

**CRIME AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

*Motion*

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Cook Labor Government for overseeing a crime and community violence crisis that continues to spiral out of control, with violent crime at record highs and Western Australians at their wits' end, exhausted by the escalating cycle of crime in their communities.

This scenario has played out time and time again in Western Australia. It has become all too familiar to see pictures of communities in disarray and of shocking crime within Western Australia, and a failure by this Labor government to address this rising crime and violence across our community. Violent crime deserves to be condemned. Violent crime is at record highs and leaving Western Australians feeling vulnerable and exhausted in their own communities. Surely, the government's primary concern must be for the public safety of its citizens. Its citizens are its responsibility and this government seems to be unable to fill that basic obligation to ensure public safety. Again, we see denial. The former Premier denied that the state was responsible. In February last year, he claimed that the state was not a parent and that others had the responsibility, but, clearly, the state is obligated to put in place measures to ensure community safety and a plan to address the crime issues right across our community. As recently as 8 February, the current Premier claimed in the news that Perth "does not have a youth crime problem" and he blamed the media for the disregard of safety. The Premier has said that it is not that the community is feeling threatened, that there is violence or crime, but that it is the media that is reporting it. I happen to agree with him that the filming of violent crime is an issue, but it needs to be addressed by the government. The government has to take responsibility for it.

The Western Australian Police Union, in response to the Premier's comments on 8 February, stated that it has —

... denounced remarks made by Premier Roger Cook today regarding youth crime. Premier Cook emphasises the importance of police presence on the streets for enhanced protection, however, this assertion is flawed, as police are already actively patrolling and are themselves impacted by youth crime.

The police are saying that they are at their wits' end. The level of offending by 10 to 14-year-olds has increased, as has the level of that violence. The police union president said —

"I disagree with Premier Cook's assertion that Perth does not have a youth crime issue.

The police, who the Minister for Police says he supports, are at odds with what the Premier is saying. The police have said that they are at their wits' end. The Premier is saying there is nothing to see. We know that police recruitment and retention is in crisis. Despite all the promises we have heard to bolster those numbers and all the publicity and announcements, last year more police resigned than were recruited in Western Australia. This is ongoing and the lack of morale is leading to the exodus of experienced police officers. I am pleased that other people are coming into the police service, but if we lose those experienced officers, we lose the leadership of the organisation, and the effectiveness of the organisation must surely suffer as a result.

The findings of the *WA public sector census 2023* painted a grim picture of police morale with only 47 per cent of officers recommending the force as a place to work. That is a crisis of confidence. That is indicative of a government that has failed to recognise and take on the issue. It failed to accept that there is a need to make an impact upon the surging crime rate and antisocial behaviour, and the incidence of non-family and family-related violence and assaults that has spiked, particularly in regional areas where it is hard to fill police jobs.

I will look at the statistics on some of these matters since this government took office. In 2017–18, in regional Western Australia, there were 14 537 offences against the person. These are things like homicide, sexual offences, assault, threatening behaviour, deprivation of liberty and robbery. In 2022–23, the same statistics for regional WA stood at 24 672 offences against the person, a 69.64 per cent—nearly 70 per cent—increase in violent crime in regional Western Australia since Labor came to power. In 2017–18, in the metropolitan area, there were 29 476 offences against the person, and last year, there were 37 691. That is, again, a steep 27.8 per cent increase in violent crime in the metropolitan area since the Labor government came into power. They are the official statistics that are collected by the Western Australia Police Force, so I have no doubt that those statistics are correct.

The situation across the state is getting out of control. When the Labor government has a problem with violence in the community, I find it ironic that it actively recruits cage fighting-type events, and I know that some of the ministers here have been involved in this sort of thing. When the Premier and the Minister for Tourism are all saying that this is a wonderful thing, does the government not think that that is signalling to the community that sometimes violence is okay? I find it perverse that the government comes in here and talks about its effort to control violence, yet it stages cage fighting events.

Several members interjected.

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Paul Papalia; Ms Sabine Winton; Mr John Quigley

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**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It stages cage fighting events. I think it is actually —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition!

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

*Point of Order*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I literally cannot hear the Leader of the Opposition over the interjection of two ministers in the chamber.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday):** I cannot hear him either. This is not a point of order. Leader of the Opposition, are you taking interjections?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I appear to have no choice.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** No, I can manage them.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Thank you. I would like them to be quiet and then they can make their contribution.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Ministers, if you could please desist. Go ahead, Leader of the Opposition.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We know what members opposite think about it. They think that that stylised violence is okay, but what signal is that sending to the community? I think the government needs to step back from that and look at what it says to young people who are being exposed to that sort of thing. Mixed martial arts is stylised, and it is contained within the area, but, by goodness, it is pretty full on. I would not like to be in the ring with one of those fighters. I think the violence is quite real, and it signals something to the community. It concerns me. I do not consider myself a wowser. As a kid I used to sneak in under the tarp and watch the boxing tent at work and watch the locals be beaten up by the professional boxers, but that was then. We do not do things now as we did in the 1960s and 1970s. Time has moved on. It worries me that this government seems to think that it is appropriate to promote those types of things. It is not some sports promoter bringing in the fighters; it is the government making it happen. I have serious concerns about that. I know the ministers are all scribbling away and they will come back with statistics about the dollars that event might bring in, but I do not know; I think it might help lead to a general view in the community that violence is okay.

Violence feeds violence, and when a community loses control it is very difficult for it to get out of that cycle. We have seen that with the instigation of the Operation Regional Shield measures that initially went into the Kimberley to attempt to bring under control some of those areas, and has since been deployed in other regional areas. From talking to people in those regional areas—the Kimberley, Kalgoorlie—I know the common thing now is that young people steal vehicles, do burnouts and maybe other things with the cars and eventually burn them out, and they like to film all this and put it on TikTok. I would like to minister to explain to me whether he has had any communication at the federal level about something being done about those platforms carrying the violence and spreading it so that kids in Townsville can watch kids in Alice Springs and Broome burning cars and compete with each other. It seems that that is outside the state government’s responsibility—it is the communications portfolio—but it is part of the state government’s responsibility to take whatever action it can to quell the violence, and if that means talking to the federal government about restrictions on the type of things those platforms show and allow to happen so they are held to account, that needs to happen.

We do not allow some measures seen to be promoting hatred in the community. A whole range of things are no-go areas in discussion and communications under the laws of any civilised country. Filming violent crime and competing with other people in the country over the level of that crime is an obvious failure of governments at all levels to get things under control. I am not blaming the state government for that, but it is a discussion that needs to be had. It is a discussion the government needs to have and take some responsibility for.

This government has a long and complicated history with its failure in youth justice. The inability for there to be proper rehabilitation and support of young people before they get into a cycle of crime and into Banksia Hill and unit 18 is a problem this government has failed dismally in addressing. That failure was finally recognised by the incoming Premier when he promoted—I suppose it is, rather, a shift sideways—or put the Minister for Police in charge of those matters and relieved the former minister of that responsibility. But, really, we have not seen anything of consequence since that has helped the situation. People in the Kimberley, for instance, may be better suited to being given some sort of on-country help so they do not come down to the university of crime in Perth but stay on their own lands with their own mob and get support there rather than getting into that downward cycle.

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There was a promise to begin doing that in the Kimberley in 2017. When the Labor government came in, that was an election promise. An announcement that was made, I think as recently as 13 March, by the Minister for Regional Development said that an on-country facility would be developed in the Kimberley. It is another announcement, but, according to that announcement, it will not be in place until the second half of next year. Hang on, that would be the third term of the Parliament by then —

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** No, it is the Parliament. This is the second term. The Labor Party has two terms of government, then we will have another term, so that will be the third term of the Parliament that will open. As shadow Minister for Regional Development, I look forward to being there to open the facility. When this government came in in 2017, it had a lovely time opening all the things that we had initiated through our government in our time. This government always carries on about the Skywalk in Kalbarri. Guess who got that going—it was not the Labor government.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Another good royalties for regions project.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes, it was another good royalties for regions program. The Labor government tarnished the name of the program but accepts all the baubles and glory of the very fine projects that the coalition government initiated. I am sad to say that as a member of Parliament I have had probably had fewer openings of things like that with a plaque on the wall than I would have liked. Most of them have the name of Hon Darren West as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Regional Development written on them. They are projects that the Labor government never funded or supported but that it ended up being able to open. Anyway, we digress.

We will get back to crime, because the government's record on crime —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I never got much practice.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members, thank you. Leader of the Opposition, if you could direct your comments through the chair and not at them, you would probably get less reaction.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Certainly, I will direct my comments through the chair.

This government makes all this noise about wanting to solve the issues of all the crime and violence we see, but time and again it denies that there is a problem.

Again, today in the Parliament questions were asked about the consumption of methamphetamine in Western Australia. We know that Western Australia has the highest level of meth consumption in the entire country.

**Mr P. Papalia:** It does not; you are wrong.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It does; the report today shows that. There has been a 23 per cent increase—more than any other state.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister for Police!

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister, thank you!

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister! Sorry, Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The minister will have the opportunity to correct the record, but I have the original source of the information, so we will see who was right and who was wrong in the end. There has also been an increase in meth consumption in Western Australia's regional areas over the last two years, so the problem is getting worse. It is not a problem that is getting better; it is getting worse. For some time, my daughter was a dental nurse in a community in the regional areas and, honestly, seeing 19 and 20-year-olds having all of their teeth removed is shocking. Sadly, in many communities I represent meth is out of control, and I say that without any shadow of doubt. I am told that by the residents. I know the police do their best but the situation is real and problematic, and it will not be solved by a government that sits around and says there is not a problem. There is a problem; we know there is a problem. We see the problem. We know there are points where drugs are dropped off. The local people know it. How come it keeps going on? I fear that if the government denies there is a problem, there is no pressure applied to the problem.

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I wonder whether that is why the problem is continuing at such shockingly high levels in Western Australia. The meth crisis in those places is the worst of anywhere in the state. We know some of the stories about why that was: the drug comes out of the system more quickly than other drugs, and people who had access to cash and had jobs for which they had to be drug tested regularly may have used the drugs recreationally and then were able to go back to work, whereas using some other forms of illicit substances or even alcohol would result in them not being able to go to work. I think that accounts quite a bit for why Western Australia took off in that way. We know that is a problem. Do not deny it is a problem; it is a problem. The government needs to act to address the problem instead of sticking its head in the sand like some latter-day ostrich and denying that there is a problem.

As the member for Roe highlighted, we know that there is concern in the school system. We know that even at school, people are not safe because students are bringing in knives and parents are threatening the teachers when they have a problem with their child's behaviour. The frequency of these incidents is growing all the time. The government cannot continue to deny that crime and violence across Western Australia is not becoming uglier and uglier.

A few weeks ago, I went out to Kalgoorlie—I think the Minister for Police went out a week or so after me—after the big power failure and all the trouble out there. I went out there thinking I would be talking about power and communications but found that everyone wanted to talk about the crime situation. Indeed, the day I was out there, at eight o'clock in the morning, there was a big incident with 50 or 60 people involved in a confrontation on the main street of Kalgoorlie, which had to be dealt with by the police. That situation was pretty confronting. I spoke to the business owners in Kalgoorlie and Boulder, which is not any less affected, and people have just given up expecting the police to be able to control it because it has become too much. The minister did go out there, and I acknowledge that Operation Regional Shield was extended to Kalgoorlie, but this had been going on not for a week or two weeks but months. People were not being listened to and businesses were feeling unsafe in their workplaces. This government talks about introducing measures such as the legislation to increase penalties for assaults on retail workers, which is good. I do not have a problem with people feeling safe in their workplace. But I wonder: why cannot everybody feel safe in their workplace? The people walking to the shop should also feel safe, not just the people working in the shop. When I talk to people on the streets, they say they feel unsafe as well.

The statistics that have been quoted from time to time are a bit misleading. At one stage, the Premier was saying that the number of cars that had been stolen had diminished. It is a bit more difficult to steal cars, generally, than was once the case, but in many regional areas, it certainly has not diminished; it has spiked. What happens is often people break into the house and steal the keys. If the car has an effective anti-theft mechanism, they just break into the house and get the car that way, so there is no safety, really, in having a high-tech car because often the thieves will simply just break into the house and perhaps that is even more dangerous for the individual, rather than if the thieves just jumped in the 1974 Ford Falcon and started it and went off, but that is often not what happens.

People are also reporting that their community is being well represented in the press or on some of the websites where people discuss where they should go. Grey nomads, for instance, are well known for having those types of sites where they discuss where is a good place to stop, where to get a free cup of tea or where is a good campsite and that type of thing. Some towns where the violence has increased have been put on those sites such that it is putting people off going there. I am not going to name them because I do not want to tarnish any community's reputation. I would encourage all people to get out to regional WA especially and have a look because there are many good things to see right across our state. However, for the safety of the people within those communities, it is time that the government started to take seriously the concerns that people bring.

As I say, the Premier does not take it seriously and denies that there is a youth crime problem. The previous Premier denied that the state had a responsibility towards solving those issues and that it was all down to the families in those regional communities. If these are the types of views of a government, we will never see solutions put in place. People are calling for solutions to be put in place. I notice the Minister for Police is here and also the Attorney General, who has some influence over the justice situation. I would like to see them outline how they are going to address that in new and innovative ways, because we know that what they have been doing until now has led to a worse situation. There are high levels of crime. There is huge uncertainty in communities about their safety. Communities are finding it hard to find staff for nursing, teaching and even policing positions because people do not feel safe there. We need to ensure the safety of our communities. That is the primary responsibility of any government. In Western Australia we have a Labor government that seems to believe it does not have that responsibility. It seems to think that somehow the community has that responsibility and it does not.

The government talked about putting in place solutions seven years ago, but it has still not delivered them, despite the fact that it has had huge budget surpluses gifted to it by the unexpectedly high mining royalties from iron ore being consistently above what Treasury felt was a realistic expectation. As a result, there has been no shortage of money. It has nothing to do with, as we hear from the government all the time, the budget surplus that the government has delivered. The government did not deliver it; the mining companies, employers, workers and everybody who

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contributes to taxation delivered it. The former coalition government in Canberra delivered it by fixing the GST problem, despite the nonsense we hear in this place around that issue. We know that despite all that largesse and all the money in the government's coffers, it has not been able to get on top of youth crime, youth justice and meth and other drugs, and violence keeps escalating across the community.

The government puts measures in place from time to time such as Operation Regional Shield, the no-go areas in Northbridge et cetera, but all those are just bandaids applied to little cuts that have manifested on the body of the Western Australian state. The government is not actually treating the disease that is, I think, a growing lack of respect for our police from across the community. The government has withdrawn from many of the regional centres the support staff and the decision-makers who can actually make a difference in the community. This government has consistently done that, and we have seen that lack of local empowerment play out, and then we see Premiers going out and blaming the people in those communities.

When the federal Labor government came to power, it made an ideologically driven decision to end the cashless debit card, claiming that there was no measurable benefit from it. Following its withdrawal, there was certainly a measurable loss. There was a loss of certainty that children would have food on the table. There was a loss for some elderly people, who were prevailed upon to provide cash to other people to use for drugs or alcohol. That was what that program was all about—to ensure that very vulnerable people got the resources that taxpayers were providing for them and that those resources would not be taken and used by others for drugs, alcohol, gambling and what have you. That was the basis of it. For the life of me, I cannot understand how any political party could say that that was anything but a well-intentioned program that was delivering benefits for the community, yet Labor, at both the state and federal levels—at the state level it denies that there is an issue or a problem—actively conspires to make the problem worse.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [4.30 pm]: I also look forward to contributing to today's motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition —

That this house condemns the Cook Labor government for overseeing a crime and community violence crisis that continues to spiral out of control, with violent crime at record highs and Western Australians at their wits' end, exhausted by the escalating cycle of crime in their communities.

I think that sums it up pretty well. We can look at the pattern that we have seen during the week, including during the matter of public interest debate yesterday on police numbers when the Minister for Police admitted that he has not been able to get the resources happening that he would have liked. There are a few examples that I would like to focus on today. I want to focus on the community violence part of this motion, which is a flow-on effect from issues in our school system, such as school violence. My worry is that we will lose teachers from the workforce. That will be a flow-on effect of behavioural problems in our schools and the intimidation and challenges felt by teachers, principals and other school officers. I know that there are challenges for the Minister for Education, the director general and the like, but our schoolteachers are crying out for help. The government needs to recognise that. That is why I asked the Premier a question today about school violence and what he is doing to support our teachers. He said, "Oh, we support our teachers", but that was all he gave me.

I will produce some figures—some members might find them tedious—that demonstrate the crime wave in our schools. Our teachers and principals are crying out for help. This is having an effect on our teacher workforce. That is the worry for me. In my question today to the Premier, I read a quote from a teacher, who earlier this week said that it is not that there is a teacher shortage but that there is a shortage of teachers who want to teach and who want to go to school each day. They do not want to go there. There are 830-odd public schools in the system and the director general has the challenge of putting out fires every day. That seems to be the issue. There needs to be a structured approach to supporting our teachers. We have a lot of students with a limited authority to teach who are out there teaching. They have challenges with behaviour management. How will the system deal with behaviour management and their inexperience? That is another challenge. The teacher shortage is perpetuating that scenario.

I want to go back briefly to the article in *The West Australian* of Thursday, 8 February 2024, in which Premier Roger Cook boldly claimed that Perth does not have a youth crime problem—an attitude that we also saw from him today. That claim was in response to sickening vision of an 11-year-old violently assaulting a 69-year-old man. I do not know what planet the Premier was on when he said that there is no youth crime problem. That attack came after several incidents involving teenagers over the past month, including two 15-year-old girls who were charged after allegedly bashing and stomping on a woman in Bayswater before stealing her car. As I said, I do not know what planet the Premier was on when he said that we do not have a youth crime problem, but I can assure him that a lot of this is emanating from the school system. It is absolutely essential that our staff—our teachers, education assistants and principals—receive support.

I will take up the issue that the Leader of the Opposition raised towards the end of his speech. I also brought up this issue in my contribution to the third reading debate on the liquor control bill and got yelled and shouted at. The

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former Minister for Racing and Gaming did not do the shouting; other members were shouting. I brought up the issue of the cashless debit card and the overuse of alcohol in the Kimberley and other regions in the state. I cannot believe that the federal Labor government took the line to ban the cashless debit card, basing that decision on talk about civil liberties. The federal minister spoke about someone having to go in and swap their underwear in a store and it was not quite right and it was not fair. What about the kids in the Kimberley, the Pilbara and the goldfields who want a meal on the table before they go to school? That is all they want; they want some breakfast. The cashless debit card was a way to get a meal on the table for some of those children who otherwise would not get it. It was very disappointing to hear the federal minister give that example when children up there need that support and need food on the table.

I am worried about the number of teachers who are prepared to walk away from their career due to rising violence in our schools. This government needs to focus, because what we are going to see, and are already seeing, is that the government will scramble to fix things. The Minister for Education comes in here in February every year and says, “We have a teacher in front of every class.” The government might get close to that by merging classes, bringing in relief teachers and all those things, but I can assure members that there is a serious issue. We have seen the figures, which I will quote. Teachers are losing the desire to teach because of the increasing violence in the community and their school communities. It is very interesting. A national survey undertaken by the University of Melbourne in 2020, prior to COVID, estimated that between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of teachers leave the profession within the first five years. I have certainly heard the figure of 25 per cent of graduates leaving within the first five years, but nothing like 30 to 50 per cent. Of course, we know that regional and remote schools in Western Australia are finding it very difficult to attract teachers. If this government continues to ignore violence issues within schools and refuses to step up with an effective plan, teacher numbers will continue to fall. That is pretty straightforward.

We have seen recent articles about the scenario that I put to the minister during question time today. We have seen the article in *The Sunday Times* by Bethany Hiatt, the education editor. Since the initial letter that she received from a teacher who was worried about being killed at the hands of a student, Bethany Hiatt has been inundated with similar stories from educators across the state. One of those was penned by a primary school teacher who said that she was prepared to walk away from her career due to the day-to-day horror that she witnessed. She revealed that she regularly dealt with children as young as five years of age who threw scissors and chairs, smashed windows and threatened to stab teachers and other students with pencils. Of course, earlier today, I referred to the year 2 student in a southern suburbs school who was caught with a knife a few weeks ago. This illustrates what our teachers are confronting every day. I think this quote sums up the education system better than any other quote I have seen in a long time: there is no shortage of teachers in WA; rather, there is a shortage of teachers who are willing to work in WA.

I will probably talk about this later, but the Teacher Registration Board seems to want to put up barriers and make it as difficult as possible for some of our semi-retired teachers, who have a lot of experience, to re-register. We have many relief teachers in the regions, but the Teacher Registration Board seems to want to make it as hard as it can for them to re-register. I find it quite bizarre that there are students with a limited authority to teach in the system. Some are in their third year of study, but now we are hearing about some who are in their second year of study. Those students have a limited authority to teach, yet the Teacher Registration Board is holding teachers with 25 or 30 years of experience out of the system and making their life as hard as possible. It is quite bizarre. I hope that the director general and the Minister for Education look at that. It is a source of teachers that could be tapped into, but they are not going to go with it because it is too hard. The Teacher Registration Board does not seem to want to ease up at all.

**Ms J.L. Hanns:** Are you saying that you don’t want people to stay current in their profession and maintain their professional development so that you can bring the most important aspects of your teaching into classrooms?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes, that is right; I know all that. I question it when there are second-year students with a limited authority to teach in the system. It is very concerning. That was a side issue.

Getting back to the teacher shortage that is gripping our state, I want to present some figures I have. It is interesting that an unusual survey was done by the Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association. It is unusual for a survey to be done unless there is an issue. Where there is smoke, there is fire. I want to refer to some of the figures that came out of that survey, along with some of the figures that were extracted by Hon Donna Faragher in the Legislative Council. It was revealed that there were 2 275 incidents of assaults or threatening behaviour against public school staff, including teachers, and they were reported through the Department of Education’s online notification reporting system. In an ABC article in May 2022, the former education minister claimed that a rise in the number of reports of threats or violence to the department was due to its great work in getting principals to report more. The rise in the statistics was not about a rise in violence in schools; it was great because principals were reporting it more. It really does make me wonder. The 2022 figures tabled in Parliament revealed that reports of assaults or threats of violence in public schools had risen by 25 per cent over the previous five years. Principals

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and deputies said that they were targeted 1 400 times in the previous year, which was almost twice the number from five years earlier. Disturbingly, the number of incidents involving a weapon or physical object had nearly doubled from 661 to 1 060. Instead of being shocked, the former minister applauded her department for reporting better. To be honest, it is quite bizarre.

We then saw the 10-point plan “Let’s take a stand together” and the No Voice to Violence campaign, which we supported. The current education minister has launched his 10-point plan, which of course we also support. However, I worry about the resources that are going into supporting our teachers and students onsite. As we know, every student deserves to learn in a safe environment and every teacher deserves to teach in a safe environment. What extra resources are going into the system to get those students who cannot be managed out of the classroom so that the rest of the students and the teachers in the classroom are safe? Are the minister and the director general putting more resources towards student services? Are they increasing the number of behaviour management centres? There are certainly some in the metropolitan area, but I can assure members that there are no behaviour management centres out in the bush, so it is survival of the fittest at times in that regard.

[Member’s time extended.]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** This is what it is about. It is about getting those students out of the classroom and supporting teachers in the event that they have those types of students in their class. I can understand why teachers are leaving the profession. I can see the challenges that the administrators have in suspending students. I can see the arduous process that principals have to undergo to exclude students, with the requirement for masses of documentation and community panels. All this stuff is to protect the student who is doing the wrong thing and their family. What about the 95 per cent of students who are doing the right thing? Do not make it quite so hard.

There was an article in WAtoday on 29 November headed “‘They are not safe places’: Perth’s most violent schools revealed” by Holly Thompson and Rebecca Peppiatt that I thought was appropriate. It stated that there were 114 instances of students taking prohibited weapons to school in 2022.

It was reported that the president of the State School Teachers’ Union of WA, Matt Jarman, said —

... members were increasingly worried about their safety at work, and the union received hundreds of calls per month asking for help.

The union received 800 calls a month from members in the categories of violence. The article also stated —

The union’s report also revealed 86 per cent of teachers had considered leaving the profession in the past four years, up from 80 per cent two years ago.

Twenty-five per cent of graduates are looking to leave the profession within five years. Thirty-one per cent of teachers surveyed said they had been the victim of physical violence at least once this school year. The list goes on. As a result, the State School Teachers’ Union had to get Carmen Lawrence and her team to produce the report entitled *Facing the facts: A review of public education in Western Australia* that highlighted the challenges that our teachers and principals are up against. The section relating to antisocial behaviour and aggression towards staff states —

There appeared to be general agreement among teachers, school leaders and parents who provided evidence to the Panel that aggression in various forms, both between students and toward teachers, is on the rise.

...

Reports such as this have prompted the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership to develop a national strategy to address the abuse of teachers, school leaders and other school staff.

There are more figures. It continues —

The study showed that threats of violence from students towards principals has increased from 17% in 2011 to 32% in 2017. A 2019 survey of 560 teachers across Australia found that 71.4% of teachers who responded reported being bullied or harassed by a student in the previous 12 months.

I think the following quote from a primary school teacher in the city sums it up —

Teachers are expected to do everything (teach, counsel, protect, deal with social concerns, coach sports, dress-up for book week, and Easter etc) and be accountable for every word spoken, every event conducted or not conducted during school time and out of school time. If a student wrecks the room, attacks the staff, disrupts the learning of multiple students—often the parents are called in to take the child out for lunch, blames the teacher/school/staff and then the child returns to the school to the next day to repeat the process.”

That is the way our teachers are feeling. I think that quote sums up the situation very well.

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I congratulate the State School Teachers' Union for taking up the challenge. It obviously saw the need to commission Hon Carmen Lawrence, a former Premier, if you do not mind, and member of the Labor Party. The union asked her to report on the issues that it faces.

From my perspective, I think this government needs to address these issues. In this motion, we have linked community violence to the school violence issue. It is emanating at times. I congratulate our teachers, principals and education assistants, who, by the way, do not get paid anywhere near enough. I am sure the member for Collie–Preston would agree with me. Our education assistants definitely do some pretty hard yards at times. I would certainly like to see a government with \$3 billion, \$4 billion and \$5 billion surpluses reward our education assistants for some of the work they do, especially special needs students, and for some of the other challenges they face in classrooms, including violence at times. I understand that it is a challenge but this government has the resources. It needs to start to learn. I can come into this place next year or the year after and ask the Minister for Education whether a teacher is in front of every classroom. This is a real issue that is confronting us now. Our teachers are saying that they have had enough and they need more backup support. It is not good enough. This government needs to take a good hard look at itself. I will leave my contribution there.

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe)** [4.54 pm]: I rise to support the excellent motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition —

That this house condemns the Cook Labor government for overseeing a crime and community violence crisis that continues to spiral out of control, with violent crime at record highs and Western Australians at their wits' end, exhausted by the escalating cycle of crime in their communities.

It is quite clear that the Cook Labor government is failing in law and order. If we think about the responsibility of any government when it comes in, at the top of the list is to keep people safe. The number one responsibility for a state government is to keep people safe within their state. The number one responsibility for the federal government is to keep the country safe—that is, to prevent other people coming in, crossing our borders and causing mayhem. They are prime responsibilities. We have seen the Cook Labor government failing its most important responsibility.

I am fascinated by the response to this debate by those on the other side. The first thing we normally hear—these lines are just trotted out—is that we are attacking the police, so therefore we are bad. We have made it very clear on this side that we think the police are marvellous. I worked extremely closely with the police for six and a half years as a forensic scientist. It was my first job out of university. I know what police have to go through and I know the difficulties they face. All the difficulties that I observed in my early career are even greater now given the much more complex society in which we live. Let us make it very clear that we are not saying anything about the performance of police in this debate.

The second thing we hear from government members whenever we raise issues of crime, particularly regional crime—we heard it today—is that we are not in Parliament legitimately raising the issue of crime; we are talking down the communities. The government would have us come into this place and only say, “No problems. Nothing to see here; everything is wonderful in every part of the state.” Clearly, we would be failing in our job if we did that. Our job is to come into this chamber and alert the government to the failures in the system. There is no greater failure in regional Western Australia than the deterioration of crime, particularly north of Geraldton and even coming to Geraldton. It is an absolute catastrophic crisis. As we have heard from other members, it is also creeping into the wheatbelt and other areas. We have seen a massive deterioration in crime in those areas.

We love the regional communities in which we live. I grew up in the bush. The reason we raise those issues in this place is not to talk down those communities but in a desperate hope that this government will do something to save those communities from spiralling out of control due to crime. Then we get the normal hackneyed stuff that we are not telling the truth and even though we provide numbers, they are not really the numbers for some reason or another. There is an old management saying that the fish rots from the head. In relation to crime, we have made it very clear where we sheet home the blame for the deteriorating situation in communities right across Western Australia, and that is with the minister. I am certain that members know that the minister is a well-meaning person. It is not a personal reflection on the minister, but as the minister responsible for this department, he is failing at his job because the crime rate is not improving; it is getting worse. The great majority of Australians are law-abiding people. They get on with life and do the right thing. However, a minority does not behave peacefully in a law-abiding way, and they cause mayhem in various ways. The majority of people have no inclination to steal or assault and they do not deal in drugs and the like; they just get on with their normal lives. We know that far too much crime causes enormous pain in the wider community and inflicts personal and financial distress on people. In the worst cases, we see people seriously injured and even murdered.

Unfortunately, the Labor Party has a long history of being soft on crime and not dealing with it adequately. I will not go into it —

Several members interjected.



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**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I can go into the philosophical aspect of it if members like.

**Mr J.R. Quigley:** Go on.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It seems that at its core the Labor Party believes that criminals are victims too, and therefore we should not have to deal with that. I have some sympathy —

**Mr P. Papalia:** That is literally what Hon Peter Collier said. Your police spokesperson wants to shut down detention centres.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Minister!

I have some sympathy with the view that some societal factors lead people to commit crime. That is one area that I want to cover in this debate today because nothing that I have seen from this government has dealt with those societal factors. That is particularly true in regional areas. I have been in Parliament for coming up to six years on 17 March, and I have another year here. Over that six-year period, I have seen a massive deterioration, particularly in the communities in the north that I have visited. That is during this government's tenure. I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that it is caused by societal factors. Equally, there have to be consequences for people's actions. One of this government's problems is that it comes late to these matters. Whenever we have raised this issue in the chamber, we have heard personal insults from government members. We heard the most disgraceful, tawdry attacks on the member for North West Central, right from the start when she became a member of this chamber, and we heard it again today. She is a fantastic member who is doing a fantastic job highlighting the issues in her community. The government brings it back to a personal attack. All the crime committed in Carnarvon was due to her husband owning a hotel in Carnarvon, apparently; it was not due to the government's failure to do its job properly. It is disgraceful. That is the level of debate. The government does not deal with the substantive issues; it attacks the person who is dealing with it properly. A headline in *The West Australian* of 22 February is "Jail time for shoplifters: New laws to FINALLY help retailers". The government is seven years into its term of office and the situation in those communities has been deteriorating for seven years. Now, in the final straight before the election, the government will do something. Now it will bring in some measures.

A member interjected.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It would have been good if the government had been working before now. The member might say better late than never, but I contend that we have been raising the issue of deteriorating law and order since I have been a member of Parliament, particularly in those regional communities. We have been told that it is not happening and that what we are seeing is not true. The member for North West Central says that people are reporting this to her but the government questions whether it really happens. Somehow or other, the government's spin is that it is not true. Now the government is addressing it and we will see increases in maximum penalties and maybe an increase in penalties for repeat offenders. Those who are caught shoplifting for a third time will potentially be subject to a higher series of penalties, but nothing will ensure that there will be minimum consequences for committing those crimes. I am sympathetic to the courts having some latitude in the application of the law, but it is very clear—we hear this very consistently in regional communities—that although the kids are not going to school and are not learning much, they are very aware of the thresholds before certain penalties will apply to them. They are also very aware when the police will take action based on how much material they shoplifted, for example. The article to which I referred caused outrage because Rodd, the criminal who had been charged, said that at the time he was aware that his petty theft would not result in a jail term and that he had no intention of changing his behaviour.

I am sure that the Minister for Police and the Attorney General will say they have done something, and I have a strong suspicion that we will support the government on that and perhaps encourage it to do more, but this is seven years into its term of office. It is not two years, once the government got its feet on the ground. The government is taking action only when it is going into an election after conducting polling and realising that law and order is a major issue that will affect its vote. I am fascinated with what I hear from the Minister for Police in this chamber in particular and what I hear on the ground in the communities. I think it was about a year into my current six-year stint when I was told that police officers in Kalgoorlie had been directed not to charge youths who had stolen less than \$500 worth of goods. The shop owners told us that. Members might think that because those kids did not go to school their numeracy skills might be lacking, but they can add up to \$500 very quickly. One of the contributors to the closure of shops in Hannan Street in Kalgoorlie, of which there have been a number, is the large amount of theft and the children not being charged. The kids know they can come back again and again and nothing will happen to them because the police simply will not charge them. When I see the statistics showing that crime has gone down, I wonder how much the statistics have been reduced because the police have been directed to not charge offenders. I believe that has to be a substantial contributor because what we see on the ground is not reflected in the statistics for petty crime in particular. We hear in the north of the state that the police have been directed that if they see a youth driving a car, the police cannot even follow the car, never mind chase it. We all understand that police carrying out high-speed chases and the like —

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**Mr P. Papalia:** You are straying out of making unsubstantiated claims to actually spreading misinformation.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The minister will have every chance to respond. I am intrigued why police tell people that is the case if it is not true. That is my concern.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** In these towns —

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** — the police would not pursue those kids.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** For goodness sake! I do not mind a bit of interjecting, but the minister can take a breath.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Lilburne):** Thank you very much, members. There was argy-bargy between the member on his feet and the minister. Let us allow the member to continue with his presentation, but he certainly invited feedback.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am very happy for the minister to make a rejoinder in his contribution, and I am sure that he will.

The youths were so frustrated that the police would not pursue them—we all understand the problem with high-speed chases—that they embarked on the practice of attacking police in their vehicles by running into them to try to engage with them. As I said, the minister reflected in his comments that that is not true, but that is what we hear on the ground in the areas. I am fascinated to hear what is being told to police out in the field compared with what we are being told in this chamber, because the escalating crime in those areas indicates that what well-meaning people in those communities are telling us is true and that those children do not feel there is any consequence to crime whatsoever, and that is fuelling crime in those communities.

As I said, we suddenly have this sort of belated “We’re going to be tough on crime” stance. I heard the Premier almost sounding like he was from a conservative government when he suddenly said that he would be tough on crime. I am not sure it is from a deep concern about crime as opposed to a deep concern that the polls are showing that crime is a weakness for this government. We have seen a real increase in the rate of serious crimes. Let us look at Western Australia Police Force statistics. Selected offences against the person excludes family-related offences, but these are serious offences. Selected offences against the person had a 17.9 per cent change from the five-year average in 2023–24. Family-related offences had a 39.6 per cent change on that five-year average. Sexual offences were up 29 per cent in 2023–24 versus 2016–17; assaults in the family were up 42 per cent; non-family assaults were up 27 per cent over that period; threatening behaviour in the family was up 81 per cent; threatening behaviour, non-family, was up 27 per cent; and robbery was up 34 per cent. Interestingly enough, dwelling burglaries were apparently down 44 per cent. I am absolutely intrigued by that because I am not aware of a single thing that the government has done that would have driven that. I am happy for the minister to inform me. I would be very pleased if the government had done something to successfully drive down the rate of burglaries. Perhaps it could duplicate a similar philosophy in other areas of crime.

Seriously, those serious crimes are escalating out of control. That makes me wonder whether there has not been some different way of treating the statistics or, indeed, whether there is not a difference now in how people are charged for some of those other crimes. If the minister has had success in some areas, that is very good, but that is not the experience we and families and others are seeing in those communities. I think there are some good reasons.

[Member’s time extended.]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to car theft. As immobilisers have become more common, we have seen a reduction in those car offences, so I think that is a real statistic. But one of the things we see, according to the data, is that drug offences have fallen from around 34 000 to 22 986. That is a drop of 34 per cent. That sounds pretty encouraging. But then we see the data on drug levels in selected sewers around the place. I heard the minister calling out before, making all sorts of allegations against the Leader of the Opposition in the quotation of his statistics. For the minister’s education, I have printed out a graph here and I am happy to give it to the minister. I am happy to give a copy of the whole report. Looking at methylamphetamine consumption per capita, we see the doses per 1 000 people a day. I might say a frightening amount of the material is used. In the latest results, only one state is above Western Australia and that is South Australia. Otherwise, Western Australia is the top, but in particular regional Western Australia has the top consumption of anywhere in Australia.

If we look at the graph and the data, we see that it is just an escalating trend. It is increasing. We have heard the minister talk about his methylamphetamine taskforce and the like. It is readily apparent that that is failing. We heard his excuse—“Oh, well!” It was funny when the border closures were in place, the government boasted about what a fantastic job it was doing of stopping drugs. Now they go, “What can we do? The border’s open. We’re not stopping

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it.” What’s the problem with methamphetamine? I am sure the Minister for Police is aware. This may be something that is contributing to the lack of morale in the police force. Methamphetamine predisposes people to violence.

As I have pointed out before in this place, a number of my relatives work in the medical sphere. Especially for young doctors who are required to work in emergency wards, it is a nightmare. I think it is absolutely fair to describe it as a nightmare for young doctors in the emergency departments because an enormous percentage of presentations in emergency departments are people who are severely affected by drugs and undergoing psychosis. They are extraordinarily violent, and they are violent towards the doctors, the nurses and the guards in the hospitals. I am certain that that is exactly what police are experiencing out there in the field—that is, people who are going through psychotic events and who are uncontrolled in their attacks and their behaviour and uncontrollable because of that. It is an enormous worry.

The minister says that the government has these initiatives but it is clear that they are not working. Again, I do not pretend that these are simple problems or things that are easily resolved. I know that there are complex social interactions in all this. That is the job of government. There is no point claiming all the good stuff. Just a brief detour, but it is a bit like the crisis we are going through in a number of downstream industries at the moment. Government members are happy to be out there with their hard hats and fluoro vests when the private sector is building new industries, but when the private sector is struggling and they are closing down, the government goes, “Nothing to do with us.” It is happy to claim the upside, but not the downside. Members opposite are in government, and it is tough, but what are they doing about that? In particular, what are they doing about those more complex social issues that are a significant contributor to that?

We see the headline-grabbing actions by the government. We hear about Operation Regional Shield. It is reactive. When there is a crisis in a town and metaphorically the place is burning—in some cases it is, or certainly cars are—people are harmed, buildings are destroyed, and shops and livelihoods are ruined. Then a force comes in to clean up the place. There was a spike in charges because of that. How do we get there in the first place? What is blatantly clear is that we have inadequate police resources, particularly in regional areas. It is all right coming in after the event—the cavalry coming over the hill, flag flying—but it is after the event.

We heard about Target 120. I have heard so much about Target 120 in this place. I have not heard an update, but I would be fascinated to hear exactly how many individuals are participating in it, because I suspect in most communities we could count them on the fingers of one hand. I have said in this place that I reckon Target 120 is a great program. The trouble is that it is hardly in effect. This is sometime down the path. I would be very pleased if the Minister for Community Services can tell us we have had an absolute spike. I do not have time to go through it, but when we look at the simple health issues that could be resolved and are not being resolved and will absolutely contribute to youth going into a life of crime, it is heartbreaking. It is clear, years down the track, that those programs are not working.

The minister can try to spin it all he likes, attack members in this place and say how dare we raise this issue and the like. Instead, the minister should put his focus and the government’s focus on dealing with the root causes and stopping crime in those communities. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that the government takes this softly, softly approach because it wants to boast, on the one hand, that it has lower juvenile incarceration rates and the like, but, on the other hand, the communities are paying the price. The price is being paid by the communities; the price is being paid by those kids. People who enter a life of crime do not have happy lives. In fact, they invariably have tragic, sad lives. By not stopping those kids or sending them an early clear message that a life and path of crime is unacceptable, we are encouraging them. It is the old safety slogan: the behaviour you accept is the behaviour you walk by. I believe that is what we are seeing by this government. I believe that that is a substantial contributor to the problems that we are having. I might say, with being soft on crime, how disheartening it is for the police when they arrest criminals and then they see those criminals released. It is disheartening for the police when, instead of someone serving the proper sentence for the crime they have carried out, they simply get a fine and go back out on the street.

The government embarked on a program of not jailing people who did not pay fines. If we are talking about a single mum who had a parking fine and she is really doing it tough and she cannot pay that fine, it would be cruel to send that single mum to jail. That would be wrong. That is someone who already has it tough in life. It would make life tougher not only for her, but also for her kids. That is wrong. When we talk about people who have actually committed crimes—that is, they have stolen, they have robbed and they have bashed—but they get a fine and then they do not pay the fine and then we say, “Oh, we can’t jail them”, that is wrong. That is sending a message to the criminal, as we heard before: “Keep on doing it”. If they are only going to be fined, I encourage the minister to have a look at that. I fully support not jailing people for trivial things—they are not trivial; they are important—such as parking fines and the like. In situations in which someone has actually committed a crime, they have only been fined and then they do not pay the fine, if there are no consequences whatsoever for that bad behaviour, people will keep doing it. We know that with our children.

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I think that is an issue that the minister has to look at. My colleagues will make a contribution and I do not want to take up much of their time, but I want to finish on the issue of morale in the police force. The minister came in here and said, “Oh, there’s no problem”. His idea is that the only reason we are struggling to retain police is because suddenly people have started having shorter careers in the last couple of years. Yes, there are other jobs outside. However, my experience of people who go into the police force is that it is a bit like nurses and teachers; that is, they do it as a vocation. Yes, it is a job, and, yes, they have to feed their family; however, they do it as a vocation. I find the people who go into the police service, like people who go into the Army, do it because they have a strong sense of community and community service. The minister cannot hide behind them. There are fundamental issues with the morale of the police and the police force and the minister needs to get to those root causes. In coming into this place and saying, “You’re wrong and it is all of these other things”, I genuinely think the minister is missing the point.

That is the principal problem and that is the principal reason that the minister cannot achieve the police numbers he wants. That is because too many police are leaving. As I say, I do not believe those factors he has mentioned are true. It might be true for a few, but there are fundamental issues in the police force that are causing police to leave. I will finish on that.

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central)** [5.23 pm]: It disappoints me that every time I stand up, the minister mistakes any comments I make about the police as me having a dig at them. I am absolutely not having a dig at them. I speak with the police daily when I am up north. I have long conversations with them regularly when they are off duty. I have admiration for them. I want to put that on the record. When people raise the issue of morale, it is actually because they are doing a goddamn hard job. They are doing the jobs of multiple people. They are psychologists. They are mental health helpers. They are looking after kids. They have so much on their plate that clearly they are overawed at times. I make the point that I dispute that whenever it is raised, and that is why. The police are wearing multiple hats and often without enough support.

Crime is spiralling out of control, but so is police fatigue because they are flooded with situations in which they do not have the tools and resources to be able to combat that. We all know in the north that youth crime always escalates in the summer. It is summer, warm and everyone is out and about. That goes with the territory. It has become incredibly difficult. I think the member for Cottesloe touched on Target 120. It is a great program, but a number of kids fall through the cracks with Target 120. If the parents and kids do not both agree to it, the kids slip through the cracks. That is an issue for many of those children.

The member for Roe touched on issues in education. I speak with teachers daily and they have issues regularly. I spoke with one teacher who had an incident with scissors. She can no longer have scissors in the classroom. Windows are broken and then kids get suspended. When they are suspended, I chat to them on the street, and they tell me that they are out for 10 days. I believe we need to look for alternatives in education for kids in those locations. Clearly, the mainstream is not the right fit. A solution needs to be found in conjunction with each community. We understand that it is a difficult situation, and we understand that there is no silver bullet. We say this all the time.

I had a conversation with a lady about housing last Friday before I left the north. She and five other seniors live in some units for which I asked the housing department in the past whether it could provide fencing. It does not provide fencing around houses. People are really nervous. One man has had his front door smashed down twice. People are coming in and heckling them for money. There are kids ranging from five to 12 years running through their yards. The residents park their cars out the back, which they are not meant to do. They want a front fence and a camera. Housing and safety are big issues in some of those towns. People are not feeling safe, particularly older people.

The member for Cottesloe touched on the impact on small businesses and industries. Any negative press has a chicken and egg impact. Caravan park owners in a couple of towns have told me that they are down 50 per cent over their high season. That means that for them to get through the summer to the next high season, they are in struggle town. Some of those businesses may not be sustainable. That is the reputational damage that comes from this, and I am sure there are places right now having this experience. It does not augur well for those people.

I touched on this before when I spoke about police; if there are no consequences or accountability for youth crime, the youth will continue to do what they are doing—and they are. They behave badly and nothing happens. I think that is part of it as well. In the end, people give up phoning and reporting it. I imagine the police feel the same way.

The Woolworths supermarket up north went into lockdown last weekend. The guard was threatened with scissors, as was the lady who cleans the shopping centre. The window got smashed and the security alarms went off. Every flashing light in town turned up. It was harrowing for the people who were in there. This sort of thing is happening and there are no consequences. They will probably do it again. One lady said, “They were the group that were throwing cans of baked beans around last week.” This is where accountability and consequences are crucial to making a change. Retail workers are afraid to pull people up when they walk out with shopping trolleys full of food. I was told the other day that some of the kids go in and take meat, and then one of the adults knocks on people’s doors

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and sells a fillet steak for \$10. That stuff is happening. It is really sad and it does not set them up for a good future. I feel particularly sad for the retail staff; they really have nowhere to go. I acknowledge that changes to retail legislation are being made. That has to happen because people no longer want to work in these places.

People on the ground are questioning the empowerment of magistrates and considering what they might be able to do about the lack of accountability or where they might be able to go. That has to come out of a collaborative discussion across many groups and people, but it definitely needs to happen if we are to help the youth who are causing all these issues. People are also grappling with children out at night. I see them as well. I live on the main street, right in the middle of town. I see five-year-olds out my window at three o'clock and four o'clock in the morning, and I see them night after night. I have often asked for a safe house, and I am really pleased to hear what the minister advised me today about Broome. I think that we need an abridged version of that in a lot of these towns because those kids are really vulnerable. They have a right to be safe, and a lot of them are not safe and have not eaten, either. From where I sit, the safe spaces and safe houses cannot come quickly enough. I have raised the need for wraparound services before as well, and I think it would help police immensely. Police tell me it will.

The women's refuge in Carnarvon, which is one of the few refuges in the region, is backed up to capacity most of the time, so Carnarvon needs a transitional housing arrangement. There is no men's refuge. With the increase in drug use, people do not have to be a rocket scientist to see—I can see it in some of my communities—that the drug and alcohol centres and mental health supports are probably not as robust as they could be, and that needs to be addressed.

To make a change, it should not be about who did or did not do what. We have to take some proactive steps to try to make changes for the kids who are not safe and are on the streets. They have nowhere to go, and a lot of them are hungry. I know that if my kids miss one meal, they become ratty. Some of these kids have not eaten for a couple of days, so they act accordingly. That is part of their concern, and they have told me that. They need a bed at night, hence my request for a safe space. In most towns, it is not a large cohort of kids; it is a small cohort. I have been told in this house before that it is more difficult than that, but I would argue that they would be safer in some kind of organised, structured safe space than running around and sleeping on the streets for three or four nights.

I know I have to hand over to the member for Central Wheatbelt. In closing, a lot of this is determined by the population size and economic conditions of each location, and they will be different in each town. They are different in Geraldton. I hear horror stories from Geraldton, but Geraldton is a bigger city. Obviously, it will be on a lesser scale in a smaller inland town or somewhere else. It is interesting because a lot of people in inland towns tell me that they do not have enough for their kids to do. They say it is okay on the coast because kids can go swimming and fishing, but their kids do not have anywhere to go or anything to do. In some of the smaller inland towns, some of the youth crime is because of a lack of things to do; they really are looking for something to do, so they get up to no good.

It is not up to the police, by any stretch of the imagination, but I believe that they need a collaborative assistance package to work with all the other services, resources and facilities and to help make their job easier.

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt)** [5.33 pm]: I rise to speak to the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition —

That this house condemns the Cook Labor government for overseeing a crime and community violence crisis that continues to spiral out of control, with violent crime at record highs and Western Australians at their wits' end, exhausted by the escalating cycle of crime in their communities.

I am the member for Central Wheatbelt. I want to comment about my electorate, perhaps wearing my shadow women's interests portfolio hat. I will also reflect on some conversations and experiences I have had travelling around the state. I reiterate the reflections of previous members about communities' emotions about the level of ongoing crime and the seemingly revolving door of offenders who are often well known to authorities.

Attorney General, is there any chance I could crack on and make my way through this without competition? Thank you.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** We were reminiscing.

**Mr J.R. Quigley:** Sorry!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Far be it from me to stop the reminiscing. It is a little tricky to make a contribution while you are having a natter.

Reflections have been made by previous members, not just today but also in other forums in this house, on the concerns, anguish—anguish is probably a good word—and frustration, particularly of those who have been continual victims of crime. It can also be by proxy. People read the news. They have been tourists in communities that they previously visited and saw as safe places to visit, but they have seen some of those communities become, quite frankly, unsafe. People I know quite well have horrifying stories. I will not name towns, but they are in the north

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of the state. Someone broke in while they were in their hotel room and the police turned up, a couple of nights running. The police are well aware of the people who are breaking in, but the advice at the time was: “It is best to get in your car, drive out of town, sleep in your car for the evening and come back the next day because we cannot guarantee that you will be safe this evening.” I do not think that was an isolated incident. It was from someone who I know well and who has spent a lot of time in some of those regional communities. The government is doing us a disservice when it dismisses community concerns and says that the opposition is trying to inflate them. I have attended forums with people and local members from around the state, and the stories are pretty similar.

Business owners have had it up to here; they have reached their limit on how many times they have seen the same people thief or be abusive. It has made it untenable for younger staff members in particular. I know that legislation before the house will deal with some of those issues, and it will be interesting to see whether that will have an effect on preventing that kind of behaviour. I was reading some articles and community members’ reflections after a forum that was held not very long ago in Kalgoorlie. A barrister said, “Quite frankly, I am not sure that some of the people who are perpetrating these crimes are reading the fact that they will end up in jail if they get three strikes.” A deeper and more challenging issue needs to be dealt with. In government, it is good to be able to say, “Look what we are doing”, and point to the legislation, the latest taskforce or the police operations because the government needs to react to what is happening in the community. This is often after it becomes untenable for the government to leave the police officers who are struggling on the ground with the limited resources they have, like Operation Regional Shield. It does not solve the deeper issues.

The question is how to keep communities safe. I have to agree with some comments made by the member for Cottesloe: this Labor government seems very reactive and piecemeal. For part of the government’s tenure, it had the coverage of the COVID pandemic, which pushed some of these things down in people’s consciousness. They did not go away, and people living in those communities were still experiencing them. I am talking mostly about regional communities that I am familiar with. I will not pretend to talk about issues that I do not have the authority to discuss. Particularly in the areas that I visit regularly, these issues did not go away. They were overtaken in the hierarchy of need, particularly during the COVID pandemic when it was all about how to keep safe and well and healthy, but those issues were still there. In some cases, domestic violence behind closed doors—we have spoken about that—was heightened and it became very difficult for women and children in certain circumstances.

I want to talk about family and domestic violence before I sit down, but I will finish up on the challenge that I think every government faces. There has been a bit of a difference between the previous Premier and this Premier’s narrative around how to deal with some of these particularly challenging young people. I think that neither approach has delivered satisfaction to the community. The chasm for the community is that somewhere between the police doing their job, the justice system dealing with those who are repeat offenders and the continual loop that they see being played out, they do not see any change. They do not see any difference in the outcome. That causes a disconnect in the community and great anger and frustration.

There was an article on this by ABC Goldfields on 8 February. Operation Regional Shield arrived in Kalgoorlie; there had obviously been a significant uptick in concern in the community. Most of the residents will say, “The police do what they can, but it’s not fair to blame them.” This article reported on some stories that were presented at the forum that was held. The article states —

Newsagent Tania Parkes was assaulted by a would-be shoplifter, while other business owners have taken to social media to report rock throwing, assaults, and vandalism.

This is in Kalgoorlie. To a lesser degree, I could reflect on similar incidents in some communities in my electorate. I have met with a number of small business owners in shopping centres in my community and had very similar conversations, to the point at which at least two small business owners in Northam are on the cusp of saying that they will not continue to operate.

[Interruption.]

**Mr P. Papalia:** It’s not mine!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** No, it is not!

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Lilburne):** Thank you very much, members. Thank you. Member for Central Wheatbelt, please excuse that interruption and please continue.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** They will not continue to operate and are finding it very challenging to deal with some of the repeated offensive behaviours. Quite often, it is groups of young people who come in at the same time. I have had discussions with some of the biggest stores and been told that there are clearly cost-of-living pressures impacting households, so theft of food and essentials such as clothing—pretty basic stuff—has escalated. We are talking about younger people who are potentially on the shop floor. I know that Coles and Woolworths has a strategy that if something happens in their stores, the staff will not confront the offenders, because they are quite rightly concerned for their workers.

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**Dr D.J. Honey:** They'll get charged with assault, as well.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** That is right. In shopping centres, we have Coles, Woolworths, Aldi and the bigger stores with the ability to absorb some of those losses; then we get the smaller vendors and businesses that are operating in the same area, and they cannot afford to take the same approach, because a loss of their stock or an assault on their staff would mean they could quite likely lose their livelihood. It is not unusual for local members to receive very impassioned approaches, and I have had many on these matters, because of business owners' sheer frustration in seeing the same people turn up in their shop and do the same thing, only to be turned back out. It is not ideal.

I have had conversations with people who say we should simply lock these offenders up and throw away the key. Unfortunately, we all know that when we are talking about youth offending, Banksia Hill Detention Centre is not ideal in making sure that there is a pathway to rehabilitation for all offenders. Particularly under this government, it has been very challenging. My pushback to some of the people who say that to me is that we do not necessarily want to send people to Banksia Hill for them to learn only how to be better at doing what they did to be sent there in the first place, come back and do it again. This requires a concerted effort on a whole raft of levels. I never want to simplify the challenge that we are faced with, but the reality is that we are coming to an election. We are going to see an increase in rhetoric from both sides of this Parliament on crime and community safety, and I do not think that this government has done enough. I think the challenge is that there are too many silos in government. They do not talk to each other, and they have not been able to work with not-for-profit agencies or fill in some of the gaps that would support families to in some cases reduce the amount of offending by young offenders.

Peter McCumstie has been a feature of the north for many, many years. He is shire president at the moment, but he has held nearly every role in the community he is from in the north of the state. He is a very sensible person. He said straight out that wraparound services in the town that he is from are non-existent, with agencies other than police maintaining only a very small presence. That would be the case in most regional communities outside the regional centres, and that is not acceptable. The overlap of the Department of Justice and the Department of Communities is disparate at best in regional communities. We have repeated calls for a better connection, even though we were told at the beginning of this government's tenure some seven years ago that the machinery-of-government changes were going to break down silos and barriers and give greater coordination across portfolios. I would question—in fact, I would refute—that the changes have delivered that outcome. It was purely a political move by the incoming government as opposed to doing what people hoped and wished might happen, which was that silos within government would be broken down. In that case, I think we are letting down businesses, families and communities. There is a disconnect between what communities expect and what this government is able to deliver.

I want to talk briefly wearing my shadow Minister for Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence hat. In the middle of last year, a crisis meeting was called. This government is very fond of taskforces and crisis meetings, and that reactivity that other members have reflected on. They were dragged to the table after there were some absolutely shocking incidents of deaths of women in the community. I know that the Premier and ministers hang their hat on the fact that Western Australia is the first state to have a Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, and they regularly talk about the investment of around \$200 million into family and domestic violence services. An investment of \$200 million sounds a lot until we compare it to the surplus that we talk about every year that this government is posting. It is a drop in the ocean when it comes to the overall state budget, and yet we hear regularly from the Labor government that it is something that they are focused on and delivering. Although the services involved in this sector will say that they have seen greater attention on family and domestic violence, and I am not going to dispute that, they will still say that not nearly enough money is being spent and there is a lack of coordination. The high-level working group that was delivered as a result of the taskforce has some serious work to do to deliver an outcome. In 2022–23, family and domestic violence-related assaults rose by more than 15 per cent in this state. When we look to comments by people who work in the sector like Alison Evans, the CEO of the Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing, her accusation at the time was very blunt. She said, "Government missing in action." She compared the investment of \$572 million that the Victorian government made in 2016 into family and domestic violence services. The Premier was quoted at the time as saying that the government had invested \$200 million since 2017. This government has posted multiple serious budget surpluses. It has created a minister, yet was required to have a crisis summit last year and is still saying that it has invested \$200 million. The minister can stand and hark on, and I am sure he will, about the previous government's record, but we are seven years into the Labor government. Everything that is happening in this state —

**Mr P. Papalia:** You said "he". Do you mean me? Am I the one?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Are you standing up to respond?

**Mr P. Papalia:** I thought it was multiple.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Okay, I am sorry. I made an assumption, Minister for Police. I will broaden my attack! Whichever minister stands to respond, I am sure will hark back to the previous government's investment, I think unfairly

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judged, but that is for another day. I would simply say that we are now one year out from an election, seven years into this government, and I do not think it washes in the community with the stakeholders, and the people who are immediately impacted that we are talking about what happened eight, 10 and 15 years ago. After seven years of this government with massive budget surpluses family and domestic violence in Western Australia is a serious and significant issue.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I acknowledge that a taskforce has been set up. I am happy to see an update on the work that has been done and I assume there will be additional funds in this year's state budget to try to address some of these challenges. In September last year, Dr Evans, whom I spoke of before, pointed out that because of the housing crisis that this government has presided over for the last seven years, an increasing number of women and children are being forced to make the horrific choice of staying in a dangerous situation that they cannot escape from because there is nowhere to go. Of the 4 932 women who reached out to homelessness services up to June last year, over half had also experienced family and domestic violence. They had nowhere to go. Dr Evans, being very blunt in her assessment, pointed out in this article —

... the gap that creates between the talking points of the Premier and his ministers and the reality on the ground.

On one hand we are saying to women and children that we are here to support them so they can leave—we should all aspire to say to every woman or family member who is in that situation that they should be able to do that—and ensure that the perpetrator leaves, but we need to put that into action. The housing crisis means that they cannot do that, and we have overextended services for women and families, particularly in regional communities and also metropolitan areas, that are simply not able to assist. It is very clear that during that post-separation period there is a heightened risk for women if they have identified the issue and tried to leave. Unfortunately, they are left in limbo and the likelihood is that there could be violence or even death. Unfortunately, that is what prompted the taskforce in the middle of last year. A key part of the taskforce, as I understand it, is addressing the walls that exist between different government departments. Again, I go back to the machinery-of-government changes and the significant amount of taxpayer dollars spent on reshuffling the decks when this government came to power over seven years ago, and now we need to form a taskforce to break down those walls. It is either wasteful and ineffective or it is window-dressing. It is disappointing because in the middle of all this are the people we are supposed to be looking after and providing avenues for. It is disappointing.

I have acknowledged that there is a Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence and I have acknowledged that Western Australia was one of the first to create such a minister, but the statistics say that the violence that women and children in these situations are experiencing is significantly high. I think we are third after the Northern Territory and Tasmania. It is not a great record to hold. When we talk about violence and crime, we quite often talk about what we can see in our communities. Domestic violence is, by its very nature, behind closed doors. Although the government says that it is seeking to change the culture and build understanding within its own agencies, unfortunately I have had to intervene for a number of constituents and ask departments to assist in the provision of housing for someone seeking to leave a violent partner. That is quite challenging in a small country town. The first response should be, "Yes. How can we help?" Unfortunately, it was not. This is a broader community problem. I am not targeting an individual here. There is much more work to do to get people to understand what is at stake when someone builds up the courage to put their hand up to say, "I require assistance." It is certainly not an easy proposition, particularly in communities in the wheatbelt; they tend to be small and everyone is known to each other. I would never ever create a hierarchy of any woman who finds themselves in that situation; it is just devastating.

I will finish my comments by saying that this government, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, is failing on a number of fronts to create a community in which people are safe, that allows them to get on with their daily life, be productive and feel safe in their schools—as the member for Roe pointed out—as a business owner and even in their own homes. For a state such as Western Australia, with the significant resources that this government has and the capacity for it to draw on its networks, it is very, very disappointing. I call on it to do more.

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Police)** [5.56 pm]: I thank members for their contributions. I have to reflect a little on the irony of being berated for violent crime and a violence crisis on the same day that the Nationals WA and, effectively, the opposition opposed legislation to create safer communities through better gun laws. I find that extraordinary. I need to take the member for Central Wheatbelt to task, because she is a reasonable person most of the time. I think she has a blind spot on this. I grew up in the country too, and I know that the natural inclination is to adopt a defensive response to anyone questioning a process around access to firearms. We are unique in the country in imposing a limit on the number of firearms an individual can possess. That is absolutely reflective of the National Firearms Agreement, which recognised that in Australia, the possession and use of firearms is



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a privilege, that privilege being conditional on the provision of public safety. That is the central element of the law that we are proposing. The member for Central Wheatbelt has joined with her colleagues—I normally expect more of her in terms of reflection on what is being proposed—in aligning themselves with people who believe there should be unlimited guns for anybody who gets a licence. That is their stance; go and ask them. It is the same for the member for North West Central. Go and ask them. Am I wrong? Do they not believe in unlimited guns for anybody who wants them and is able to get a licence? It is not very difficult right now. All they have to do is buy a property letter from someone, often in the member for North West Central’s electorate, but also in the member for Central Wheatbelt’s electorate, to then get a licence.

There is no in-person encounter with a police officer like there used to be before 2009 when the member came into government and it was changed and centralised to be an entirely online process with only a theoretical, not a practical, test. We are changing that. The point is that members opposite have aligned themselves with people who believe that there should be no limit. The opposite of a limit is unlimited. The member is angry with me for using the words “American gun culture”. What is American gun culture? It is a person having any number of guns they want.

Member for Cottesloe, go to a pub in Cottesloe and ask someone at the bar if they want us to have an American gun culture. Just go and ask them.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** You know that they have semiautomatic and automatic weapons and we don’t.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Member for Cottesloe.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No, member. It is no longer that.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** He’s inviting interjections, Acting Speaker. He also debated something that I have not even spoken on.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am responding to the member for Cottesloe’s interjection.

It is no longer about semiautomatics, although the member for North West Central advocated for people on farms who want semiautomatic rifles. It is not going to happen, by the way. Professional Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions shooters are allowed to use semiautomatics for culling vermin, but we are not going to allow just anyone else to use them because that would undermine and erode the purpose of John Howard’s National Firearms Agreement, as would allowing what has been going on.

There has been a significant growth in the number of firearms without a commensurate growth in the number of firearm licence holders. That means people are stockpiling weapons. Fewer than five per cent of people have the vast majority of the firearms. At the same time, in Western Australia, 65 per cent of the people who have firearms reside in the metropolitan area. They are not all going shooting vermin on someone else’s property. They are acquiring firearms because they can under the lax laws that have been in force for a long time. That means that throughout our suburbs, there are people whose sole genuine reason for firearm ownership was achieved through buying or acquiring a property letter from someone who enabled them to do that. They potentially acquired it as a practice of buying their firearm from a store or dealer, but it was potentially bought from someone they have never met for a property they never intend to shoot on and have never subsequently shot on. That means there are unnecessary firearms in the community. The two members are opposing this legislation solely based on the advocacy of some people who would like an unlimited numbers of firearms.

Again, it is doubly ironic that the member for Central Wheatbelt concluded her speech with a reflection on family and domestic violence and the horror of it. Ask Alison Evans what she believes the single biggest threat to a woman in a domestic violence situation is with regard to the likelihood of her being murdered. What is the one factor that elevates the risk that she contends with or confronts regarding the likelihood of being murdered? It is the presence of a firearm in the household. Ask her. I know the member talks to her, and I respect that. I am absolutely sure that the Leader of the Opposition has not spoken to the people on the list that I read into the Parliament earlier today. That is why he has so fulsomely and wholeheartedly embraced the idea that it is somehow wrong to limit the number of firearms someone can own.

That is only one thing we are doing. The other thing that the opposition rejects is the reform of the property letter process. I think the member for Cottesloe recognises that that is completely corrupted.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** The buying of property letters is wrong.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes. It is ridiculous.

People are buying property letters for the sole purpose of having a gun in the suburbs and in country towns. It is not just the suburbs.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** I acknowledge that that is not right.

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**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes, but the member's party opposes that—read the Facebook page. The National Party opposes reform of the letter!

We were requested by the entire Primary Producers Firearms Advisory Board, and particularly the Pastoralists and Graziers Association, to reform that process and change it. The member's party rejects that. She has stated the three things that she is really rejecting: a limit on firearms, the reform of the corrupted property letter system and the health check. I have repeatedly said that we will talk about this part of the legislation in the consideration in detail process. I look forward to that. A health check with a mental health component is akin to the sort of thing required for a heavy haulage truck driver's licence or a dangerous goods truck driver's licence. Another analogy for a recreational shooter who does not shoot for a profession is something akin to requiring a medical check for a recreational diver's licence. It is not a terrible thing. It might actually identify a reason why someone should not go ahead with the practice they are about to embark upon.

The mental health component of the health check is not envisaged to be an onerous thing. There seems to be a bit of an inconsistent fear that people will be driven away from getting a mental health check because they will have to get a mental health check. I do not understand it myself. The argument that is being put is a bit odd. If someone wants to retain or acquire a licence to possess and use a firearm—because it is a privilege—there will be a requirement for a health check. It will have a mental health component. If someone does not want to get that health check, they will forgo the privilege of having a firearm. It is not some attack or assault. The language that has been employed, particularly by the member's colleague Hon Louise Kingston in the upper house, is provocative and angry. It misinforms and encourages people to be outraged about something that is not even going to happen with the different elements that have been proposed. It is not just those three things. There are a lot of changes in the legislation because there had to be. It is the first rewrite in 50 years and the first time since the National Firearms Agreement to make public safety the central consideration.

The first paragraph of the National Firearms Agreement contains the observation that “firearm possession and use is a privilege that is conditional on the overriding need to ensure public safety”. If the member read this bill, she may find that the same thing is said in the first paragraph. We are reflecting John Howard's National Firearms Agreement for a reason. The elevation of public safety to a primary consideration is central to everything else that flows in the legislation. It means that we can make reasonable decisions around what pathway to go down and not allow everybody to have a firearm. There will be disqualification orders. That will be an interesting thing. Do members know who will benefit most from disqualification orders? Family and domestic violence victims will, because disqualification orders for serious offences will result in the people who have committed serious offences not being able to hold a licence. They will have to surrender their firearms for a period of time. That is a good thing, but the member's party has chosen to oppose it, and that is disappointing.

The member for North West Central referred to gun clubs. I am glad that she is talking to them. Can she please tell them that their peak bodies had the opportunity to engage with the police? They were meeting with them every single week as part of the West Australian Field and Game Association. If gun club members have not received any information from those discussions, and if there has not been any discussion around advocacy that they might want to take back to the process, that is entirely the responsibility of the peak bodies. We had two meetings with them in my office right at the outset of the process. They were all invited as individual representatives; the West Australian Pistol Association, the West Australian Rifle Association and the Western Australian Clay Target Association were all invited to my office. We had two meetings and then they decided that they would go and join this new organisation WAFGA. They then ceded their voice to the Sporting Shooters' Association of Western Australia, so Paul Fitzgerald from that association is the only one who speaks. If they do not get to put the case for their members or they do not convey to their members information from the meetings they are having, that is unfortunate, but it does not mean that there has not been consultation. It means that those bodies chose not to participate in a fulsome way. They go to the meetings. Every week they are sitting there and they get the opportunity to listen, talk and make suggestions and proposals, but if that has not been happening, that is the reason.

I think the member for Cottesloe—it may have been the member for North West Central—made an observation about law-abiding firearm owners. We see the acronym LAFO all the time.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** I haven't spoken on the bill.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** It might have been the member for North West Central. I concede that the vast majority of firearm owners are fine; they do not break the law and they are law abiding, and that is fine. The member for North West Central said that people were asking her about the statistics on the number of licensed firearm owners who had committed crimes as opposed to those who had not. I ask the member: what threshold would be okay? I will make a little observation for the member. The biggest mass shooting in Australia since Port Arthur was the Osmington shooting in 2018. The shooter was a law-abiding firearm owner right up until he killed his entire family and shot himself. Right up until that point, he was a law-abiding firearm owner. His name was Peter Miles. He shot

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Katrina Miles, who was aged 35 years; her four children, Tay, Rylan, Arye and Kayden, who were aged between eight and 13; and Katrina's mother, Cynda. They were all murdered, and then he shot himself. He was fine right up until that point. He was a law-abiding firearm owner.

There was also Nick Martin's assassination. The chap who did that was a law-abiding firearm owner and a licensed firearm was used.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Minister, I am learning a lot and this is a very erudite speech, but it is reminiscent of a reply to a second reading debate, which I suspect you will be giving tomorrow. I am wondering whether you might address the actual motion before us.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Acting Speaker, I am reflecting on how the motion is about violence and violent crime, and I am suggesting that there are probably few more violent crimes than being shot to death —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Sorry; I am speaking. Your idea of relevance might be a bit different from mine, but I will give you some latitude. Proceed.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Thank you.

Nick Martin's assassination was by someone who was a law-abiding firearm owner, right up until he was not. He was actually up to no good elsewhere, but for all intents and purposes in Western Australia, he was law abiding.

There was also the Two Rocks school shooting last year—the very first school shooting in Australia. The shooter's dad was a law-abiding firearm owner. The shooter was law abiding and had done no wrong, right up until he did that. He took his dad's firearm to school and fired rounds at schoolchildren at the school.

Then, last year again, there was the Kellerberrin murder–suicide, member for Central Wheatbelt. Right up until Lachlan Bowles took one of his licensed firearms to work, shot his colleague and led the police on a chase before shooting himself, he was a law-abiding firearm owner. I am not saying that law-abiding firearm owners are a problem; I am just saying that they are not immune from using firearms for crime. Similarly, they are not —

**Ms M.J. Davies:** I appreciate what you are saying, and I am very close to that community, but —

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I know. There we go. What I am saying —

**Ms M.J. Davies:** No, but that could still happen under your legislation, so it's not right to draw those conclusions.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Here is the thing, member. We will be making them do things that they do not currently have to do. There will be other hurdles in place. It will not be as simple as it was. There will be more onerous demands placed on firearm licence holders, and some of them do not like it. For many, it will not mean any big change. If someone is a gun enthusiast who shoots regularly and is already a member of a gun club, I do not think they will notice much. Most of the licensed firearm owners in Western Australia have far fewer than the 10 firearms we are talking about for competitive shooters or club shooters. There is an avenue through which people can get more guns if they aspire to competition; we will talk about that. I know that issue was raised by a number of members.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** Perhaps during the legislation!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** But this is about violence. On the same day that we started debating this bill, the member's party went out on the steps of Parliament House to say that it is going to oppose this law because of the freedoms of gun owners; that is pretty much what the statement was. The member's party is opposing limits. Why? It is because some people do not want limits. It is opposing health checks because some people do not like health checks.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** Minister, there will be an opportunity to debate that during consideration in detail.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes, there will be.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** Just for the record, I haven't actually made my second reading contribution yet.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Okay; I will move on.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** I feel like I'm being targeted for something I haven't actually said yet!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** We have to stop using shooting language, but it is less about targeting the member than it is about appealing to the member. I respect the member's professionalism and desire to help the community, as I do the member for North West Central. I understand where the member is coming from, but I think she is being grabbed by a few people who have got the wrong end of the stick. It is not necessarily what they think, but even if it were, maybe what they think is wrong.

That aside, I will move on with the discussion around violent crime, particularly with regard to family and domestic violence. With regard to breaking down the siloing of agencies that the member referred to—I think the member

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for Cottesloe did also—police in the last few years have significantly shifted their method of operation, and a key element of that is the creation of a permanent State Operations Command Centre where other agencies are co-located. The Department of Communities is there, the Department of Education is there, the Department of Justice is there and the St John Ambulance dispatcher is there. There is a clinician from the Mental Health Commission. That, increasingly, is doing exactly what the member suggested needs to be done—breaking down the barriers across different departments, enabling access to different databases, and real-time provision of situation awareness to police on the front line, who are invariably the first people at an incident or issue. The presence of other agencies means that they can advise or divert other services to those people in real time. That has been enabled only in recent years through the creation of the State Operations Command Centre and increased connectivity. All our police officers are digitally connected with mobile phones that increasingly will have access all across the state, particularly in the regions, through the rollout of satellite communications. That is for everyone—550 police cars and 129 police stations. There will be a footprint within range of which our police officers in the regions will be afforded exactly the same sort of support from the SOCC that people in the metro area get. It is changing things and it is happening rapidly and in real time.

I probably should apologise for not having arranged for people to see the SOCC. We have only just formally opened it. It had been open in Maylands for a while. It has now moved to Wellington Street, which has greater connectivity. In the future, we will ensure that police have the capacity to get greater access and use more data. The SOCC is changing policing and changing our relationship across government. The Minister for Community Services would be able to tell the member about it. At Christmas, we saw some really incredible advances made in providing good real-time support to FDV incidents in particular at a time of year when, in the past, everyone went on holiday except the cops. That has changed. It is partly because we can enable that through this capability. It will get better. It is improving all the time. The Department of Justice people who monitor the people with bracelets are co-located there. Numbers will grow with the expansion of that program.

Commissioner Royce, the Commissioner of Corrective Services, intends to move his corrective services operations centre in the Department of Justice into the SOCC. He will physically move the staff there and that will enable further access to databases and intelligence sources that will improve policing and our ability to address violent crimes and the people who perpetrate those crimes. It is rapidly changing. It has improved dramatically. There is another thing going on with the nature of offending post-COVID and whatever has caused it. It is something that is not isolated to Western Australia. It is everywhere, particularly in the western world. Through the ability of police to respond to it and coordinate with cross-government activity, the focus on solving or reducing crime is improving all the time. It is worth looking at the SOCC. I probably will formally forward invitations to people because I think that is a worthwhile activity.

The final thing I would say is that I want to reflect on the Banksia Hill Detention Centre because the member referred to it and said that it is not the place to which we want people to go. I understand what the member said because historically—it is probably still true—one in three juveniles who go through the front door of detention ultimately reoffend as an adult in such a way that they are incarcerated in adult prison, and if they are Aboriginal, reoffending and recidivism results in them being in there for a long time. But I need to say that Banksia Hill is not what it was seven months ago. Members can ask the President of the Children's Court and Eamon Ryan, the Inspector of Custodial Services, and they will confirm that. It has vastly improved. Both those people are in the stakeholder group that receives regular briefings on out-of-cell hours and school and other interventions and provision of support. It is not a place that should be used as an excuse not to incarcerate people.

**Mr J.R. Quigley** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Attorney General, keep it down a bit, please. Yes, you can walk in front of the speaker!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am not advocating huge numbers of detainees being incarcerated, but I share the member for Cottesloe's view that there need to be consequences. Beyond that, I am not sure that sentences have in recent times—there are a number of reasons for it, potentially—been long enough for us to get effectiveness out of what is now a world-class facility, and it will continue to improve. It is acknowledged and recognised that if we want to try to change someone's behaviour, it is better to divert them earlier if we can. However, ultimately, if they are offending in such a way that the community has to be protected from them and they have to be incarcerated, the likelihood of them having a successful intervention and changing their behaviour is diminished if they are in there for only short periods of time. That is a problem. We have a really good school in Banksia with excellent teachers. It probably has better staff than any school in the state. The ratio of staff to students is good. They are really well qualified and capable of teaching that challenging cohort. They have the techniques and ability to do it, but they quite often say that they will just be at the point of teaching a kid and they will lose them. We are looking at how we can try to ensure that kids transition back into a decent school system. But a lot of these kids are not going to school on the outside. Seventy per cent of them are functionally illiterate and functionally innumerate. That is a challenge.

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I wanted to conclude with the observation—I say it everywhere I can—that Banksia Hill is not what it was. It certainly should not be used as a reason for not incarcerating someone. There was a time not long ago when I heard magistrates say that they would not send a child to Banksia Hill because that would be more damaging than if they were not to send them. That is not true. The people there are good, dedicated people doing an incredible job.

**MS S.E. WINTON (Wanneroo — Minister for Community Services)** [6.27 pm]: I, too, rise to make a small contribution to this motion, which the government will not be supporting. It takes me back to the last Wednesday we had private members' business, and it seems to me that this opposition continues to kick own goals when it comes to thinking about what kind of motions it ought to bring to the house. On a day when it has been made clear that the Nationals WA, as a key alliance partner in an alternative government, is not going to support one of the most significant reforms that will have a significant impact on violence in communities, it is quite breathtaking and so contradictory that it is hard to fathom.

I want to make a contribution on a few areas within my portfolio focused on working as part of a whole-of-government response to deal with violence in communities and also, most importantly, our attempts as a government to stop the violence before it starts. Our government is also very much focused on preventing violence and supporting communities in making sure that we prevent violence before it starts.

I want to start at the beginning by making some remarks on the taskforce that all members in this place know has been established because the member for Central Wheatbelt made some comments about it. I can reassure the house that this is a taskforce like no other. To diminish it like it was some other working group, inquiry or taskforce that kicked something down the road could not be further from the truth.

The Family and Domestic Violence Taskforce is made up of significant non-government sector partners and key stakeholders from various agencies within government. They come together to talk about the prevention of family and domestic violence and what more all of us can do—the government, the sector and communities—to deal with a scourge on our society. I want to emphasise to the house that the taskforce work is very significant and all the feedback I have had so far from all members of the taskforce is that this government has been on the right path in the last seven years. No-one within the taskforce has said that we have to throw out all our thinking and strategy around family and domestic violence and start again. Our strategic approach to dealing with family and domestic violence—members opposite are right—started with this government having a strategic approach to the prevention of family and domestic violence. Our government placed a priority on this issue by creating the first ever Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. It has also made a significant investment of some \$300 million since 2017. That is significant and has made a significant difference in dealing with a significant and complex issue within our community. To diminish that investment diminishes and disrespects the incredible contributions that have been made by our community sector partners each and every day over seven years. Those community sector partners have been given that \$300 million of investment to provide critical services each and every day throughout communities in this state over the last seven years. Members opposite diminish the work of those people —

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** They diminish the outcomes that community sector —

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Cottesloe!

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Cottesloe!

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** Members opposite are diminishing the outcomes that are achieved every single day by our community sector partners and the important work that they are able to do each and every day in all communities throughout the state as a result of the \$300 million investment into this important area.

I will not steal the Attorney General's thunder, but, of course, a very important part of the family and domestic violence story is around the important reforms that seek to protect vulnerable people from violence in our community. Our record has been unmatched by any previous government in this state. The reforms are making a difference each and every day in protecting vulnerable women and families. The taskforce's work is coming towards completion. Members would know a significant investment of over \$72 million was announced by the Premier during 16 Days in WA. Again, it focuses on areas that we know make a difference in continuing to support crisis supports for vulnerable women and children. Importantly, it also makes further investment in the important work around perpetrator responses, changing men's behaviour to stop the cycle of offending and, of course, in the primary education and primary prevention spaces so that we can change the prevailing attitudes that are still out there in our community and allow that violence to occur.

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I also want to briefly mention Target 120, because it came up in debate this afternoon. Whenever I get an opportunity to speak about this program, I take it. It is a significant, innovative program that is making a huge difference in local communities. The issues surrounding youth offending or youth disengagement in communities are complex and there is no quick solution. The solution we know that does work is if we back in local communities to provide them with the resources and support that they need to wrap around young people and steer them into alternative pathways. They can support them to re-engage with school, to get training and to think about future career paths. Target 120 is a complex but very rich program that engages on a very deep level with the individuals who come into the program. I often try to explain it. Someone only needs to talk to the people who deliver Target 120. It is not about just working with one individual young person. The issues are complex and that young person has a family, has siblings, and all those people are also supported as part of the Target 120 program. We have invested over \$43 million, which will see the program continue to rollout throughout the state in 20 locations, fully funded until June 2025. Each and every day, the people who work within this program around the state are making significant differences to young people's lives and, importantly, as part of that, are keeping communities safe.

The Minister for Police spoke around the State Operations Command Centre and the family domestic violence response teams. I want to make a couple of comments on them to back in what he said about the work that police do. When we talk about violence in our community, police are absolutely critical in keeping communities safe—but it is not just a police responsibility; it is a responsibility of the whole of government and a variety of agencies. The new State Operations Command Centre, which I was privileged to visit recently, is exactly that. It is not a police station. It is a place where a variety of agencies come together, sit together and work together and are able to share data and intelligence to wraparound families to support them—not only to respond to crime and violence, but also to go in after the event to support families and make sure that the cycles do not continue. Incredible work is happening in that area. Likewise, our approach to policing is changing in the way the family and domestic violence response teams operate. There are some 17 of them around the state and I visited a couple of them. There are police officers co-located with Department of Communities' staff as well as community sector organisations and child protection staff. Crime sheets from the night before are triaged and prioritised. It allows those agencies and people to go out to families to support them after a crime event to make sure that the families are safe and to support them to make sure those acts are not repeated. It is a different way of working together. It is a real privilege to be working with the Minister for Police and his agency as we take a whole-of-government approach in responding to violence and focusing on preventing violence in our community.

Finally, the last thing I want to say before I give the call to the Attorney General—no, Madam Acting Speaker (Ms M.M. Quirk), I do not give him the call; I will not take that away from you!—is about the announcement we made this morning around Marlamanu. It was a really significant announcement that will see a diversion program that was asked for and designed by Aboriginal people. They want to have control and to work on solutions for young people in their communities. The program has some \$18 million and will see up to 16 young boys aged 14 years to 17 years supported on country with structured educational programs and wraparound services. Each of them will be held to account, not only for their actions but also for changing their ways. Importantly, all that comes together through being mentored and guided by Aboriginal leaders on a working pastoral station. This government is interested in these kinds of things and in working collaboratively among various ministerial portfolios because we know that is where the true solutions lie.

When I talk about all the programs in my portfolio, their common theme is that they require one to have good working relationships with cabinet colleagues. They require having the same purpose of mind and agreeing about policy development. We have not had any of that from the other side in seven years. The opposition has never offered any alternatives or solutions to the problems that vex society. The opposition just harps on without an alternative. We have less than a year until the election. The opposition needs to present an alternative to the community if it does not think the government is doing well enough. It cannot just tell us that we are not doing well enough; it has to tell us how it would do it better. It is unable to present that because it is so totally dysfunctional that it does not agree on policies.

**Mr R.S. Love:** We don't need to tell you anything.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** No, but opposition members do not even tell each other anything.

In the media it was reported that opposition members do not like sharing policy ideas because they are scared that they will steal each other's homework, go to the media and steal each other's policies. How can opposition members be in an alliance when they cannot even share their ideas with each other? How is it possible to go to Western Australians and say, "We would be a better government because we have better ideas," but not be able to work together in the cabinet room? How could that possibly work? The Leader of the Opposition cannot keep a straight face when I pose that question: how would it work? If the opposition has developed wonderful policies,

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do not tell us; that is fair enough, but opposition members cannot even tell each other and cannot get on the same page.

We talk about violence in this state. On the very day that we introduce one of the strongest, nation-leading reforms that will make women and children safer in our community, the Nationals WA opposes it, yet its alliance partners will support it. What are women and children who want a safer Western Australia supposed to think about voting for you mob as an alternative government?

**MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Butler — Attorney General)** [6.42 pm]: When members have been around for as long as the Acting Speaker and I have, we have seen it all before.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk)**: Thanks for reminding me.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY**: That is okay, Madam Acting Speaker. You have been wonderful over the journey. We see things that have changed and then changed back to how they were, like some sort of fashion. When I was a young man, people wore stovepipe jeans and then they wore flares. Then, the fashion went back to stovepipes. Now, looking at the Academy Awards, I have to buy huge, flared jeans again. This is what happens in Parliament sometimes.

When I first came to Parliament in March 2001, Dr Geoffrey Gallop had just come to power, and I was on the back bench, where I watched things until 2008. As I recall, the lovely man the late Hon John Kobelke was the Minister for Police, and Hon Jim McGinty was the Attorney General. The opposition was led by Hon Colin Barnett, although the leadership changed a few times before he snatched it back and took the opposition to victory in about September or October 2008. During that period, when the Liberal Party was in opposition and the Gallop government reigned, the opposition was after the government all the time because it was soft on crime. “Labor is soft on crime!” The opposition was after Labor because it was doing nothing about bikies, this and that, and it was soft on crime.

When the opposition got to government, it did not know what to do. When I think about it, it reminded me of the crazy dog that chases the car wheel down the street, barking at it like mad. When the car stops at the Stop sign, the dog does not know what to do with the wheel. That is exactly what happened with the Liberal–National coalition when it assumed government; having barked “Soft on crime!” at the Gallop government, as it does now, it did not know what to do when it got to government. It did not have a clue how to stem crime; it had no idea.

The opposition, then and now, embarked on what a former Chief Judge of the District Court—the first woman to be appointed a judge and who became a very distinguished Chief Judge—said about the body politic: they operate on a policy of fear. If you can scare a population enough on race, ethnicity or anything, it will be more accepting of any stupid or extreme solution you want to introduce. Like the dog that arrived at the Stop sign and caught up with the wheel and the car, the Liberal coalition government came to power and stopped barking because it was on the Treasury benches but was bewildered about what to do. I recall that Attorney General Hon Christian Porter said that the government would crush crime by introducing the criminal organisation anti-consorting legislation and have the capacity to declare bikie gangs outlaw gangs. We all know that they are outlaw gangs, but the government was going to go through the exercise of declaring them gangs and double the penalties for anyone who was in the gang, so they had to prove the person was in the gang. It was just laughable, and I said so in this chamber at the time. It was very slick salesmanship, but it had no effect. The bikies and outlaw motorcycle gangs that are the retailers and perhaps also wholesalers of methamphetamine, which is wreaking so much havoc in the community, blossomed.

**Dr D.J. Honey**: It looks like they are back in business.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk)**: Member for Cottesloe!

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY**: The member is right: “blossomed” might have been the wrong word. They increased in number and criminal activity. Does that suit the member for Cottesloe? It went through the roof. We all remember that every other week a house was blown up because they were cooking methamphetamine. Roofs were being blown clean off houses. What did we do? We said we would come into government and bring in the harshest law to suppress outlaw motorcycle gangs, and we did. They do not go around flaunting themselves in public anymore. They still commit crime, and the police know who they are, but the community feels a bit relieved. If people go to a cafe now, they do not have three rebels sitting next to them with their tats and patches.

Let us get to sex crimes and dangerous sex offenders. Remember, as I said, I can still remember stovepipe jeans, going to flares and now back to stovepipe jeans. I remember it all. When we get to sex crimes, I remember that just about every other week there was an article in the paper about some sex monster who was being released. Madam Acting Speaker, you were in the Parliament in 2016 when I introduced a private member’s bill to reverse the onus of proof for a dangerous sex offender’s application for release. They had the most ineffectual and hopeless Minister for Police at the time. Members will remember Hon Liza Harvey. She was just one of a team, but she did not know what was happening. When I introduced this legislation, which was and has proven to be very effective, I can remember Hon Liza Harvey over here as the police minister speaking on behalf of the most ineffectual

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Attorney General the state has ever had to suffer, Hon Michael Mischin from the other chamber, saying, “The Liberal government will oppose this reversal of the onus of proof; it is not necessary and not required.” We got to government. We were not the dog barking at the wheel not knowing what to do once we got there. When we got to government, we had a whole list of bills that were ready to go. There was the no body, no parole legislation. Then we introduced high risk serious offenders legislation, which not only reversed the onus of proof for dangerous sex offenders who were seeking release, but also broadened the scope of the legislation past dangerous sex offenders to capture all serious criminals who have arrived at the end or served their finite term of imprisonment but would present a danger if released into the community. Now we have a whole section down at the State Solicitor’s Office called the HRSO section that triages these cases and decides whether it is appropriate to obtain an order for continuing detention.

Madam Acting Speaker might recall that Hon Liza Harvey and Hon Michael Mischin said at the time that it would be unconstitutional to reverse the onus of proof on these applications. That was taken to the High Court by one of these offenders after we took out an order against them, and the High Court upheld the constitutionality. I say this to members opposite about government amendments: they are good. That is what this whole Parliament is about. We listen. If the previous government had listened, it would not have wasted millions of dollars on the Bell Group Companies (Finalisation of Matters and Distribution of Proceeds) Bill 2015. We were here in the Parliament saying that it was unconstitutional, but Hon Mike Nahan knew better and proceeded with it and set the Solicitor-General of Western Australia on a fool’s errand to Canberra to defend it, and he was hit out of the park, the poor man. I think it damaged him at the time. In his opening, or shortly after he opened, they said, “Well, what about the list of priorities in the Income Tax Assessment Act? Does this not sort of lay to waste this whole thing?”

Anyway, we listened. The previous government never listened. It was stubborn and it did not know what to do, and that is why crime rose. It also refused point blank to help child victims of sexual assault by opposing a private member’s bill that I brought into this chamber in opposition to lift the statute of limitations. They opposed it, even though the member for Roe was in support of it. I think he crossed the floor, from memory. He had the integrity to cross the floor. After we came to government, one of the first things we did was lift the statute of limitations. It nearly made me vomit on the carpet when I saw all the members of the Liberal Party who had opposed the lifting of the statute of limitations rush to the back of the chamber to shake the hand of the victims and say “well done”. They were just dripping in hypocrisy. It was shocking.

Now we come to some of the bills that we introduced to stem crime in our community. I have already spoken about the Criminal Law (Unlawful Consorting and Prohibited Insignia) Act, which the bikies hate. We as politicians look for third party endorsements. Members all go out and get photos taken near a school or with someone in their community at a sporting club, looking for third party endorsement. No-one has a better third party endorsement than I have, have they? I have the bikie Troy Mercanti walking into court with a T-shirt that said, Mr Squigley, eff your laws. What a third party endorsement! The bikies hate it. I have a little amendment in mind just to turn it a bit tighter on them, subject to —

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Why don’t you stay on for a few more years? You should stay on for a few more years to finish it all off.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I am going to stay on long enough to make sure that this community understands the rubbish that members opposite go on with prior to the next election—this rubbish of fear. I will be here to call it out. This is just a fear campaign to make the population scared so that they will vote for members opposite. They would not vote for them rationally. I worked on stations on horseback up in Mardathuna and in Hill Springs up in the Murchison, and you have to scare the cattle along to keep them moving. That is what members opposite have to do with the population. Crack the whip, put the fear of God into them, and then say, “You’ve got to vote for us, we’re the solution to your problems.” Just whip, whip, like we used to do out there at Mardathuna. Not that I was very good; I cracked myself a few times, but anyway, that is another point.

We also introduced a presumption against bail for anyone charged with terrorism. We withheld parole. That was a really good one. We are talking about being tough and not letting crime get out of control. We brought in a law that meant that anyone who was a mass or serial killer may stay in prison for life, because the Attorney General—that is me at the moment, and I have done it—can prevent the Parole Board from considering parole for one of these abominable creatures. I have done it. The Attorney General can say, “No, he killed three people. He’s done 25 years, he’s up for parole; don’t even consider it.” That is how tough we got. They hate it.

In 2020, we gave the courts the power to impose orders permitting GPS. I want to talk about GPS. I have 60 seconds. Members opposite try to scare this community about GPS; they did not put one on during their eight years! Then we ran a trial to see that we could do it and make it effective, then members opposite started criticising us that the trial was running too long, because it ran for a year. We cannot satisfy them! What they have to do is scare the people. It is their only hope. Just like we used to scare the cattle, they have to scare the people, and then they might squeeze a couple of votes out of frightened folk. I meet people from all around the world who say, “What a wonderful



**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 13 March 2024]

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city; what a wonderful, safe place to come and raise our children.” That is what they say to me in Butler when we have so many people coming here.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Attorney General, in accordance with standing order 61, even though I have enjoyed your trip down memory lane, this business is interrupted and adjourned.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

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