many people who attend the Riverton Library would be told by the librarian that they have the required funding. Those people will vote at the next election, and they will vote for us. I thank the opposition for its efforts.

MR J.H.D. DAY (Kalamunda — Minister for Culture and the Arts) [6.21 pm]: I welcome the debate in this house on libraries. Libraries are very important in our community. I said in question time that I very much enjoy using public libraries and the library at Parliament House, which is the best part of this building. The government certainly wants to ensure that public libraries in Western Australia are properly and sustainably funded into the future. As I said in question time, that is exactly the decision that has been made by this government.

The future of public libraries in Western Australia has never been under threat. The issue has been about the amount of funding that will be provided on an annual basis for the purchase of new materials. The question has been whether that funding would remain at the \$6.5 million base funding, which was in the forward estimates, including from the previous government.

If the opposition thought this issue mattered, as the member for Riverton said, why did it not do better when it was in government when it had consecutive \$2 billion-plus surpluses? The question is whether the level of funding for public libraries should remain at that amount or be at the higher amount that I announced today, which for 2010–11 for public libraries, excluding the State Library of Western Australia, will be \$9.307 million. That will make a total of \$10.949 million, if we add in the \$1.642 million for the State Library. As the member for Riverton said, the government has also made the decision to index the increases according to the consumer price index, as determined by Treasury, so that the amount will increase to well above \$11 million over the following three years. That is what the debate has been about. In reality, this debate has not been about the future of public libraries, which play an important role in the community, as members on both sides have said, and I totally agree with them.

The debate that the opposition has been pursuing in relation to a perceived 40 per cent cut is based on an artificially increased amount of funding that was allocated two years ago. I made it clear in question time, and the member for Riverton just referred to it in an erudite manner, that the additional amount of funding of \$4.4 million, which was provided in addition to the base funding of \$6.5 million two years ago by the previous government, was not new funding in the culture and arts budget. It was taken out of the \$8 million allocation that was made to assist with the relocation and building of rehearsal studios and finding an appropriate home for the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. It was taken out of that allocation and the public was not told about that. WASO was not told about that. The hard reality is that in this budget development process this government has had to make an allocation of \$4.4 million to return the total funding to WASO to \$8 million to assist with that particular project. It has been a discretionary decision by this government to correct the problem that was caused by the Labor government two years ago. WASO is in the same position as it was previously and now that project can, I hope, be completed in a timely way, given that it has been on the agenda for far too many years and was never brought to a conclusion under the previous government. I do not criticise the previous government for that specifically, but the reality is that it has not been concluded.

Mr P. Papalia: Do you think Geoff Hutchison will believe you?

Extract from Hansard
[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 21 April 2010]
p1970b-1986a

Mr John Hyde; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Watson; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Peter Tinley; Ms Janine Freeman;
Mr Chris Tallentire; Dr Mike Nahan; Acting Speaker; Mr John Day

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I am telling the truth. I know what has been involved in the budget decision-making process under this government over the past several months. I know what I have been advised by the professional public service.

The Labor Party obviously does not like it because the truth has finally been revealed. This government is fixing up WASO's problem that was caused by the previous government and it will ensure that there is an appropriate level of funding for library materials in this state. For the first time in this state's history, certainly in recent years, there will be an indexation so that there will be continuing increases in the allocation for library materials over the forward estimates and into the future. It was not done under the previous government. It had completely ad hoc arrangements in place.

Mr J.N. Hyde: Rubbish! You know it was a framework agreement.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: The member knows that ad hoc arrangements were in place under the previous government. In some years there was an increase and in other years there was no increase. My recollection is that an artificially high amount was provided two years ago from the source I referred to. In short, it was a dog's breakfast. For the first time there will be predictability and certainty and continuing increases so that the many people across the state who use public libraries will have access to an increased amount of materials over and above what would otherwise have been the case under the previous government's forward estimates.

The content of this motion to condemn this government certainly should be resisted. When the facts are understood and considered, there is no reasonable basis for it. We oppose the motion.

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (23)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr M. McGowan	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr A.J. Waddell
Mr R.H. Cook	Mrs C.A. Martin	Mr E.S. Ripper	Mr P.B. Watson
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr M.P. Murray	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr J.N. Hyde	Mr A.P. O'Gorman	Mr T.G. Stephens	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr P. Papalia	Mr C.J. Tallentire	Mr D.A. Templeman (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr F.M. Logan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr P.C. Tinley	

Noes (27)

Mr P. Abetz	Mr V.A. Catania	Mr A.P. Jacob	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr F.A. Alban	Dr E. Constable	Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr A.J. Simpson
Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr M.J. Cowper	Mr A. Krsticevic	Mr M.W. Sutherland
Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr J.J.M. Bowler	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr P.T. Miles	Dr J.M. Woollard
Mr T.R. Buswell	Dr K.D. Hames	Ms A.R. Mitchell	Mr J.E. McGrath (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Mrs L.M. Harvey	Dr M.D. Nahan	

Pairs

Ms R. Saffioti	Mr I.M. Britza
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr C.C. Porter
Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan	Mr J.M. Francis

Question thus negatived.

House adjourned at 6.32 pm
