



# Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTIETH PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION  
2020

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 23 September 2020



# Legislative Assembly

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**THE SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson)** took the chair at 12 noon, acknowledged country and read prayers.

## **NOISE ABATEMENT WALL — CLAUGHTON RESERVE**

### *Petition*

**MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Water)** [12.01 pm]: I present a petition signed by 336 petitioners. It has been certified by the clerks and is in the following terms —

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled.

We, the undersigned say a proposed lack of noise abatement wall along the Tonkin Highway adjacent to Claughton Reserve and across the Redcliffe Bridge will see noise levels at the reserve and nearby homes rise to unacceptable levels, which will severely impact the local amenity.

Now we ask the Legislative Assembly to call on the Minister for Transport and Planning to immediately address our concerns by consulting with local residents to include noise abatement walls adjacent to Claughton Reserve and across the Redcliffe Bridge.

[See petition 191.]

**The SPEAKER:** Minister for Tourism, social distancing, please. Thank you.

## **PAPERS TABLED**

Papers were tabled and ordered to lie upon the table of the house.

## **ABORIGINAL POLICE SERVICE MEDALS — CARNARVON, SOUTH HEDLAND AND NEWMAN**

### *Statement by Minister for Police*

**MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland — Minister for Police)** [12.04 pm]: On 21 and 22 July this year, it was my pleasure, along with Deputy Commissioner Dreibergs, to present Aboriginal Police Service Medals at ceremonies in Carnarvon, South Hedland and Newman. These medals acknowledged the service, commitment and sacrifice of Aboriginal employees within the Western Australia Police Force, either in a sworn or unsworn capacity, and are part of our WA Police Force's commitment to reconciliation. On 12 July 2018, Commissioner of Police, Chris Dawson, delivered a historic apology to the Aboriginal people of this state. In making that apology, the commissioner committed the police to taking positive steps to heal any division between Aboriginal members of our community and police officers.

The inaugural medals were presented in May last year at Government House. The medal recognises the commitment and sacrifice of Aboriginal employees—officers and public servants—in their services to the WA Police Force. Its award symbolises an overdue but sincere thank you for services, and aims to demonstrate to Aboriginal police officers and staff, and to the wider police force and community, the degree to which the service of these officers is valued and respected. It is also designed to encourage Aboriginal people to seek employment within the police force, particularly through the police cadet program.

I take this opportunity to recognise the following medal recipients from those ceremonies: Rodney Bellotti, George Dann, Theonie Jacobs, Tammy Smith, Tracy Pickett, Mervyn Lockyer, Paul Mamid, Clive Ryder, Josephine McNally and Rod Wilkinson. A medal was also presented to Al Kickett in recognition of the service of his late father. These experienced officers have served as police aides, senior police aides, Aboriginal police liaison officers, police auxiliary officers, community liaison officers and police officers. They have worked throughout our vast state, particularly in our remote and regional towns of Broome, Bunbury, Carnarvon, Derby, Geraldton, Halls Creek, Karratha, Laverton, Mandurah, Marble Bar, Meekatharra, Narrogin, Newman, Port Hedland, South Hedland and York, and in the metropolitan area. I am sure all members will join me in thanking these officers for their invaluable service.

## **ABORIGINAL POLICE SERVICE MEDALS — KUNUNURRA AND BROOME**

### *Statement by Minister for Police*

**MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland — Minister for Police)** [12.07 pm]: Last week in the Kimberley, I was able to visit a number of police stations and community services to see the outstanding work of our regional officers, the improvements being made to their workplaces and the strong partnerships formed with local community organisations. In addition to this, it was also my privilege, along with Deputy Commissioner Gary Dreibergs,

to present a number of Aboriginal Police Service Medals in ceremonies at Kununurra and Broome on 17 and 20 September. As I noted in this place, these medals are a significant marker of the Western Australia Police Force's path to reconciliation with Aboriginal Western Australians. They show both members of Aboriginal communities and the wider Western Australian community the value placed on the role of past and current WA Police Force Aboriginal employees and the importance of their contribution to policing.

Police records indicate that over 660 Aboriginal people have worked with police as Aboriginal police liaison officers since the 1970s. Of these, an estimated 460 officers were employed for at least three years. Currently, there are Aboriginal police officers and staff working in a range of frontline, investigative, community engagement and leadership roles.

In Kununurra, medals were presented to John Birch, Arnold Birch, Frederick Martin, Rex McIntosh and Percival Hunter. A medal was also presented to Kathleen Carter, in recognition of her late father's service.

In Broome, with the member for Kimberley, medals were presented to Irenaeus "Eric" Cox, Michael Corpus, Damien Manado, Gordon Marshall, Lindsay Greatorex, Allan Tang Wei, Gregory Tait, Warren Greatorex, John Albert and Luka Gray. Senator Pat Dodson also received a medal for his nephew Ronald Dodson, who could not be present. Hasimah Hajinoor received a medal for her son Ryan Sgro; Harley Howard for his late father; Mark and Tania Bin Bakar for their son Lindsay Bin Bakar; and Shereen Bin Hitam for her partner, Howard Lockyer.

I also recognise and thank the families and friends who supported all our award recipients throughout their careers, some of whom joined us, and others were there in spirit. These ceremonies would not have been possible without the tireless work and impressive organisational skills of Acting Inspector Les Plane. These presentations cumulatively represent decades of service. These police employees, sworn and unsworn, have served our community with distinction, protecting the lives of those under their care. Without doubt, they have imparted more knowledge than the training they received and have left an indelible mark on their colleagues and communities.

### ANNUAL REPORTS — TABLING DELAY

#### *Statement by Treasurer*

**MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park — Treasurer)** [12.10 pm]: I rise briefly to inform the house about the late tabling of some 2019–20 annual reports. A number of agencies will not be in a position to table their annual reports on time consistent with the current requirements of the Financial Management Act 2006. Section 64 of the FMA requires ministers to table an agency's annual report, and the Auditor General's opinion, if applicable, within 90 days after the end of a financial year. When a minister is unable to do so, they are required to inform Parliament under section 65 of the FMA on or before the expiry of the 90 days—that is, 28 September this year. The minister is required to inform Parliament of their inability to table the annual report, the reasons for that inability, and the anticipated date of tabling the annual report.

Following precedent set in 2017, these accountability requirements can be administratively achieved by way of tabling individual ministerial notification through one minister—me as Treasurer in the Legislative Assembly, and the minister representing me in the Legislative Council, on behalf of other ministers. Ministers have notified me in writing of the agencies within their portfolios that are unable to table annual reports by 28 September. They have also included information about their reasons for that inability, and the anticipated date on which they will table their department's annual report.

Therefore, in accordance with section 65 of the FMA, I now table the notifications provided by affected ministers.

[See papers [3725–3733](#).]

### BANNED DRINKERS REGISTER TRIAL — PILBARA

#### *Statement by Minister for Racing and Gaming*

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Racing and Gaming)** [12.11 pm]: I rise to update the house about a very significant initiative the McGowan government is implementing for the people of the Pilbara, the banned drinker register trial. Late last month, I travelled to the Pilbara with the member for Pilbara to announce that a local Western Australian company, Scantek, has been selected by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries as the provider for the BDR trial software and technology. This is a \$1.9 million contract that has been awarded to a WA-based company, which will create jobs for Western Australian people. The trial will begin on 1 December 2020 across the entire Pilbara region and will run for a two-year period.

The BDR trial demonstrates the McGowan government's commitment to working with all stakeholders in the community and the industry to come up with new solutions to tackling alcohol-related harm. As opposed to current community-based measures to limit people's access to liquor, the BDR is a new measure that aims to identify problem drinkers, remove their access to alcohol, and provide them with support services. The BDR technology will assess a person's identification to determine whether they are on the register, with a visual indicator used to alert staff if they are a banned drinker. Personal information relating to people on the BDR will remain confidential and no records will be kept by licensees about the purchaser and what they purchase, or if they are refused.

The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries will have people on the ground in the Pilbara up until the trial start date to liaise with licensees, non-government organisations, service providers, police and the community. This engagement will ensure that all stakeholders are extensively consulted with so they understand what the trial means for them. The trial will be independently evaluated during its operation to examine its impact. The Public Policy Institute of the University of Western Australia has been in discussions with the department to undertake this work.

I have also recently visited the Kimberley and have had some very positive discussions with local government, local licensees and police in Broome and Kununurra, who are all committed to undertake a community-funded BDR and takeaway alcohol management system in the Kimberley. I have progressed these discussions since my visit and have formally written to the Kimberley Zone and liquor accords to confirm their support for the project to proceed.

Alcohol-related issues are incredibly complex and are not an easy problem to address, but the McGowan government is committed to doing what it can to tackle alcohol-related harm. The BDR is a significant step in trying to add another effective tool to help those affected by alcohol-related harm.

### LICENCE PROCESSING CENTRE — COLLIE

*Statement by Minister for Mines and Petroleum*

**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Mines and Petroleum)** [12.14 pm]: I rise to inform the house of the successful delivery of yet another government initiative for the people of Collie and the south west, the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety's new Collie regional licence processing centre. Collie has played a vital role in the history of Western Australia for more than 100 years to date, supplying power to Perth and the rest of the south west with its large coal-fired generators. Changing technology has led to doubt and uncertainty for the town. However, the McGowan Labor government is committed to Collie and to securing opportunities for it to grow.

On Friday, 18 September, I had the privilege of opening this new licence processing centre with the member for Collie–Preston, Hon Mick Murray, MLA, and staff from the department. The department worked closely with the Collie delivery unit, which was established by the McGowan government to promote initiatives that support the future prosperity of the town. The office is located at 66 Forrest Street in the Collie town centre, and has recruited 11 new staff, who commenced training in late August. The Collie team members are all locals from the south west, with eight from Collie or the immediate surrounds, and one each from Brunswick, Busselton and Harvey. The team will be processing licence and renewal applications for electricians, gasfitters, plumbers and high-risk workers, and for a range of dangerous goods. The existing department mines safety office in Wittenoom Street will continue to operate.

I would like to congratulate the new team members and thank the department for its hard work. I would also like to recognise the Collie delivery unit, the South West Development Commission, the Collie Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and other involved locals for their support on this project.

The 10 full-time roles in the Collie licence processing centre have been created through \$300 000 of additional salary funding provided by the government. This funding, along with the \$20 million Collie Futures fund, is driving Collie's future through a number of important initiatives. In addition to this new office, the McGowan government's Collie Futures fund is responsible for constructing the \$5.7 million Lake Kepwari recreation development, now nearing completion, upgrading the Collie scenic drive, building 12 kilometres of new mountain bike trails in Arklow forest, and many more projects.

Establishing the Collie regional licence processing centre has been a rewarding project that underscores the McGowan government's determination to help steer Collie towards a more resilient economic future.

### CORONAVIRUS — WA RECOVERY PLAN — ASIAN ENGAGEMENT

*Statement by Minister for Asian Engagement*

**MR P.C. TINLEY (Willagee — Minister for Asian Engagement)** [12.16 pm]: Just over 12 months ago, I launched, on behalf of the McGowan government, this state's first ever Asian engagement strategy. The strategy recognises the importance of Western Australian trade to our economy and identifies that by 2030, Western Australia will have increased trade and investment, delivering job creation and economic growth; diversified the economy through development of the priority sectors; and developed an Asian-engaged workforce through capacity building and relationships. International trade contributes more than \$180 billion per annum into Western Australia's economy, most of which comes from our trade with Asia. The economic contribution of WA trade is not just about the state's balance sheet, as important as that is. For up to half a million Western Australian households, WA trade equals WA jobs. That is why supporting our export sector is an essential part of the McGowan government's \$5.5 billion WA recovery plan. This includes maintaining the deep relationships WA has in markets, so that when this pandemic ends, which it will, WA will be in the best possible position to understand and capitalise on new supply chains, understand disrupted consumer demand, and be able to identify new market opportunities.

Invest and Trade WA, WA's trade and investment shopfront within the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, Western Australia's overseas trade commissioners and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's agribusiness food and trade team have all demonstrated resilience, dedication and creativity to maintain and grow WA's trade relationships, despite closed international borders. This has included virtual trade shows; our trade commissioners engaging with the local Western Australian business community to build capacity and provide market intelligence; and, last week, WA signing a memorandum of understanding to establish a formal economic partnership with the province of Ba Ria-Vung Tau in Vietnam.

The McGowan government is also investing more than \$40 million to support WA's food industries, which have continued to successfully meet domestic and export demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the obvious challenges.

In my portfolio of fisheries, the McGowan government has provided additional investment to expand the Albany shellfish hatchery, which will support WA's rapidly expanding shellfish industry. The Geraldton finfish nursery also received additional funding under the WA recovery plan and will also support the creation of hundreds of new jobs in regional WA. The McGowan government also acted quickly to support the \$600 million commercial fishing sector and protect thousands of jobs in regional WA, including supporting what is arguably WA's most famous export apart from iron ore, the western rock lobster industry.

It is critical that small to medium businesses in WA are supported to understand the impacts of COVID on our Asian markets, and to do the work now to prepare for when borders re-open. That is why I have asked JTSI to re-open the Access Asia business grants, which were suspended in the early days of the COVID pandemic, to re-focus and re-orientate to virtual engagement, business planning and marketing activities. More details will follow shortly on when the next round will re-open.

### **RAILWAY (BBI RAIL AUS PTY LTD) AGREEMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2020**

#### *Introduction and First Reading*

Bill introduced, on motion by **Mr M. McGowan (Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade)**, and read a first time.

Explanatory memorandum presented by the minister.

#### *Second Reading*

**MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade)** [12.20 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Railway (BBI Rail Aus Pty Ltd) Agreement Amendment Bill 2020 is to ratify amendments to the Railway (BBI Aus Pty Ltd) Agreement Act 2017. This will, firstly, extend the deadline for the submission by BBI Rail Aus Pty Ltd—as the company under the BBI state agreement—for the railway project by 18 months and mean that the current deadline of 30 September 2020 will be extended to 31 March 2022. It will also provide for a further extension, at the minister's discretion, of up to 18 months beyond this date. Secondly, given the extension of the deadline for the submission of the initial railway project proposals, it will expressly provide that force majeure may not be claimed by the company for any reason to justify any future delay in submitting the proposals. Thirdly, it will expressly recognise that the state may enact general legislation that may substitute for, or modify, clauses in the BBI state agreement relating to local participation. The bill being introduced today is in line with the government's commitment to support the Pilbara mining industry and is consistent with the long-established practice of significant railway infrastructure to be developed under state agreements.

As a reminder, the 2017 BBI state agreement was entered into by the state and ratified by the Parliament to allow the Balla Balla Infrastructure Group to develop 165 kilometres of heavy haulage railway. The railway will link a number of iron ore deposits, known as the Pilbara Iron Ore Project, to a transshipment port to be constructed at Balla Balla Harbour. The agreement stipulates that the port will be capable of exporting not less than 50 million tonnes of ore per annum. The BBI state agreement has a term commensurate with the special railway licence to be granted under it—namely, 20 years from the grant date, with a provision for two 10-year extensions. The total capital investment for the project is expected to be in the order of \$7.3 billion, generating 3 300 jobs during construction and 910 jobs once it is in operation.

Since the BBI state agreement was ratified by Parliament in 2017, the proponents have continued to develop the commercial requirements to deliver an integrated mine, rail and port project. It has also met many of the obligations contained within the state agreement relating to the construction of the railway. To date, the proponents have achieved the following milestones. They have submitted reports on investigative works under clause 5 of the state BBI state agreement. These are the preparatory works for geological, geophysical, geotechnical, engineering and environmental investigations and studies, as well as marketing and finance studies. They have received approval for submissions made under clause 7 of the state agreement for the railway corridor. They have received approval under clause 8 of the state agreement for submissions detailing the area and layout of the railway in the port area. They have received approval under clause 9 of the state agreement for a community development plan. They have received

approval under clause 10 of the BBI state agreement for a local industry participation plan. They have formed an incorporated joint venture to enable the Flinders Mines Pilbara iron ore project to be developed and to be the foundation customer for the project under a long-term infrastructure services agreement. The BBI state agreement stipulates that the carriage of ore will be for no less than 20 years and no less than 25 million tonnes per annum from the Flinders Mines Pilbara iron ore project. They have reached all native title and heritage agreements with the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi and Wintawari Guruma people upon whose lands the integrated mine, rail and port project will be developed. They have negotiated and agreed to most agreements with underlying landholders, including pastoralists and mining companies. They have received primary approvals for the integrated project, including environmental approvals under ministerial statements 945, 1006, 1014 and 924; environmental approvals under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999; and rail safety accreditation.

However, despite the significant progress made to date, recent global events have contributed to delays to the project. This variation agreement will overcome the imminent time constraints within the BBI state agreement for the submission of initial project proposals for the railway, which would have otherwise been required by 30 September 2020. In agreeing to this extension, the McGowan government reinforces its commitment to supporting projects that can create jobs and deliver growth and economic development to Western Australia, noting the many challenges that we as a state have faced during the past year.

The variation agreement also contemplates the potential for future general legislation to enhance local participation and procurement. This will apply to the railway project under the BBI state agreement in substitution for, or in modification of, the existing provisions of the state agreement relating to local participation. This is consistent with the government's commitment to maximising local participation.

Although the integrated project has yet to make a final investment decision, the proponents have commenced engagement with the local community, which has included the establishment of regional offices, a commitment to the early listing of proposed packages of work, and the undertaking that the project's head contractor and tier 1 and tier 2 contractors will be contractually obligated to appoint a local engagement agent. This work is to ensure that there is an understanding of the capability of local industry as procurement planning is undertaken and decisions are made. It will provide opportunities for those contractors, where possible, to work with local and Western Australian-based industry to maximise business engagement with the project.

As was outlined during the ratification of the agreement in 2017, this project will support the delivery of significant positive outcomes for the local communities and those businesses servicing the Western Australian mining and resources sectors. The integrated project has the potential to generate significant jobs in both its construction and operation phases, and it must be acknowledged that it is a project that has had the support of both sides of the house.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr A. Krsticevic**.

## **BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY (SECURITY OF PAYMENT) BILL 2020**

### *Introduction and First Reading*

Bill introduced, on motion by **Mr J.R. Quigley (Minister for Commerce)**, and read a first time.

Explanatory memorandum presented by the minister.

### *Second Reading*

**MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Butler — Minister for Commerce)** [12.28 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

Today is a historic day for all participants in the building and construction industry in Western Australia. In August 2016, the Western Australian Labor Party, when in opposition, made a promise that if elected it would pursue a bold reform agenda to provide a new and fairer system for all persons who carry out construction work or supply related goods and services in the construction industry. The building and construction industry is a vital part of our economy, providing the jobs, housing and critical infrastructure to meet the needs of all Western Australians. The industry is also a significant source of employment and income for both the Australian and Western Australian economies. It hosts the largest number of small businesses in this state, with hundreds of thousands of people earning a living through the building and construction industry.

Our election commitment was made in recognition of the fact that the state's construction industry has a long history of businesses and their families suffering significant financial losses due to non-payment and mistreatment. In many cases, these businesses provide their own capital up-front for materials and labour; therefore, when the person they are working for does not pay or goes bust, the consequences can be absolutely devastating. These include not being able to pay staff, owing large debts such that people cannot ever restart in the industry, and suicide and relationship breakdowns. This is the problem of "security of payment", and it has been, and continues to be, a blight on our state.

The problem of security of payment has far-reaching ramifications, not only for industry participants, but also across the broader community. It weakens the industry and fundamentally stifles innovation, investment and economic growth. It makes sense that if people could guarantee that they would get paid for the work they do, they would have more confidence to build and expand their businesses. If they could have security of payment, they would be able to create job opportunities and be in a financial position to take on more staff, trades and apprentices. They could get more Western Australians into jobs, and provide our young people with their first job. But the current reality is that businesses need to contend with the constant fear of not getting paid on time or at all, and do not have access to effective rights and protections under the law.

The McGowan government committed to unlocking cash flow in the industry and supporting those who carry out the building and construction work in our state, particularly in this period of economic recovery. I stand here proudly today to deliver on those election commitments. This historic bill will improve security of payment and fairness across the Western Australian building and construction industry. It is the result of an incredible breadth of consultation across all sectors of the industry, including on a consultation draft released earlier this year. I take this opportunity to thank the building and construction industry for their engagement in the consultation process and acknowledge the productive and constructive input provided by a large number of groups and stakeholders into the development of this bill.

I also wish to thank Mr John Fiocco, and Hon Matthew Swinbourn, MLC, a member in the other place, for spearheading the initial review process, which was established by my colleague and former Minister for Commerce Hon Bill Johnston, MLA. Following his review, Mr Fiocco recommended a number of reforms to the government, including the adoption of many of the recommendations of the national review into security of payment laws conducted by Mr John Murray, AM, on behalf of the commonwealth government. Mr Fiocco recommended, and this government has accepted, that Western Australia's security of payment laws should be made more consistent with the east coast model, which is based on New South Wales legislation. The principle of greater national consistency in this context is an important one, as it will ensure that if someone carries out work, the law will support them to get paid, regardless of which state or territory the person operates in. As a result, this bill will implement a substantial package of law reform to ensure that all participants in the building and construction industry in Western Australia can be confident of getting paid on time, every time, for the work they do. Make no mistake about it: the bill is a game changer for security of payment.

I want to address some of the major reforms that will be introduced. The bill will establish, for the first time in Western Australia, a new framework of security of payment laws that, over time, will replace the Construction Contracts Act 2004. The CC act, which was introduced by the Gallop Labor government, was the first piece of security of payment legislation ever introduced into Western Australia, and was a vital foundation for resolving construction disputes. Whilst the CC act was revolutionary at the time for Western Australia, it is clear that the many challenges faced by businesses today in getting paid are not adequately served by this legislation. It was made clear to Mr Fiocco, as well as Mr Murray in his review, that legislation based on preserving the commercial bargain struck between parties has not always achieved the right outcome in an industry plagued by inequality of bargaining power, unfair risk allocation and lengthy and delayed payment times. It was a Labor government that first addressed the problem of security of payment back in 2004, and, 16 years later, another Labor government stands ready to tackle it once again.

Western Australian contractors will now have access to the same rights and protections under security of payment laws that their eastern states counterparts have had for many years. Crucially, part 2 of the bill will establish a statutory right to receive payment and an effective process to recover delayed payments through rapid adjudication and/or court proceedings. This will provide more transparency and structure to issues such as dates for claims, approvals and payment. The bill will require timely engagement in the payment process and impose significant consequences for failure to do so.

One of the biggest criticisms of the CC act has been that subcontractors are often not properly informed about why payments are being withheld or delayed. They are left to either wait until payment is due to find out whether they will be paid the full amount claimed, or commence an adjudication, only to then discover the full reasons for non-payment. This does not guarantee prompt payment and leaves the party who carried out the work in the unenviable position of chasing their cash or commencing an adjudication with limited or no knowledge of the case they will face and the likelihood of success.

Under this bill, a party who carries out or undertakes to carry out construction work or the supply of goods and services—the claimant—is entitled to make a progress payment claim at the end of each month. To ensure that cash flows quickly through the contracting chain, payment claims made under the bill from head contractors to principals will need to be paid within 20 business days of the claim or any lesser period stipulated in their construction contract. Payment claims by subcontractors to head contractors, or between subcontractors, will now need to be paid within 25 business days or any lesser period in the construction contract. Payment claims for certain residential-related construction work will need to be paid within the date specified in the contract or within 10 business days if no date is specified.

The party that receives a payment claim—the respondent—must issue a payment schedule within 15 business days of receiving the claim if it does not intend to pay the full amount claimed. The payment schedule must outline the amount to be paid and the reasons that payment is being withheld. Once presented with the payment schedule, the claimant can make an informed decision about whether to apply for rapid adjudication to recover the full amount it considers is owed. If the claimant elects to go to rapid adjudication, the respondent cannot raise reasons for withholding payment during that process not included in the payment schedule, such as set-offs or cross-claims. This means the respondent must treat payment schedules with the utmost care.

Alternatively, if the respondent does not give a payment schedule within the time required or pay the full amount claimed, the claimant may elect to either recover the full amount as a debt owed through the courts or apply for rapid adjudication. Before applying for rapid adjudication, the claimant must give the respondent notice of its intention to do so and a further opportunity to give a payment schedule within five business days. If no second-chance payment schedule is received, the respondent will not be entitled to provide a response or any submissions during the adjudication process.

The rapid adjudication process under part 3 of this bill, as under the CC act and elsewhere, remains a “pay now, argue later” scheme designed to deliver an interim, binding decision so that works can continue, but without affecting the parties’ legal rights to go to court or use any other dispute-resolution mechanism if unsatisfied with the decision. The adjudication process is to be carried out by an experienced, independent registered adjudicator within a compressed time frame. Applications for adjudication are to be made by the claimant to a registered adjudicator specified in the construction contract, or, if no adjudicator is specified, the claimant is free to lodge the application with an authorised nominating authority of its choice. An authorised nominating authority is an individual or organisation approved by the Building Commissioner to appoint an adjudicator. Currently, a number of organisations perform a similar role under the CC act as “appointers”, and elsewhere across Australia. It is expected that these organisations will apply to be authorised nominating authorities under the bill. The adjudication process is designed to ensure claims are determined with speed, efficiency and minimum formality and cost, so that money continues to flow through the contracting chain with minimum disruption. Once an adjudication application is made by the claimant, the adjudicator specified in the contract or appointed by the authorised nominating authority can make a decision within as few as 10 business days if the respondent does not provide, or is not permitted to provide, an adjudication response, or within 10 business days after a valid adjudication response is provided.

Clauses 35, 36 and 38 of the bill detail the powers and functions of the adjudicator. The process is not judicial and the decisions are to be based largely upon the payment claim, payment schedule, adjudication application and response, but the adjudicator can request further submissions, call conferences and carry out inspections of the construction work. The adjudicator must decide the amount, if any, owed by the respondent to the claimant in respect to the payment claim, including the return or release of any performance security, the date on which the amount became or will become payable, and any interest that is owed. The adjudicator must give brief reasons for their decision in the form of an adjudication determination.

As the parties retain their rights to go to court or commence other dispute resolution processes, adjudication determinations under the bill are not, as a general rule, open to appeal or review. However, part 3 of the bill introduces a limited right to seek a review of an adjudicator’s determination by a senior adjudicator. This limited right of review will be available only for high-value disputes, but will provide an aggrieved claimant or respondent with an alternative remedy to be exhausted outside of curial proceedings. This review mechanism is based on similar laws in Singapore, and the recommendations of Mr Murray’s review for the commonwealth government.

The bill will also introduce measures to improve the overall fairness of contracting practices in the building and construction industry. Too often people find that the rules are stacked against them right from the very outset. If a party gets squeezed because it lacks the same bargaining power as the other party, some might invoke theories of free market economics to explain or even justify this situation. They might say, “Well, that’s just the way it is, and it’s always going to be like that”, but I resoundingly reject the notion that an enhanced bargaining position in a free market is a licence to withhold moneys from those who are entitled to it. As a community, there are certain standards that we can all and should all expect for contracting practices in the industry.

This bill will introduce a range of mechanisms to improve the fairness of contracting practices across the industry. These include voiding unfair notice-based time bars, which operate to unfairly limit or restrict a contractor’s entitlement to claim or to receive payment under a construction contract; enacting a broader prohibition on “paid-when-paid” provisions; as well as requiring certain contracts to be put in written form and meet minimum standards to remove any uncertainty about each party’s rights and obligations.

Another key pillar of reform is the introduction in part 4 of the bill of a retention trust scheme that will apply down the supply chain. This is a first of its kind in Australia, and it will protect subcontractors’ retention money from being misappropriated or lost altogether in insolvency. Often, retention money may equal or even exceed a subcontractor’s profit margin for a construction project. But right now, under the law of this state, it is perfectly legal for a party holding or withholding retention money to use this money as they see fit. They can use it to prop up or increase their own cash flow, or even apply it for purposes totally extraneous to the construction contract, such as buying

a luxury car or financing an expensive holiday. When a party holding retention money fails, the moneys owed by way of retention are almost always unsecured claims; therefore, a subcontractor can, on average, expect to receive next to nothing of what they are owed. The McGowan government believes that subcontractor retention money should be protected. It should no longer be treated within the industry as an interest free loan that one can use for whatever purpose they choose. For that reason, the bill will impress retention money with trust status by force of law and require that it be ring-fenced in a dedicated trust account to separate it wholly and completely from the trustee's general pool of assets. When a party fails to fulfil their obligations as a trustee of the retention money, beneficiary subcontractors will have access to existing general law remedies, and, in some cases, a statutory right to suspend ongoing construction work or the supply of related goods and services.

Another key feature is part 7 of the bill, which provides the building industry regulators—the Building Commissioner and Building Services Board—with new powers to remove from the industry building contractors with a history of insolvency or not paying court-ordered or adjudication debts. Let it be known that the holding of a registration as a building contractor in this state is a privilege; it is not a right. Those with a history of ripping off subcontractors, or engaging in “phoenixing” activity by driving a construction business into the ground and then re-emerging from the ashes with a brand-new business, will be placed squarely within the line of sight of the regulator's new powers. If someone wants to be a registered building contractor, they need to play by the rules, make sure they run their business properly and pay subcontractors who work for them, or else they may rightly be required to show cause to the board as to why they should be allowed to be a registered player in the industry.

I conclude by emphasising that this bill will introduce historic reforms to give confidence back to subcontractors. These reforms will promote business growth and innovation, and make this state a fairer and more desirable place for all to do business; safeguard the livelihood and wellbeing of the Western Australians behind our construction businesses; and complement measures the McGowan government has already delivered through the expanded use of project bank accounts on government projects and enhancing the investigation powers of the state's Small Business Commissioner.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr A. Krsticevic**.

**APPROPRIATION (RECURRENT 2017–18) SUPPLEMENTARY BILL 2018**  
**APPROPRIATION (CAPITAL 2017–18) SUPPLEMENTARY BILL 2018**

*Second Reading — Cognate Debate*

Resumed from 24 October 2019.

**MR Z.R.F. KIRKUP (Dawesville)** [12.48 pm]: I rise to talk on the Appropriation (Recurrent 2017–18) Supplementary Bill 2018 and the Appropriation (Capital 2017–18) Supplementary Bill 2018. The government has a lot on its legislative agenda today. Once again, it is fairly vacuous and shallow, but that is what we have found from this government. It lacks any sort of legislative priority whatsoever.

**Mr D.J. Kelly**: You should be out doorknocking. You know that. You're the current member for Dawesville.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP**: You are the current member for Bassendean.

**Mr D.J. Kelly**: And I will be for a long time, comrade.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP**: With that emboldened ego, I look forward to our candidate in Bassendean taking the fight up to the member.

**Mr D.J. Kelly**: Whenever they might be preselected.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP**: There is a very competitive field for Bassendean. There are many, many people in the member's community who want to get rid of him as a member of Parliament and want to nominate for the Liberal Party, let me tell the member.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP**: Absolutely—a very good person.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk)**: Minister! It is like shooting fish in a barrel. If you could refrain, that would be great.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP**: Thank you very much, Acting Speaker.

**Mr D.J. Kelly**: And there's one fisherman!

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP**: That is right.

I think it is important today to talk about the appropriations bills and the fair use of —

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER**: Minister!

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I thank the minister for the contribution!

It is important that we are talking today about the use of taxpayers' money. That is exactly what appropriations bills grant. Today on the front page of *The West Australian* is a headline about the very unusual use of taxpayers' money to defend the ego of this Premier in advance of attacks from a Queenslander because the Premier finds that he has somehow had his reputation injured by the comments of that Queenslander, which I find fairly remarkable. Premier McGowan is counter-suing, using taxpayers' money and the state's legal defences, because he feels as though he has somehow had his ego injured, which is remarkable to me, because the only damage I can see is that the Premier continues to be buoyed in the public polling by the political decisions he has made, yet somehow he feels the need to use taxpayers' money in defending —

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** That is right! I am sure one day when the member for Bassendean is leader, he will probably find a far better use of the state's resources, such as spending on classrooms in the member for Hillarys' district, where schools find their classroom ceilings collapsing, or addressing ambulance response times in the northern suburbs, which are so far going wanting—you know that well, Acting Speaker. We found that no ambulances were available to respond to priority call-outs north of the river between two-hour blocks on Friday. That is simply not good enough. That is where the state's money should be put. The state's money should be spent not on defending this Premier's bloated ego, but instead on the priorities that matter to real Western Australians—to every Western Australian. We have record levels of ambulance ramping and violence in our communities and an economic crisis occurring right across the state, but we see the government defending this Premier's reputation instead of standing up for Western Australians and, importantly, responding to the needs of the community across the board.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** Do you support Clive Palmer?

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

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I suspect that will always be the member for Bunbury's simplistic refrain, but I would be more concerned about the level of ambulance ramping in Bunbury and the emergency department time blowouts in his seat than anything else. That is what the member's community cares most about. I am certain, as the member advocates for here in Western Australia, that that is something the member would stand up for. That is what all of us would expect the money would be spent on—that is, making sure that there is appropriate investment in the concerns and priorities of people in our community. To be perfectly frank, the legal defence of the Premier's ego is not what Western Australians think their money should be spent on. They think the money could be spent on things that matter to them.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** We cannot have a 45-year-old woman in Greenfields getting hit over the head with a tyre iron and a lack of police in Mandurah, and think that the money should not be spent on police but would be better spent on defending the Premier's ego. How can the member defend that?

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** That is a ridiculous comparison.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** That is not a ridiculous comparison. We do not have an infinite bucket of money. We have limited resources in our state, and given the economic crisis we are facing, we are under more constraints than ever before. How can the member defend a dollar being spent on a defamation lawsuit instead of resourcing our state's police?

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** What a ridiculous comparison.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** It is not at all. We do not have an infinite supply of funds in our state.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** You now realise that, when you blew state debt out to \$40 billion.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I had nothing to do with that, but of course the reality is that this government has blown out debt far beyond what it inherited. We had nothing to do with that. That was due to decisions of this government.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, I call you to order for the first time.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Thank you, Acting Speaker.

In any case, the priorities of Western Australians —

**Mr D.T. Punch** interjected.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Member for Bunbury, every day I will defend the previous government's reputation, because we were a government that cared about all Western Australians, we were a government that governed for all Western Australians and we were a government that had capable ministers in our cabinet, unlike the cabinet that we see right now —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** — with a Premier who continues to overlook talent on his backbench —

**Mr D.T. Punch** interjected.

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

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** — because he wants to make sure he yields to his union paymasters. That is in stark contrast to the former government, which had talented ministers who governed for all Western Australians, and indeed that is exactly what we did. We are now here talking about the appropriations bills for 2017–18, and the point is making sure —

**Mr D.T. Punch** interjected.

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

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** — that there is appropriate and proper use of taxpayers' money. To be perfectly frank, I stand very proudly in saying that I do not think it should be spent on a defamation lawsuit. That money is better spent on making sure we have more police on our streets, expanded emergency departments, more nurses in our hospitals and not having classroom ceilings that collapse on children while they are still at school. I think that is where the money is probably better spent, but we will see.

The Premier clearly has an emboldened view of the world right now and a very inflated ego, and if it is bruised in any way, shape or form, he decides the best recourse is to sue. We will see. I wonder whether that is the right priority for Western Australia. I do not think it is. I think people want to see an economic plan from this government. They want to see a path forward during this crisis, and they simply do not have it. The government was very good at closing the state down, but I am not certain that there is a very good plan for opening the state back up again. That stands in stark contrast to the Liberal Party, which has already released a number of commitments and policies —

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I look forward to enlightening the member for Bassendean. The most important one released recently was the local jobs guarantee.

**Mr D.T. Punch** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Bunbury, I call you to order for the first time.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** The local jobs guarantee will make sure that local contractors —

**Mr D.T. Punch** interjected.

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

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** — get those local tenders that are put out. That is an important thing for local unemployment in our state. I do not think, member for Bassendean, that anyone would not think there is a need to do that. In my region, for example, a \$1.2 million landscaping contract went to a firm headquartered in Canada rather than a local supplier. Given the member for Bassendean's history, I expect that he would want to see local jobs staying in our state rather than them going overseas.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister!

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** We see that the government is not committed to local jobs or an economic plan. There is no plan for recovery, and that stands in stark contrast to the Liberal Party's plan. We have a plan to get ourselves out of —

**Mr D.T. Punch:** Where's the plan?

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Member for Bunbury, we have released the local jobs guarantee. That is an important and key element to ensuring that there is a strong sense of recovery and the Liberal Party can offer that vision for the future when we take office on 13 March next year.

Several members interjected.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I will tell the member for Bunbury this right now: the idea that the Liberal Party is somehow mimicking the government's commitments shows that we have local candidates who listen to their communities and who make commitments to ensure they respond to the community's needs. That is exactly what this is about. That is where the real priorities are. The real priority for Western Australians is not spending money on defamation lawsuits. It is making sure that money is spent on having more high-quality classrooms in our community, there are more nurses in our emergency departments and there is an expanded police presence on the ground in places such as Northbridge, which recently found itself called "fear city" under the lacking leadership of this government.

We have spoken about ambulance ramping for some time, but I thought it might be a good opportunity to go through where we find ourselves in Western Australia.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** How many shifts have you done?

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I have lost count now, member for Bassendean—so many.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Take your shoes off.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I do not know what that means.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Use your toes if you have lost count.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** It might go beyond that. I thank the member for Bassendean for that instructive recommendation. What an amazing contribution. Is that what the member suggests in cabinet when ministers cannot add up, which happens quite a lot of the time, because they find themselves more often than not at odds with community expectations?

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** How many shifts have you done?

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** As I have said, member for Bassendean, I have lost count. I do not know why the member is so obsessed with what I do, how I serve my community, how I spend my evenings, how I spend my weekends and how I spend my public holidays serving my district as a volunteer ambulance officer. If the member wants to keep that obsession going, he can go for his life. I suspect it perhaps has something to do with him liking to see me in some sort of green uniform. Maybe that is more of an insight into the member for Bassendean's mind than about what I get up to.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** I am interested. How many shifts have you done?

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I do not know. As I have said, I have lost count.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** More than five?

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** As I have said, I have lost count.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L. Mettam):** Member for Dawesville, do you like the interjections? It is a bit boring for the rest of us.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I look forward to the member for Bassendean going around and around in the same circle without the capacity to provide any constructive contribution to the important debate on the use of taxpayers' money, which, of course, is what we are here today to talk about. I think it is important that when we talk about the appropriations bills, we look at where the money could be better spent. The money could be better spent on expanding our hospitals and making sure that our emergency departments —

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I am sorry; I could not hear that last comment.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Go and wear the uniform and do some shifts! How many shifts have you done?

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Thank you very much, member for Bassendean. I appreciate, as always, your very enlightened contribution.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** It's a simple question.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** As I said, the answer is that I have lost count. If the member wants, we can go through it. I can send the member for Bassendean in the post a signed photo of me in a green uniform, if that is what he is really interested in. We will see how we go. I think it is important that we talk about where taxpayers' money is better spent—not on defamation lawsuits, but on priorities for all Western Australians. Let us look at ambulance ramping and the situation that we find ourselves in at the moment. For the interest of all members here, I will use the dataset for the last full year of the Liberal–National government, which was 2016 —

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** The last year for a long time.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Thank you, member for Bassendean; again, a very enlightened contribution—and the current year of the Labor state government. In January 2016, ambulance ramping was at 592 hours. In January 2020, before COVID-19 hit, ambulance ramping in our state was at 1 656 hours. That was an increase of 1 064 hours more ambulance ramping than in the final year of the Liberal–National government in January alone. Looking across the board, let us go to the last month of September.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** My apologies to the member for Dawesville; I have to go doorknocking in Dawesville.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** May I recommend that the member for Bassendean doorknocks very actively in Dawesville, because the more people he meets, the more votes Labor will lose.

**Mr S.K. L'Estrange:** That is a really good point. He is a vote multiplier for us!

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** That is right; more power to the member for Bassendean if he wants to get out there, member for Churchlands. I think it is important. The people want to see what the face of the Labor Party looks like, or, not really the face—the backroom dealer of the Labor Party and what they look like.

Unfortunately, if we go through the data for the months in 2016, we see an average of 1 127 hours of ambulance ramping during the final year of the Liberal–National government. If we compare that with the full last year of the

Labor government in 2019, we see that there was more than 2 034 hours of ambulance ramping in our state. That is wholly unacceptable for any Western Australian who finds themselves in the back of an ambulance and unable to be admitted to an emergency department because our hospitals simply do not have the capacity. It is even more concerning that in recent times, we have had situations whereby no ambulances were available to respond to priority emergency calls north of the river. In my district, for example, in the Mandurah and Peel region, every single available ambulance was in fact ramped last Tuesday and unable to respond to call-outs. In my district, a crew from Rockingham had to respond to a priority call-out in Dudley Park. We are very lucky to have exceptional men and women right across our paramedic and volunteer ambulance services, but crews in Rockingham should not have to respond to calls in Dudley Park. Similarly, we should not have a situation in which there is no ambulance north of the river available to respond to an emergency call-out for at least two hours, as occurred on Friday. I am very interested to see what the situation was there. Although I appreciate the minister's responses yesterday in question time, at this time, we have not had a full picture of what has happened.

We know that there has been a systemic failure by this government to respond to the health crisis in our community. We have not seen the investment required to make sure that we keep up with demand and the complexities of the patients who come through our emergency departments. We know that complex mental health conditions are increasing and the number of presentations of patients with mental health concerns are rising. We think that will only be exacerbated by the pandemic and the impacts that has on our community. I believe that situations such as this pandemic cause conditions referred to as great stressor events, which have significant ramifications across a person's life, family, relationships, finances and future. If a person has a significant lack of direction and understanding about what their future looks like, that is a very real concern that puts a lot of stress on that person and exacerbates mental health concerns. As an example, on Friday, there was a significant number of inpatient involuntary treatment orders, with an increase in some hospitals of more than double the number of people who are ordinarily involuntarily admitted to our state's hospitals. At one hospital, there were not enough secure beds to treat them. That is simply not good enough. This government points to its investment in mental health observation areas. They are important, but we want to see more investment in community and preventive mental health services. We know, for example, that this government is not following its own mental health plan priorities up until 2025, which showed that we need to increase expenditure from the Mental Health Commission's budget by, I think, up to four per cent into community and preventive mental health services. If we do not invest in community mental health up-front, people will not be able to access services at the very start of their mental health journey when issues might arise. Unfortunately, they then may not be able to get the treatment or appointments that they need.

At the other extreme, we find that there are now more admissions to our state's emergency departments. This government's so-called revolution of our state's health system that it was going to undertake when it first got elected to office simply has not occurred. We have not seen the promised cut to the elective surgery waitlist; in fact, we have seen it increase to nearly 30 000 people waiting for elective surgery. We have not seen a reduction in ambulance ramping times; in fact, we have seen ambulance ramping times continue to increase. We have not seen the promised massive rollout of medihotels in Joondalup and Murdoch and at Royal Perth Hospital. In fact, we have seen only one, and the medihotel that is most needed at Murdoch will not be finished until the end of 2022. The Labor Party commitments at the time were to somehow revolutionise our state's health system. It simply has not eventuated. The Labor Party has failed to respond to the health needs and concerns in our community. That has a very real impact. The government and its ministers cannot stand here, as they did during question time yesterday, and genuinely say that everything is going fine, our state's health system is all fine and there are no issues whatsoever. That is not the case. I do not think that it is going well out there, and continuing to ignore the crisis that is occurring in our community will only exacerbate the situation. The minister needs to stand up, take ownership of the issue and respond accordingly.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** We cannot continue in a situation whereby we have what I think is a deteriorating set of circumstances with ambulance ramping and systemic failure right across our hospitals. The doctors and nurses who serve very diligently and do amazing work in our state's health system are not being honoured by this government. Their service and dedication is not being honoured. They are being let down by this government's lack of action on our state's health system. We talk a lot of the time about metropolitan ambulance ramping, but the reality is that ambulance ramping and the situation that we face with our health crisis is occurring right across Western Australia. It is occurring in the regions and in our regional hospitals. We know that the four-hour rule in Bunbury is blown out quite significantly. Unfortunately, we know that tens of thousands of taxpayers' dollars are being spent on flying mental health patients from Geraldton down to Perth, often under sedation, with the assistance of the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the Western Australia Police Force. That costs a significant amount of money. The last thing that people who have very serious mental health concerns want is to wind up in a place that they are not familiar with, such as Royal Perth Hospital, far disconnected from places like Geraldton. There needs to be a better approach to the concerns that we have about mental health services and treatment in our community. To me, that is an absolute priority that should be addressed by this government. Given that we are dealing with the 2017–18 appropriation bills, it is something that I hope will be addressed in the upcoming state budget in October.

I am not entirely certain about that, because everything I hear from people across the sector is that there is not going to be an increase in the health budget or in investment in WA Health, which is where we need it. Unfortunately, I think the government will continue to kick the can down the road and put lives at risk.

From a local context, of course, I could not miss the opportunity to talk about Peel Health Campus and what is happening there. More recently at Peel, anecdotally, people are telling me that they are getting very good levels of service and treatment. I appreciate the work that the clinicians, doctors and nurses are doing at Peel Health Campus, responding in very constrained circumstances. I think that is a very good thing, but the reality is that Peel Health Campus is too small for our community. Since 1977, the hospital has expanded in size by five per cent, whereas the population of the Peel region has nearly doubled during that time. I recognise the government's contribution thus far to expand the emergency department at Peel Health Campus by adding eight emergency department waiting bays, but that is not the wholesale extension that the hospital requires. There is a real crisis going on at Peel Health Campus. I know from my own experience—the member for Bassendean alluded to this—and anecdotally that it is getting chock full of patients and that we cannot move people through the wards quickly enough. As I said in last week's grievance to the Minister for Health, I do not really care how the government decides to fix the hospital; I just want it fixed. The suggestion that has been bandied around is that significant investment in the hospital is required. I would like to see that. That is what is absolutely required. If the government thinks that it is necessary to put that hospital into public ownership to achieve that significant investment, that is up to it. All I care about is seeing greater investment in the hospital. That is all any Western Australian who lives in Mandurah cares about. All we care about in our community is investment in the hospital. The contract, the operating model and all the rest of it is a decision for government based on the advice it gets. What is most important for the people in my community is that they get a hospital that has been invested in and expanded to deal with the circumstances that we face.

On a not dissimilar topic, there has undoubtedly been an increase in the level of homelessness and street-present people in our community. I again recognise the good work of the City of Mandurah for the leadership it has shown to help address this very complex social issue. Investment has been made in key infrastructure projects to allow, for example, free showers and laundry services near the library in town. That is a very good thing. I recognise that the Minister for Community Services has forecast that there are possibly three locations for a Common Ground facility. I note that the members for Mandurah and Murray–Wellington support that. I genuinely believe that that is an important prospect that could be rolled out in Mandurah if it were done as part of a holistic plan to respond to street-present people and homelessness in our community. Having had conversations with the member for Carine, the idea of a Common Ground facility is important because of the complexity of the issue. If a Common Ground facility is built in our community, I hope that it will be part of the holistic approach that the City of Mandurah has already invested in. Undoubtedly, the minister would get the same level of advocacy from the member for Mandurah. If a Common Ground facility is rolled out in our community, it should be done in a manner that complements the amazing work of Peel Community Kitchen, the City of Mandurah and WestAus Crisis and Welfare Services, which are providing good community-based services in an approach that is important when it comes to something like a Common Ground facility.

I note that the minister has flagged the City of Fremantle and City of Stirling as two other possible options. Those are the three shortlisted sites and regardless of where the government decides to build the next Common Ground facility, it is inevitable that other ones will be rolled out in those communities at some point. Having had a conversation with the member for Carine, I am curious about where the government would build one in the City of Stirling if only for the fact that it is very obvious that the City of Mandurah and the City of Fremantle are obvious communities of interest. The City of Stirling is quite disparate because of the number of centres that exist within that very large local government area. In any case, I support getting something like a Common Ground facility in our community. Having spoken to people, I know that this is a very real issue and concern. Not only do the people in the district that I have the privilege of representing understand and recognise that it is a complex social issue, but also they realise that it requires a holistic approach to make sure that we can respond to what is an increasing crisis in our community. There were almost record levels of street-present people during the winter season that has just gone. That was obviously a concern during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we know historically that more street-present people go to Mandurah during the summer months, so if there is already a higher than average level of homelessness and people on the streets of Mandurah, I suspect that during summer the numbers will only increase.

Another local issue that I would like to very briefly mention is the increasing issue of crime and violence in our community. Oftentimes the issue raised with me is the level of hoon behaviour across key suburbs in my community, such as Seascapes, Halls Head and Falcon. Hooning is becoming a real issue, as is off-road trail bike riding in Dawesville. There is a lot of concern about the government's lack of response to that issue. We have held a number of community meetings and I understand that there is a sense of frustration in the community because of the government's lack of action to respond, but it is a fight that I am not going to give up on. It is important that the government provides a proper response to what people are very rightly concerned about. They hear the cars scream down key roads such as Peelwood Parade and they see the burnouts on the street. They realise that one day a car could crash through someone's home or there might be a motor vehicle accident, both of which puts lives at risk. It is not only a stupid thing to do, but also a very dangerous activity.

The level of violence in our community continues to be a concern that is very often raised with me. If people and their family members have not experienced violence themselves, they often see it reported on the news that once again there has been another violent incident in Mandurah. It is a concern to me that Mandurah will become known only for its violence. We are far more than that. We have an amazing community with amazing people who are very committed to making sure that we progress and look after each other but, unfortunately, time and again Mandurah is described in detrimental tones as an area that is full of violence and crime. We need to make sure there is a proper police response to that. I recognise that the government has invested to expand Mandurah Police Station. What is most important is that there are more police in our community.

Another topic that I wish to discuss is what I recognise as the government's continued commitment to the issue of Aboriginal suicides, particularly those of young people, in the Kimberley and right across our community. A number of recommendations came out of the coroner's report, which was released, I think, in February 2018; excuse my lack of recollection in that respect. The government took some time to respond, but it said that it overwhelmingly accepted those recommendations and would invest in them. Because of COVID, I am worried that the issue is not in the public's consciousness. We need to maintain a focus in this area because it will take a lot of time and energy. I note that work has been undertaken by a number of agencies to make sure that local mental health plans are established in concert with Aboriginal communities. It is vitally important to me that that work remains a focus of government and the agencies that are involved in those very difficult circumstances in which we have seen, unfortunately, not just a spike but an increase in the rate of Aboriginal suicides, particularly in young people and particularly in the midwest and the Kimberley.

I worry that the Aboriginal suicide rate in the midwest is not always a focus. I have spoken to people at the National Suicide Prevention and Trauma Recovery Project. If we take the Yamatji people as a cohort and compare them with the rest of the world, we find that that group has a higher suicide rate per capita than any other in the world. We need to make sure that there is a sustained focus. It is important that any service and outreach is done in a way that is not only culturally appropriate, but also led by Aboriginal people on the ground to empower them appropriately. I have spoken about this issue in nearly every single budget speech and I will continue to do so. This might be my last year of contributing in this place but if it is not, I will continue to raise it in every single contribution I give to the budget debate because Parliament needs to be entirely focused on it to make sure that regardless of the politics, there is increased investment in this area. The government has done that and it is important to continue that focus as much as we can.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Madam Acting Speaker —

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I have yet to finish, member for Mandurah. Is it a point of order?

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** No, I was going to speak.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I have not finished!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Dawesville.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Thank you very much.

I think it is important that when we look at this issue, we make sure that there is significant investment.

**MR S.K. L'ESTRANGE (Churchlands)** [1.18 pm]: I am sure that the Leader of the House will get plenty of opportunities to speak, which he normally does. As a minister, he gets many opportunities to stand in this place. Given the importance of the Appropriation (Recurrent 2017–18) Supplementary Bill 2018 and the Appropriation (Capital 2018–19) Bill, which were put forward by the McGowan Labor government, is it not interesting, members, that we are dealing with legislation from 2017? It tells us a little bit about the Labor government's management of the parliamentary process when just over halfway into its third year it has run out of legislation. Notwithstanding the very difficult circumstances COVID has presented for us as a state, this government has been quite slack, quite lazy and quite inept.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** We just wanted to see whether you had anything new to say, and clearly you don't.

**Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE:** The member for Bunbury should think about the performance of the government backbench over the last three and a half years. Maybe the Premier has been giving backbenchers the signal that none of them are good enough, because no backbencher has been elevated to a cabinet position since he became Premier—none. There has been no movement, and that is with the announcement of two, now three I think, retirements. With the three retirements, three senior positions will become available, but none of the backbenchers are good enough.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** How did you go in cabinet in your time?

**Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE:** The former Premier of the Liberal–National government had set cabinet reshuffles and then what I call accidental reshuffles. He had set reshuffles in his first and second terms, and he had some adjustments he had to make due to retirements and things like that. On the whole, he had one reshuffle per term. The government has had none, so the member for Bunbury is not good enough. The Premier is saying, “You are not good enough to be a cabinet minister.” It is pretty simple. He is saying that to everybody else.

Liberal Party candidates are out on the ground throughout Western Australia working really, really hard. We have some outstanding candidates, and so we should. They are really taking it up to the government's backbenchers. We have the wonderful former police officer and union representative George Tilbury—we have a union guy up against a union guy in Forrestfield! Have members ever heard of such a thing? We have a fantastic candidate there. We have Liam Staltari in Kalamunda. The member for Kalamunda has been absent from his community for three and a half years. That community is now getting representation. I was in the electorate with our candidate for Kalamunda, Liam Staltari, visiting and chatting with local businesses and the local volunteer bush fire brigade. They have needs that our candidate is looking into that the government has not touched. The member for Kalamunda is sitting on a 2.5 per cent margin. Liam Staltari is going to have a really good hard crack at that. I think he has knocked on more doors in the last three months than the member for Kalamunda has seen in the last three and a half years.

Then we have the member for Kingsley—a lovely lady. She is pleasant and sits up the back of the chamber. What has she done? What has she actually done in the Kingsley electorate? Our candidate for Kingsley is Scott Edwardes. I think he has probably already doorknocked almost a thousand homes. He has been working with our shadow ministry to write ministerials to ministers to get things fixed in that electorate. What has the sitting member done? I have not seen anything. I have not heard the member for Kingsley bring forward any big issues in this place. The list goes on and on. The member for Joondalup is sitting on a margin of 0.6 per cent. I am sure the member for Joondalup is a lovely, lovely person, but I honestly have to say that in three and a half years, I do not think I have heard her say much in this place—not much. She might be a lovely person.

**Ms S.F. McGurk:** Why doesn't it surprise me to hear you call two backbench women "lovely ladies"?

**Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE:** There we go. The misogyny brigade—up she pipes. Did I not mention the member for Kalamunda first? Did I not mention the member for Forrestfield in the first group? So far, it is two and two. I mentioned the member for Bunbury, so it is actually three and two. I am sorry, but I am actually being quite even-handed here, member.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L. Mettam):** Member, are you taking interjections?

**Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE:** I am happy to take their silly interjections.

I will go on. We have the member for Murray–Wellington. It was her birthday the other day—lovely lady. She is doing a really good job. We have a lovely lady doing an outstanding job in that electorate in Michelle Boylan. I visited the electorate with the member for Dawesville and spent some time with our candidate for Murray–Wellington, Michelle Boylan, and the volunteer marine rescue group in Mandurah. Our candidate is putting in an outstanding effort on the ground. Liberal Party of Western Australia members on this side of the house absolutely support and respect our women candidates going forward to the next election, just as the National Party supports its women candidates going forward to the next election. For the minister to interject and try to turn an aspect of my speech into sexism is just frankly ridiculous, because we are all elected to this Parliament to do a job; it is that simple. Regardless of whether a member is a man or a woman—there are many other categories nowadays—sitting in this chamber, we have a role to play. I am sorry, but if a government member is seen to not be doing anything, is the minister saying that we are not allowed to hold them to account for that because of their gender? That is what I heard.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** You referred to members of the house as "lovely ladies".

**Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE:** I said that our members are lovely ladies, too. I am sure we have lovely men, lovely women, lovely gentlemen, lovely ladies.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** It's too late to backtrack.

**Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE:** I am not trying to backtrack. Member for Bunbury, this is exactly what the government has focused on for the last three and a half years. The government is more interested in that type of dialogue than in progressing the Western Australian economy. That is the government's problem. The Labor Party is so woeful when it comes to growing the Western Australian economy because it is so fixated on the social agenda and re-engineering issues.

There is no better example of what I am talking about than one of our lovely ladies, women opposition members of Parliament, the member for Darling Range, who won that by-election with a 9.3 per cent swing. Why? It was because the community said, "You've ignored us." The Labor Party got itself elected and its members have sat on their hands and ignored the people who put them there. All I am saying, member for Bunbury, is watch out, because we have some hardworking candidates who have been burning through shoe leather knocking on doors, picking up local issues, writing ministerials with shadow ministers and making changes in the last three months, while government members have done nothing for three and a half years. That is the government's fault!

There will be a swing at the next election. The member for Bunbury might still be here, but other members will not. Do members know what? I am not convinced that the Premier is going to throw them a lifeline. I think he will sandbag certain seats to sure up what he thinks is the winnable backbench he needs. I think he will do that, but he will cut the rest adrift. We are already seeing that. We are already seeing Labor MPs being ignored by the state Labor government,

and because they are being ignored, the communities and people in those electorates are losing out. That is why our candidates—our men and women candidates—are doing so well. They are cutting through where government backbenchers could not cut through. That comes back to my first point that none of the backbenchers are good enough to make it to cabinet and the Premier will not put them there. It is that simple. We have a very average Labor state government backbench. The Premier is not prepared to promote backbenchers and a number of them will not be here next year. It is that simple.

The economy is a key reason that is the case. I do not want to talk about the economy during COVID-19, because we are in a unique situation. We know that the JobKeeper and JobSeeker policies alone, brought about by the federal Liberal–National government, not the state government, have propped up communities and families in Western Australia. We know that the heavy lifting was not done by the state government, but by the federal government. We can judge the state government's capacity to improve the Western Australian economy up to March this year, because the statistics are there for all to see. I will go through some of them. Correct me if I am wrong, Treasurer; in 2018–19, the operating surplus was \$553 million and in 2019–20, \$1.5 billion. The Treasurer is yet to put out the 2020–21 budget, and we look forward to seeing that. Let us not forget what helped the government achieve what it has done with those surpluses. Let us not forget the GST deal. It was a decade-long, almost bipartisan appeal to the commonwealth to fix the GST mix. When that was handed down, it meant that WA received an additional \$4.7 billion over eight years. That is the information that I have been able to get hold of. That is a significant increase to the state government's budget.

Let us not forget what has been happening with iron ore. Back in 2015–16, iron ore was achieving \$US52 a tonne. Guess what it is today, members. Today, it is worth \$US125.73 a tonne. What does that mean for us? It means that iron ore now represents 20 per cent of gross state product and 82 per cent of WA's royalties. Iron ore royalties rose 56 per cent to \$7 billion in 2019. Goodness knows what the figure will be in the 2020 financial year given the numbers that we are seeing and the amount of iron ore that is heading off to China from the Pilbara every day. These are huge figures.

It must be challenging for the Treasurer to have all this money flowing into the government's coffers at a time when, due to COVID, Western Australians are in dire need of support. Communities, families, suburbs, townships and regional centres throughout Western Australia are suffering. The Treasurer will really be under the pump with the next state budget. Like many other people in Western Australia, I am thoroughly looking forward to seeing how the Treasurer addresses the challenge of supporting Western Australia into the future with the budget that he is going to hand down on the Thursday of the second week of the school holidays.

The Treasurer's performance up to March this year was not that flash. I will outline some of the areas in which it was not that flash. For starters, CommSec's "State of the States" report rated his performance as pretty average, from memory. The January 2020 report showed that WA's dwelling commencements were down 33.4 per cent, population growth was down 35.9 per cent and construction work was down 47.8 per cent. They are really the best figures to support an economy that needs to grow and expand. In March this year, WA had a 5.2 per cent unemployment rate. That was the trend rate, which was higher than the national rate. We have to remember that when the Labor Party took over government in April 2017, the unemployment rate was 5.8 per cent. Yes, that difference of 0.6 per cent shows that more jobs were created on a trend rate, but it is not a huge increase when we think about the extra money that the government had to invest in projects and get things moving.

We also had a situation in which 75 000 residents in Perth's north east were unemployed. The trend in that area showed that they had to wait 25.9 weeks for employment. In the north west, the figure was 22.5 weeks. What have the backbenchers in electorates in the north east—Swan Hills, West Swan, Mirrabooka and Wanneroo—been doing to encourage the government to stimulate their local areas and metropolitan Perth by making improvements to create jobs? Residents in the north west have had to wait 22.5 weeks, on average, for a job. That area is represented by the members for Butler, Joondalup, Kingsley and Burns Beach. We have seen no real heavy lifting by the Treasurer to not only support his own backbench to help their communities get into jobs quicker, but also help unemployment in real terms.

The Treasurer really dropped the ball the most in dwelling investment up until March this year. Dwelling investment contracted by 6.4 per cent over the December quarter. It had contracted by 11.3 per cent in annual average terms by the end of last year. Dwelling commencements in WA fell by 14 per cent in 2018–19. Probably the most damning statistic that I came across related to total building approvals—that is, all building types. In December 2019, they fell to their lowest level since 1983 when records first commenced. That in itself is a record. The Labor Party surpassed that downside of the 1990s, with Keating, the federal Labor government and the recession we had to have. It has surpassed the Asian financial crisis of 1987 and the global financial crisis of 2008. With all those economic shocks since 1983, the number of dwelling commencements in Western Australia under Labor is the worst ever. What type of indicator is that to the people of Western Australia? It says that people do not have confidence in the Treasurer. They do not have investment confidence or household confidence to go out and build a house or build a business. That occurred under the Treasurer's watch. At the end of last year, after three and a half years, that was the statistic. It is quite damning.

The bills that we are debating today relate to the 2017–18 financial year. It is now 2020. Back in 2017, the government introduced the foreign buyers surcharge tax for overseas buyers of apartments. Where did all that investment go? It went to straight to Melbourne and Sydney. At the same time that tax was introduced, I recall that the government changed the regional migration status for those wanting to study in Western Australia. At the time, I think we were holding the government to account for that, being nothing more than cheap political economic xenophobia. The government was trying to make out that it would protect Western Australian jobs by introducing a foreign buyers surcharge tax and changing Perth's regional city status so that the visa situation was the same as Sydney and Melbourne. It was going to be tough on overseas students wanting to come to Western Australia and overseas investors wanting to buy an apartment for students to live in while they study in Western Australian universities. How ridiculous was that policy! How did that turn out? We know what happened. The overseas student market almost dried up. The investment of off-the-plan apartment buildings stopped, and all that investment went east. Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide all benefited while poor old mum and dad working for a small business—they might have taught English as a second language at a small private college that was connected and linked to students coming to Perth to study at Curtin University, the University of Western Australia, Edith Cowan University or Murdoch University—were out of a job. They lost their jobs. Why? It was because the government had this really tough policy that was all about giving jobs to locals. All that the government did for local jobs was increase the number of people on the unemployment list. It is that type of ridiculous short-sighted policy that the government announced to get its spin in the media and hide the details of the second and third-order consequences of what it created. Then all the problems arose. That has a negative multiplier effect flowing through our economy. Finally, the government realised that it might have made a mistake.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE:** Ten months down the track, the government had to make an adjustment. Do members remember that? The government announced that adjustment as a means of stimulating the economy. It got out the Liquid Paper or Tipp-Ex and covered up its mistake, fixing it up a bit when the damage was already done. That is what households and businesses in Western Australia have had to contend with since 2017. We have seen a government bungling along, making incompetent decision after incompetent decision, and not really genuinely supporting households.

While I am on the topic of households, how was household stress pre-COVID under this government? Let us not forget that. These guys are absolutely going to use the COVID situation as their massive smokescreen for saying how wonderful they are. We all get that. The government will politicise it and work it to its advantage as best it can going into this election. That is its decision. Let us not forget—we will tell the community—what the data showed us in March this year, before COVID. For example, in 2018–19, there were 1 332 civil property possession applications in the Supreme Court, up 383 on 2014–15. We know that in 2018–19, Synergy and Horizon Power cut off the electricity of more than 22 000 customers for unpaid bills—one in every 60. This is supposed to be a caring Labor government. How caring is it that one in 60 has been cut off because they cannot afford their power bills? Figures from the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia from 19 July show that 12 per cent of Western Australian home owners owed the bank more than their property was worth. Supreme Court figures for 2018–19 show that lenders made 1 304 applications for civil property repossession. The housing loan arrears rate in Western Australia was more than double the national rate in July last year. Compared with the 2017–18 financial year, an 18.4 per cent increase has occurred in personal insolvency agreements in Western Australia. According to Digital Finance Analytics, in October 2019, 138 761, or 32.5 per cent, were under mortgage stress, with 13 270 at risk of default. This was the economic situation confronting households in Western Australia under this government pre-COVID-19. What did it do to support households that were in that stress? It hiked up fees and charges. It hiked up electricity by 19.6 per cent; water, 14.5 per cent; public transport, 15.25 per cent; and motor vehicle licences, 7.9 per cent. We are yet to see what it does in this year's budget to add to that. No doubt it will add to it, and do so in a COVID environment, which is even worse than the dire situation it started with in March. Cost-of-living charges keep going up and up and up when the economy needs support.

Notwithstanding all that woeful disrespect for the difficulty that households have faced in the economy of Western Australia, the government has had successively increasing budget surpluses. What has it been doing? Has it been paying down debt with those surpluses? My understanding is that total public sector net debt as at 30 June last year was up \$856 million on the 2018 figure. The government has had those increases in surplus. It has been whacking households with increased fees and charges. It has not managed the economy to get dwelling construction going and it has still allowed debt to go up. So what is it doing? We wait with bated breath for what the budget will be in a few weeks because we hope, as does every Western Australian, that it will be more supportive than the government has been over the past three and a half years.

That makes me think about some of the other budget-related matters, but more about the decision-making, or psyche, of this government and how it makes decisions on matters of public importance to the people of Western Australia. Do members remember that when we first came in here in 2017, the government was going to close Perth Modern School? Let us not forget that. It seems long ago now because COVID has occupied so much of our attention over

the past six months or so, but we should think back to when the government was going to shut down Perth Modern School. Do members remember its shameful handling of Moora Residential College or, prior to Christmas, the ridiculous decision by the Minister for Education and Training who said she wanted to shut down the Schools of the Air? Do members remember that? It was fascinating. It gets to the psyche of what this government was about. It was not prepared to listen to and understand or empathise and consult with those different community groups.

Closer to home in my electorate is the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. From memory—correct me if I am wrong—it required a budget of around only \$180 000 a year. The government closed down resourcing for that, yet that centre offered Aboriginal education and cultural programs and involved volunteers. Over 6 000 kids from different schools in the metropolitan area participated in its environmental education programs each year, right here on the doorstep of the heart of Perth, and the government said, “No, we don’t need that.” That cuts to the psychology of this government: it actually does not understand what matters to people—what matters to the cultural fabric of the people of Western Australia. It sees them as just voters and it works the numbers. What is its polling telling it? If its polling tells it to do something, it will do that. If its polling tells it to go somewhere else, it will do that. However, what really matters to people in Western Australia—mums, dads, families and small business owner-operators—is what faces and confronts them every day in their local area. If the government’s local members of Parliament are not focused on that, people in those electorates feel ignored and completely isolated from the decision-makers of the state and they become depressed about where the future of their own life and business, and the future of this state, is going under this government.

Those examples from 2017 illustrate what I am talking about—the psychology of this government that does not care. It is big on the spin, it is big on the headlines and it is big on making out that there is a grander social engineering need, but what really matters to the people of Western Australia is what confronts them every day, and that is what the government has ignored, and continues to ignore.

We as an opposition will prosecute this case every day until the second Saturday in March next year with our local communities to try to get them to understand that whatever spin and narrative the government runs that its polling tells it to run, we will focus at a local level. Our candidates will be doorknocking, face-to-face with community members, asking: What do you need? What are the issues? How can I help? And then demonstrating that help by following up. That is what we will do. I have absolute faith that because our men and women candidates are so good, they will turn votes in our favour and we will take seats off the government and its backbench will not be as big as it is now. We will push ourselves as hard as we can to that next election to try to give members opposite a really good shake, and maybe even do a Bradbury and fall over that line. We all have faith. We will give that a really, really, good hard knock because we have faith in the Western Australian people.

We also know—there are no secrets here—that when people threw out the Liberal–National government at the last election, they had their reasons. However, we must ask them now whether they are happy with Optus Stadium, Perth Children’s Hospital, Fiona Stanley Hospital, Elizabeth Quay, the sinking of the railway line in Northbridge and Yagan Square, which has now become available as space for Edith Cowan University that was not there before. Are the people of Western Australia happy with that? Are they happy that the opposition, when in government, started and signed off on the planning for the new Western Australian Museum in Northbridge? Are they happy that Western Australia had the greatest expansion of mining in recent history under that Liberal–National government? Are they happy with that? Are they happy with the record spending in regional Western Australia under the royalties for regions scheme that our last government oversaw? I think they will say that they were happy with that and that they went for change; but what has change given them? It has given them nothing. It has given us a lot of talk, but it has not actually delivered anything. The government has cut ribbons for finished projects that we started, sure, but what has it actually done from scratch on its own? What has it started and got well and truly underway? Members opposite should feel free to stand up and let us all know, because I think the answer is “nothing”. When we go to that election, that is what we will hold the government to account for.

**MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood)** [1.49 pm]: I want to raise a number of topics, and I will change the order a bit, because the Treasurer; Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is in the house, so it might be a good chance to have a conversation about some matters that we have talked about in the past. I have offered on numerous occasions, and still do, my support from this side of the house for more progressive, and even bold, policy settings to improve the lot of some of our most disadvantaged people in Western Australia. I note that the Minister for Communities, who is in charge of rolling out some of the strategies that were put in place by the previous government, is also in the house. It is pleasing that much of that has been taken up. It is also good to see the investment that has been made alongside that.

I want to refer to a question that I asked of the Premier, but it applies also to Aboriginal Affairs. It was about the target set for the employment of Aboriginal people in state government agencies. During our time in government, in many cases the only economy in remote communities was the work that was being done by state government agencies. That provided the opportunity for a level of employment that previously did not exist. At that time, and I think it is still the case—the Treasurer might be able to respond by way of interjection if it has changed—the policy settings were set at a state level, and a target of 3.2 per cent Aboriginal employment was set for each government

agency. However, one of the challenges was that although that target might be meaningful for metropolitan Perth, it is not necessarily meaningful for some regional parts of Western Australia. In the Kimberley, 45 per cent of the population is Aboriginal. The percentage of Aboriginal people in the Pilbara and goldfields is also very high. I have had a conversation with the Treasurer about setting targets that are regionally-based as distinct from state-based. That is certainly a challenge. I was disappointed that our government was not able to lock that in with the directors general as part of their performance agreements. That would have had to be done over a fairly long period through attrition. However, I think that was a good target.

I want to give members some figures about the level of Aboriginal employment in government agencies across the regions. These figures are from March 2017 to March 2019, so they are a bit old, and I will probably put some questions on notice to have them upgraded. The rate in the Gascoyne increased from 8.4 per cent to 10 per cent. That is a positive outcome. The rate in the goldfields–Esperance increased from 5.9 per cent to seven per cent.

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** Those figures are from when to when?

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** They are from March 2017 to March 2019. They are not the current figures. They are over 12 months out. The rate in the great southern remained at 4.2 per cent, so there was no increase. The rate in the Kimberley remained at 18 per cent, which is a good number, but it still does not meet what is perhaps an ambitious target for the Kimberley region. The rate in the midwest went from eight per cent to 7.6 per cent, a slight drop; in Peel, it decreased from 2.1 per cent to 1.9 per cent; in the Pilbara, it decreased from 9.7 per cent to 8.9 per cent; in the south west, it increased from two per cent to 2.1 per cent; and in the wheatbelt, it decreased from 3.5 per cent to 3.1 per cent. The Treasurer has talked about some of the Closing the Gap targets. Successive governments have done a poor job in meeting those targets. I do not think any of us can stand on a high hill and say that we have done a good job of changing that space. However, it is still a good objective to set for our government agencies. The performance agreements of government agencies should include regional settings. In many cases, the reason that the objective of moving through employment is not achieved is not that there is no ambition to do so; it is that the opportunities are not provided. One way of doing that is for government to walk the walk. That should be pursued.

I want to raise an issue about which I copped a bit of fire. The Minister for Water has talked about the government's investment in 10 regional communities to upgrade their water and power infrastructure. That makes sense. It was part of the work that our government did in remote communities and the resources that we provided. While the Minister for Water was talking, I shot across an interjection and asked whether any mutual obligations would be attached when choosing communities in which to make a substantial investment to standardise their infrastructure to what people would expect no matter where they live in Western Australia. I was kind of howled down for saying that. However, that is a good conversation to have. This principle has been pushed by Noel Pearson for many years. In fact, I took the time to go to Cape York to see how that has been put in place. That was a while ago now, but I was quite impressed with the efforts to do something different from what we have done before. The same principle applies here. We need to do things differently from how we have done them before.

The transitional housing program involves mutual obligations. That is a program to invest not in social housing in the form of a Homeswest house, but in transitional housing. People can get a transitional house only if they have a job and their kids go to school for a certain percentage of time. That has fundamentally changed the game. It means that people are taking jobs not because they believe they could lose their house if they do not have a job, but because they think, "If I take that job, I'll get that flash house at the end of the street." That changed the game. I pay tribute to Ian Trust for his leadership on that front. That is a good example of how, if we use our smarts, we can use government investment as a tool to deliver social change. We have to be prepared to be a little bold on that front. It does challenge us. This is what I was howled down on. The provision of water is, of course, a basic right of people who live in a western society such as Western Australia. However, if we do not achieve the outcome of kids going to school and getting a half decent education to enable them to participate fully in society, in one of the wealthiest states in one of the wealthiest nations in the world, we are fundamentally doing something wrong. We should consider leveraging every opportunity that we possibly can.

I remember that a couple of years ago, in budget estimates, I asked a question of the Minister for Housing about the investments that had been made. The minister made the same comment. He said that it is a basic right to have this and that. The then director general of the department of housing, Grahame Searle, responded by saying that they were having discussions about what could be brought to the table to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal people in remote communities.

The Minister for Housing is investing in 10 remote communities in WA. There are about 270 remote communities across Western Australia, and the department of housing has some direct responsibility for 160 of those communities. All those communities, almost without exception, have poor energy and water supply systems. They are in drastic need of upgrade. Given that the government is investing in only 10 of those communities and cannot roll out those upgrades to all 270 communities, why are we not having a conversation about what the community can bring to the table to improve the outcomes for the kids in those communities? It should not be a stretch to support higher levels of participation in school. I will not mention the communities in this example that I am using, but in two communities that are located very close together, one had about 99 per cent school attendance and was very motivated, and, in

the other, school attendance was down to 60 per cent, and it had a bunch of brand-new houses that had been built with some federal money. A conversation needs to be had about leveraging government investment to achieve social outcomes as a strategy to fix something that we have not been able to fix. We are dealing with massive social challenges. It tests us. Water and energy are fundamental rights. Education for a child is also a fundamental right. I will probably quote it incorrectly, but I remember that Marcia Langton made the comment, “Don’t lock our communities into poverty by having government policy settings that keep the status quo and protect the status quo because if the status quo is there, it is actually not good enough.” These are good conversations to have. I have had a number of these conversations with different people. I should be challenged on my views as well. That is a good thing. These things will change only if we take a successive government approach to them. I for one, and certainly many of my colleagues, are prepared to be counted on some of these challenging issues.

One of the challenges I have now as a member of the opposition backbench is that I do not have the chance to travel that I used to have. I therefore put the qualifier that much of my commentary is based on my very strong level of engagement a few years ago. However, I do not think things have moved that much that my comments no longer have a level of validity. One of the legacies I can try to leave in this place is to give a level of support, whether from the government bench or the opposition bench, to fundamentally change the approach taken and opportunities for some of these kids in many parts of regional Western Australia. I think that is something we could all do a damn sight better, and we rightly should be measured by that.

I am going to move on very quickly, but I will probably run out of time before question time. The next topic I want to talk about is the gag order that the Minister for Emergency Services, supported by the Premier, has placed on volunteers under the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, to prevent them from talking to members of Parliament, state or federal, about issues that relate to department business. That is absolutely sad and a fundamental breach of our democracy in Western Australia.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

### QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

#### CORONAVIRUS — INTERSTATE AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS — SPENCER FAMILY

##### **726. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Premier:**

Before I ask my question, as someone who has a family of nurses, I would like to say a grateful thankyou to the nurses who have returned home from Melbourne. I particularly thank them for their selfless service to fellow Australians who have been impacted by the COVID crisis.

My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier agree to meet with Peter Spencer, the father of war veteran Stephen Spencer who is trapped overseas and is just trying to get home to Western Australia to be with his family?

##### **Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

As I have said a number of times, we have a great deal of sympathy for people who are overseas and would like to come home. At this point in time, the advice is that around 25 000 Australians have applied to return to Australia. The best way we can support everyone in this situation is to increase, in a safe way, the number of people who are able to come back to Western Australia. That is exactly what we have done. A further 500 Western Australians will be able to return home each week. That arrangement will kick in over the course of the next few weeks. We are currently negotiating with the commonwealth about getting additional Australian Defence Force personnel to assist us in maintaining and managing our hotel quarantine.

I want to make this point: I know that there are a lot of these cases, but our main priority is to make sure that people can come home in a safe way and that we can also keep Western Australians safe. Returning Australians are managed in our hotels. For whatever reason, the commonwealth does not want to use the commonwealth facilities that it has available. Therefore, the state is now managing nine hotels. This is a 24-hour-a-day process, with security staff, health staff, police and the like assisting in managing those hotels 24 hours a day, seven days a week in a secure way while providing a whole range of testing and additional services—food, drinks, medical attention, psychological support and everything else. It is a massive logistical exercise. If a mistake is made, as it appears mistakes were made in Melbourne, and the virus gets out into the community, that will obviously have dire consequences for the state. We are doing our best to manage a difficult situation in the interests of everyone, including people who want to come home from overseas.

#### CORONAVIRUS — INTERSTATE AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS — SPENCER FAMILY

##### **727. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. The Premier has not answered my question. Will the Premier agree to meet with Peter Spencer, the father of war veteran Stephen Spencer who is trapped overseas, and does he realise that it is his responsibility to meet with Western Australians whose lives he is having a devastating impact on?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

The thing I have noticed about the state Liberal Party is that if it can undermine our COVID response, it will. That is all its members do. That is all they have done for the last seven months. If the Liberal Party had had its way in joining with Clive Palmer in the High Court, Western Australians would have died.

## ALBANY RING-ROAD

**728. Mr D.T. PUNCH to the Premier:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's efforts to support local jobs and local businesses through its unprecedented investment in regional roads, including the \$175 million Albany ring-road. Can the Premier update the house on the work that has been undertaken by the McGowan Labor government to get this project on the national agenda and construction underway, and can the Premier outline to the house how this project will support the local economy?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

Can I thank the member for Bunbury for asking an important question about Albany, Mr Speaker!

**The SPEAKER:** I can re-read it for you if you like.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is great to see the member for Bunbury showing such interest in Albany!

Today was a great day for Albany. Work has now commenced on the Albany ring-road, which will complete the project. This project has been talked about for 25 years and it is this government that has made it happen. The Minister for Transport worked incredibly hard to get federal funding for this project. Prior to the state election, she put a significant amount of state money into this project, got the business case to Infrastructure Australia and obviously got a federal commitment as well. We are very thankful to the commonwealth government for its commitment to this project. This is a \$175 million project—the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken in the great southern. Western Australian company Decmil has been awarded the contract. The project is set to create up to a thousand jobs in Western Australia, including, especially, jobs in the Albany area. It will be a vital piece of infrastructure that will ensure traffic flow and transport linkages into the Albany port for decades to come. It will also divert traffic away from the heart of Albany, which will be great. As those of us who spend considerable time in Albany know, Mr Speaker, traffic in the heart of Albany is often problematic.

The participation plan that Decmil has outlined will ensure a large amount of local content, which will give local businesses a great opportunity to gain work. At this point in time under our local jobs act, 289 participation plans have been submitted. An overwhelming majority of projects have 100 per cent Western Australian content and the projects have supported nearly 25 000 jobs in WA and over 1 000 apprenticeships. The Albany ring-road project was fast-tracked as part of our COVID response. We fast-tracked more than \$2.3 billion worth of large-scale road projects, including the Bunbury Outer Ring Road, Stephenson Avenue and the Leach Highway–Welshpool Road interchange. We are very pleased that we are now investing \$260 million a month in Western Australian roads, of which this road project is an important component. I thank you, Mr Speaker, as member for Albany, the transport minister, the federal government and the contractors for what will be a great project for Albany that will solve what has been an issue for decades.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you, Premier. That was a very good question, member for Bunbury!

## CORONAVIRUS — CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER — TOWN HALL MEETING

**729. Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP to the Premier:**

Will the Premier allow Chief Health Officer Andy Robertson to front a public town hall meeting to answer any questions from the public on his critically important health advice; and, if not, will the Premier confirm that he is in fact gagging the Chief Health Officer?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

The Chief Health Officer, Dr Andy Robertson, has been doing a very good job at keeping Western Australians safe. Once again, the Liberal Party is trying to undermine that work of the state government and the Chief Health Officer. He has an important role to perform as the Chief Health Officer. I must say that the outcome of his advice and the work of the Minister for Health, the Commissioner of Police, the director general of Health, the director general of Premier and Cabinet and the Public Sector Commissioner has been absolutely outstanding. I do not know why the Liberal Party is always trying to nitpick and criticise our outcomes. We have now had 163 days without a single case of community spread of the virus in Western Australia—163 days!—and all the Liberal Party wants to do is to undermine. The Liberal Party joins a long line—a conga line—of people who want to undermine the outcome that Western Australia has secured. It appears to me that the Western Australian Liberal Party would prefer an outcome that involved a breakout of the virus and having to go through the process that New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland are going through, whereby the virus is managed in the community. My view is that it is better not to have the virus. I know over east they are saying that the gold standard is somehow New South Wales, where there are outbreaks everywhere and then they are managed. How is that a gold standard versus a state that does not have the virus? How is that a gold standard? I do not understand this. It defies logic. I will tell members one thing about Andy Robertson: he has done a lot more press conferences than the Leader of the Opposition!

## CORONAVIRUS — CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER — TOWN HALL MEETING

**730. Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. There can be no doubt that Andy Robertson is providing good health advice. We are simply asking why the Premier will not make him available to the people of Western Australia for a town hall —

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Because that's not his job; he's a public servant.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Armadale, I call you to order for the first time. It is my job to keep you in order.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Is it, in fact —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members on my right! Start again, I want to hear it again.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** There is no doubt that the Chief Health Officer is providing absolutely the best advice. Why will the Premier not allow the Chief Health Officer to front the public town hall meeting? Is it because the Premier is hiding him from any public appearances and gagging him?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

I do not know what the member is even talking about. I do not know what this public meeting is; I do not know what the town hall is. I have no knowledge of any invite for the Chief Health Officer to attend these things. He is a grown man. He makes his own decisions, and he has made some very good decisions. We are very grateful for his service to the state.

Just to get back to the point I was making before in light of the opposition's constant criticism of the outcomes in Western Australia, I note that the internet job vacancy figures have been released today by the federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment. It is the internet vacancy index. It shows that Western Australia's internet jobs vacancy index has climbed by 10.6 per cent. New South Wales has gone backwards by 20 per cent. That is a net 30.6 per cent difference. The gold standard of New South Wales that the Liberal Party seems always to be proclaiming is significantly worse when it comes to new jobs being generated, as demonstrated by the figures today. Our model of having a hard border, keeping the virus out, keeping our export industry strong and ensuring within the borders that we have a strong domestic economy that is growing rapidly every day has worked. Although the Liberal Party seems to want to undermine it every single day of the week and join with Clive Palmer in his actions in the High Court, we will not accept its model and we do not accept what it says.

## METRONET — ELLENBROOK RAIL LINE

**731. Ms J.J. SHAW to the Minister for Transport:**

Before I begin, I welcome Brandon Waterfield and his mother to Parliament today on behalf of the member for Kalamunda.

My question is to the member for Swan Hills—sorry, my question is to the Minister for Transport! I have lots of questions for myself in this place sometimes!

**The SPEAKER:** Preamble, member!

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** I refer to the McGowan Labor government's efforts to drive WA's economic recovery through the delivery of Metronet and its significant investment in local manufacturing.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on how this government's investment in Metronet, including the long-awaited Morley–Ellenbrook link is supporting local jobs?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how this government's record of investment in local manufacturing compares with that of the Liberal–National government?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:**

(1)–(2) I thank the member for Swan Hills for that question. I am sure she would also be able to provide the answer, but I will give it a go anyway! It is a great pleasure to show what we are delivering in relation to the Ellenbrook rail line. This week we announced the preferred contractor for the Ellenbrook rail line and it is the MELconnx Consortium. Laing O'Rourke Australia Construction will deliver that rail line. This is a rail line that the Liberal Party promised in 2008 and never delivered. This is the rail line it promised in 2013 and never delivered. We have been around the suburbs and the state. We were in Albany today with your good self, Mr Speaker, outlining the record infrastructure we have around the state. Metronet is a key part of that. The packages for the new Bayswater station have been let and the Tonkin Highway gap package has been let. The Tonkin gap alliance comprises BMD Constructions, Georgiou Group, WA Limestone, BG&E and GHD, with works to commence very, very soon.

We are getting on delivering our commitments to creating thousands of jobs throughout Western Australia. Every time I go to a site, every construction company I meet says that this state government is doing a record

amount in delivering contracts to all contractors operating in WA. Of course, the opposition does not support Laing O'Rourke delivering this project. It would rule out Multiplex and Clough, for example, ever bidding for projects in Western Australia. That is their policy. It would rule out those companies bidding for contracts. We know this opposition is in a desperate, desperate spin when it comes to policies, as we have seen in recent days. It rocked up to a company claiming that company was locked out of bidding for a contract for railcar manufacturing. That is absolutely wrong. It is yet another Liberal lie. The Liberal Party members rocked up with their self-produced hi-vis vests. No-one else in the entire company was wearing one, but they had hi-vis vests. It is all about spin and desperate politics from the opposition. Again, we are seeing an opposition wanting to undermine confidence in Western Australia and cut out companies such as Clough and Multiplex from ever bidding for projects in Western Australia again.

That should not surprise anyone. This opposition has taken sides against WA and WA workers again and again. It said we should not have a local railcar manufacturing industry because there was an industry from a bygone area. It subcontracted work for the Matagarup Bridge overseas, and when we brought it onshore, it said it would be substandard. The opposition has backed against the interests of WA workers. It has sided, and continues to side, with Clive Palmer. Yet again today, we saw the member for Dawesville put the interests of Clive Palmer ahead of Western Australians. The opposition sided with the federal government when it attempted to pull down our borders. I understand that the member for Dawesville just issued a challenge to the Chief Health Officer to front a town hall meeting. I will give the member for Dawesville this: I challenge him and the Leader of the Opposition to stand in front of a town hall meeting and explain to the public of Western Australia why they continually side with Clive Palmer on every issue in Western Australia.

**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES WORKERS REGIONAL TRAVEL  
AND ACCOMMODATION SUPPORT SCHEME**

**732. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:**

I refer to the government's primary industries workers regional travel and accommodation support scheme and confirmation are only 434 people have signed up to fill the thousands of seasonal jobs required in agriculture. Did the government set a target for how many people it wanted to sign up to the support scheme; and if not, why not?

**Mr D.T. Redman:** Good question!

**The SPEAKER:** You probably wrote it, member for Warren–Blackwood, but you do not need to interject all the time!

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

We have put forward a program to encourage Western Australians to go out there and do work in agriculture. We have explained that to the people of the state, we have advertised it and we have put financial resources behind it to get people out there. The Work and Wander Out Yonder page has received 61 000 views, with 33 000 users visiting the page. The campaign page on the Tourism WA website—which, admittedly, is a different matter—has had nearly 40 000 page views from those within Western Australia. We have had some success in getting people to view the information provided online, and we have also had some success in connecting employers via Studium, which connects employers with students looking for this sort of work. I am advised there are currently still around 5 000 or 6 000 backpackers in Western Australia. They regularly fill these roles in seasonal agriculture, and we are encouraging them to do so. We are also encouraging farmers to also connect with the backpackers who traditionally undertake this work.

We need employers out there to upload the jobs available onto the Studium and Seek sites as well. We have been advised that many employers have not done that. We need them to upload those positions onto the websites. I have said two things to the member before. Firstly, we need the commonwealth government to allow people who are on JobSeeker or JobKeeper to keep their payments and make some extra money on top. That will incentivise people to go out there. People on JobSeeker are not going to go out and work on a farm, often in hot or difficult conditions, if they are not going to make any money for it. We need there to be a one-off opportunity to incentivise people, and we encourage the commonwealth to do that. Secondly, we also need employers in agriculture and employer organisations to do their bit to attract people. We have done all that we can to attract people out there. They need to ensure that they are working hard to attract Western Australians from the cities and towns out there to do this work.

**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES WORKERS REGIONAL TRAVEL  
AND ACCOMMODATION SUPPORT SCHEME**

**733. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. Premier, only six per cent of the required 7 000 jobs have been filled. What is the government's plan B to make sure that the agricultural and horticultural industries have the thousands of seasonal jobs filled for this season?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

As I said in reply to the previous question, we have launched a major campaign. We have launched up to \$4 000 per person in travel and accommodation allowances to attract people out there to do this sort of work. As far as I understand it, that money is tax free. We have done what we can do. We do not control the welfare system. The commonwealth government controls the welfare system. I urge the member to make her pleas to her colleagues in the commonwealth government about this matter. I have now raised this matter personally with the Prime Minister on a number of occasions. I urge there to be some urgency at a commonwealth government level.

## CORONAVIRUS — ECONOMIC RECOVERY PACKAGE

**734. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Small Business:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's \$5.5 billion recovery plan that includes significant support for those small businesses impacted by COVID-19.

Can the minister outline to the house how this government's COVID-19 industry support fund will help Western Australian travel agents deal with the economic impacts of the pandemic; and, can the minister advise the house how this dedicated support program for travel agents compares with other jurisdictions?

**Mr P. PAPALIA replied:**

I thank the member for her question and for her advocacy on behalf of all travel agents around the state, particularly Christine Ross-Davies in her own electorate. At the outset, I just have to reflect on the fact that Western Australia is the best place in the nation, if not the world, to have a small business right now. We have an open economy. There is opportunity for small business right across the state. The challenges we have heard—which is a terrible problem, but not a bad problem to have—is the demand for workers in many different sectors; not just agriculture and horticulture, but also hospitality, accommodation and other service-related industries right across the state, because demand is so high, unlike everywhere else. Western Australia leads the nation with regard to its recovery. However, there are some sectors—some pockets—that are doing it tough. Travel agents are clearly one of those. They were severely impacted by the federal government's closure of the international borders. The moment the federal government closed the international borders, travel agents in Western Australia lost 90 per cent of their revenue stream, because 90 per cent of the revenue generated by travel agents prior to COVID was generated by Western Australians leaving the state and travelling overseas. That is no longer available, thanks to the federal government's decision to close the borders.

We responded immediately with measures, particularly for travel agents in bricks-and-mortar outlets, to assist them with their commercial tenancies, amongst many other small business responses that were provided to travel agents and everyone else in the state, but we advocated and have been advocating with the federal government for a targeted response to travel agents and the particular circumstances they confront. Ever since Christine and Jo Francis came to see me and the member for Bicton we ultimately took it to the Premier, and we have also been advocating for them at the federal level—with no success to date, sadly. However, I can report that an element of the COVID industry support fund that we have created as part of our recovery package—the \$5.5 billion McGowan government recovery plan—was launched on 18 September, when we created a dedicated travel agent fund. That fund consists of a \$3 million support package for which eligible home-based travel agents and shopfront bricks-and-mortar outlets can apply. Home-based travel agents can access up to \$5 000 individually, while those operating shopfronts can receive a minimum of \$10 000, and it may be more, subject to how many apply and how many are eligible. We do not really have much visibility of the exact numbers that we are talking about. That work is being done by the Small Business Development Corporation right now. Small businesses are able to access information about the fund via the corporation's website, [www.smallbusiness.wa.gov.au](http://www.smallbusiness.wa.gov.au).

What I can say is that with our dedicated support fund and solid response to our travel agents in Western Australia, with reference to the rest of the nation, we are the only state or jurisdiction in the nation with a dedicated fund for travel agents. I would again call on the federal government to step up into the space. A long-term solution needs to be provided. We as a state are doing what we can, but this is a federal government matter. This is a national issue, it is an ongoing issue, and the federal government needs to step into the space and take responsibility for helping these people in the longer term.

## METRONET — RAILCARS

**735. Ms L. METTAM to the Premier:**

I refer to the Premier's announcement yesterday to send the contract for the Morley–Ellenbrook rail line to a British company. Can the Premier confirm that his government awarded the railcar construction contract to a French company, which excluded local WA seat manufacturing company Beurteaux, despite it previously building tens of thousands of WA railcars?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

The member is incorrect in everything she says.

**Ms R. Saffioti:** She should ask me!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** She should ask the Minister for Transport, but I do want to comment more broadly on these matters. She seems to be angry. I noted the tweet that was put out by the Liberal Party about the fact that Alstom won this contract. Just so the member understands, there is no Australian or Western Australian railcar manufacturer. There are none. We have to get an overseas company to come and build them here if we are going to have them built here; that is the way it works. The Liberal Party does not seem to understand how business works anymore, but that is how it works. We have attracted an investor to come and build them here. It is actually embarrassing that the member does not even understand that; there is no Australian manufacturer that can do the work. There were two competitors at the end, one Canadian and one French, because they are the railcar builders. When railcars are built in Melbourne and Queensland, it is the same situation: an overseas company comes and does the work.

We have secured over 50 per cent local content on these railcars. When the railcars were being built under the last government, it was two per cent local content. How do we know that? It is because we asked the last government a question on notice and it answered and advised us that it was two per cent local content. Why does the member not ask a question? Why does she not do a press conference? Our contract has secured railcar manufacturing in Western Australia for the first time in 35 years or so. It will be done here with a high-quality company that knows how to do it. The New South Wales government is of the view that it cannot be done in New South Wales, so it got it done in India. The gold-standard state got it done in India, and the railcars would not fit through the tunnel in Sydney. The gold-standard state; I hear that is its model. Remember Ian Britza? He had that plan as well. Indian railcar manufacturer—the railcars could not fit through the tunnels. We are getting them manufactured here in Western Australia. There will be all sorts of local jobs. The facility is being built at Midland as we speak. The Liberal Party seems to hate it. Members might note that the Leader of the Opposition described it as a past industry that should not happen in Western Australia.

#### METRONET — RAILCARS

##### **736. Ms L. METTAM to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. I am referring to Beurteaux Australia, which built tens of thousands of seats for WA railcars.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members!

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can the Premier confirm that, as a direct result of the government giving major contracts to foreign companies, Western Australian local jobs are being lost, as is the case with Beurteaux?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

The answer is clearly no. We will have railcar manufacturing here for the first time in 35 years, or at least 30 years. The advice I have is that the company to which the member referred did not put in a final bid and did not want to comply with modern Australian safety standards.

**Ms L. Mettam** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Vasse!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is the advice that I have been given.

**Ms L. Mettam** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Vasse!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I want to give the Liberal Party a lesson on economics because clearly it does not understand it these days. Overseas companies invest in Western Australia, set up offices here and employ Western Australians. Liberal Party members do not seem to like that, but if they walk down St Georges Terrace they will see the offices of BHP, Rio Tinto, Chevron and all sorts of companies that are all over Perth, Western Australia and, indeed, all over Australia. They are based overseas but they set up offices in our country and employ local people. That is the way it works. We do not have enough capital and we do not have homegrown organisations that build railcars. Therefore, we attract overseas investment. Woe betide the people of Western Australia who actually want jobs and a future if the Western Australian Liberal Party, with its attitude, is ever elected again. Its attitude appears to be more in tune with Fidel Castro's Cuba than modern day Western Australia.

#### FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES — KIMBERLEY

##### **737. Dr A.D. BUTI to the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to support our most vulnerable Western Australians through both its \$5.5 billion COVID-19 recovery plan and its unprecedented investment in family and domestic violence services. Can the minister outline to the house what the government's investment in support services means to those living in the Kimberley who are experiencing, or are at risk of, family and domestic violence?

**Ms S.F. McGURK replied:**

I am very pleased to answer this question because rarely a week goes by, if not a day, when the observation is made that the incidence of domestic violence is going up under COVID, for a variety of reasons. We were aware of this very early on in the pandemic and we have been working very closely with service providers as well as other state government agencies to keep a keen eye on reported incidents of domestic violence, but we are also sending a very clear message to the community that should people experience domestic violence in any form, they should come forward and seek assistance. Members might be aware that cabinet had its community cabinet meeting in the Kimberley. I was very happy to be in Broome for a few days. I took the opportunity to meet with a number of service providers; for instance, the Marnja Jarndu Women's Refuge and the Men's Behaviour Change Network. Some women from the Derby refuge took the time to come down to Broome to attend one of the events. It was fantastic to meet them and understand their issues in tackling an unacceptably high rate of domestic violence in the Kimberley.

The member referred to the recovery spend by the McGowan government. It is not just a cash splash; it is a very targeted investment in understanding the existing services on the ground and where there is need in the community. The state government put in \$23 million as part of the COVID-19 recovery plan to tackle domestic violence. The six refuges and safe houses across the Kimberley will benefit from a funding top-up of \$210 000 to acknowledge resourcing pressures brought about by COVID-19. Of the \$6.8 million in extra outreach workers throughout the state, at least two will be funded for the Kimberley. That is, workers who are based at services will be able to go out and reach people who are either not in a position to go to a refuge or simply do not want to. There are two family and domestic violence response teams that will each get another community-based resource.

Members would be aware that the response teams are usually located in police stations and they involve the police working side by side with Department of Communities staff and a service provider, and they are getting an additional resource: one in West Kimberley and one in East Kimberley. While I was up there, I was able to meet with the joint response team in Broome. It was really fantastic to see the level of sophistication and cooperation between agencies, the not-for-profit agencies, the police and the Department of Communities. I was able to meet with Health as well. That model is working very well. There are 17 joint response teams across the state. During COVID we have seen a lifting of that joint and co-location of effort. As well as meeting with the family violence joint response team, I was able to meet with the COVID emergency recovery team, which includes Health, the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service and the Department of Health officials working with Department of Communities and police to identify areas of need and possible risk management throughout the Kimberley. That joint approach is fantastic.

Finally, I want to mention the reallocation of \$2.6 million of funding to the community services sector in the Kimberley. We heard loud and clear that local organisations want to be able to bid for some of that money. We have made the reallocation of the money that is available open to tender and that will mean that the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and local organisations will be able to bid for some of those funds. We heard loud and clear that local organisations are best placed to deliver those services, particularly Aboriginal organisations in the Kimberley.

**TAFE — STAFF RECRUITMENT****738. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Premier:**

I note the Minister for Education and Training's media release last Friday calling for skilled and passionate people to join TAFE.

- (1) Does the Premier agree that the biggest challenge in recruiting skilled educators to TAFE is the significant pay disparity between industry and government?
- (2) Will the Premier commit to increasing remuneration to attract the pool of school educators that TAFE needs?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

- (1)–(2) The remuneration of the TAFE workforce is governed by enterprise bargaining agreements entered into between the TAFE workforce and the state government via the Department of Training and Workforce Development, which are negotiated every two or three years. It is an industrial relations matter that is resolved by established processes such as that. In saying that, I have a great deal of respect for our TAFE workforce. I meet a great many people who work in TAFE. I have visited a number of TAFEs in recent days and I do so regularly. I am always impressed by the fact that a lot of people, particularly in the trades area, seem to have undertaken a working life, if you like, in industry, and then they go back to training, perhaps in their 50s or 60s, and impart the knowledge they secured during their working life to, predominantly, young Western Australians. Perhaps yesterday or the day before, I was at a workshop in Thornlie that is very much of that nature. The day before, I was at a TAFE in Kununurra that is very similar. I am always impressed that people do that.

In recent days, the government has, from memory, invested \$267 million or thereabouts into infrastructure—and a whole bunch more; maybe that includes the training component—and into cheaper fees and training to get Western Australians through our TAFEs. Our bona fides are there when it comes to investing in TAFE. The member was not in Parliament then, but when the Liberals and Nationals were last in office,

they put up fees on people undertaking training and TAFE courses by up to 500 per cent. I do not personally blame the member because he was not here and cannot be held responsible for what the Leader of the Opposition did. When she was Minister for Training and Workforce Development, the fees on many courses went up by 500 per cent, which drove down enrolments. With our cuts to fees of up to 72 per cent, we have seen a massive increase in enrolments taking place as we speak. Thousands upon thousands of additional Western Australians are undertaking TAFE training because of what this government has done.

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Armadale!

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** I call you to order for the second time.

#### TAFE — STAFF RECRUITMENT

**739. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. Given that pay levels in industry are often so much more attractive than those offered by government in regional Western Australia, and given his response, how does the Premier propose to build the pool of TAFE educators?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

We recruit through the Department of Training and Workforce Development in the normal ways. Often, a lot of people who work in TAFE, as I outlined in my answer before, have had a career in industry and want to undertake a different sort of life. It is often not about having the income that, for instance, someone who works fly in, fly out might have; it is a different lifestyle. A lot of people, as they get older, are looking for a bit of a different lifestyle. We negotiate pay and conditions via enterprise bargaining agreement processes. That is an ongoing process that is conducted between the workforce or its representative and the state government. It is done in that manner and I do not propose to interfere in that. I will say that we have invested more in TAFE and put more effort into TAFE than any government in living memory. We have had a massive decline in fees; massive investment in infrastructure, jobs and skills centres opening up all over regional and city WA; and niche industries like defence have been targeted—for instance, yesterday that had an \$18 million injection of funds. There has been a very successful period of growth in TAFE that is getting Western Australians into the jobs of the future.

#### YOUTH DIGITAL INCLUSION PROJECT

**740. Ms E. HAMILTON to the Minister for Youth:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's \$5.5 billion recovery plan that includes support for young Western Australians who may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Can the minister outline to the house what this government's investment in the youth digital inclusion project will mean for young, vulnerable Western Australians and their access to the support services they need?

**Mr D.J. KELLY replied:**

I thank the member for Joondalup for the question and for the hard work that she puts in representing the young people of her electorate.

Throughout the pandemic, a lot of sections of the community were hit hard. Of course, one of those sections was young people. When we look at the impact on employment, we see that is the cohort most significantly affected. But it is not just in employment; the impact on young people in areas such as mental health has been quite significant. One of the issues that has made it more difficult for young people to access the services they need is that when the pandemic first hit, many youth services' shopfronts were forced to close, and those services moved to online delivery. For a lot of young people, online delivery is not difficult because they are used to living in that environment. But for disadvantaged youth particularly, who may not have a mobile device or who, when they run out of data, would ordinarily go to a library to access the online world, a lot of those opportunities ceased to exist.

As part of the pandemic response, the government put together a youth task force. We asked the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, which participated, what our key responses should be for disadvantaged young people. One of the ideas YACWA put forward—I want to thank the council and CEO Ross Wortham, in particular, for their contribution—was a program to get repurposed digital devices, whether mobile phones, laptops or tablets, into the hands of disadvantaged young people. We worked with the Office of Digital Government—as Minister for Innovation and ICT, that was a great collaboration—and put together the youth digital inclusion project. Through some relatively modest funding of about \$160 000, that will see up to 300 refurbished devices made available to service providers to put into the hands of young people selected as needing them the most. Those devices come with six months' worth of free data. It means that young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who would otherwise not be able to access youth services online can do so through this program. It was a great collaboration between the Office of Digital Government and the youth services sector. It is just one example of how this government has taken a nuanced approach to this pandemic.

I give a shout-out to the Hello Initiative. It is a similar program run by a not-for-profit in conjunction with Total Green Recycling. It provided repurposed devices to young people in the justice system who would otherwise have found it difficult to maintain contact with service providers. It put together a similar program. I understand that by June it had provided about 60 devices to young people.

The other initiative that came out of the youth task force, again put forward by the Youth Affairs Council, was the idea of a live dashboard so that young people could go to one place to see what youth services are available to them. Again, it was a modest investment of about \$20 000 and delivered by the Youth Affairs Council of WA. It was another way of ensuring that during the pandemic young people could readily access the services that they need.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I want to draw the house's attention to the document "Digital Inclusion in Western Australia: A Blueprint for a Digitally-inclusive State", which is now out for public consultation. Members on this side of the house see the opportunities that the digital economy provides. In so many ways, it can improve the lives of Western Australians and solve real-life problems. But it would be naive to think that all Western Australians will be able to access digital services in the same way. The concept of the digital divide is very real. Members of this side of the house are determined to do what they can to narrow the digital divide. We have put out—again it was put together by the Office of Digital Government—a draft digital inclusion blueprint that outlines a number of initiatives we think could be progressed in order to narrow that digital divide as much as possible. It is currently out for consultation. We have had so much interest that we have extended the consultation period to the end of October. I invite members of the house who are interested in dealing with this important issue, especially during this pandemic, to look at that draft document.

#### HOMELESSNESS

##### **741. Mr A. KRSTICEVIC to the Premier:**

I refer to the outstanding exposé by Josh Zimmerman in *The Sunday Times* regarding the homelessness crisis in Western Australia, specifically focusing on the CBD tent city. Now that the people of Western Australia are aware that the government secretly sold off more than 1 000 public houses, will the Premier now apologise for the role his government played in the current homelessness crisis?

##### **Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

Obviously, the government has invested very heavily in additional housing, as members can see from the announcements that we have made over the past year. The government has invested \$93 million per annum into homelessness and family and domestic violence services across the state. A large component of that is allocated directly to homelessness services statewide and in the Perth metropolitan area. On top of this, the government has allocated a record \$72 million to support evidence-based approaches to homelessness. This includes a new Common Ground facility to be built in the Perth CBD. We are looking for another location for a second facility to provide permanent housing for homeless people. We look forward to getting them underway and constructed during the next couple of years.

The Housing First homelessness initiative was also rolled out, providing wraparound services for people in this situation. As part of COVID-19 recovery funding, a further \$6.8 million was provided for homelessness services.

In terms of the provision of public housing, obviously we had to deal with some longstanding issues around Brownlie Towers and what I think are called the Stirling buildings in Highgate, which are old, decrepit and no longer fit for purpose. We had to close those facilities that had been on their last legs for a long period. That has impacted the number of properties available. Obviously, as part of our COVID response and also the stimulus measures that we took last year, we are constructing a great deal of additional public housing across Western Australia and also refurbishing a great deal of public housing that had not been refurbished or maintained. Like everything, as housing ages, it often becomes unusable. Fixing properties and making them available for people is an important part of what we are doing to get people back into some of those properties that were, in effect, left to rot over many years prior to the election of this government.

#### HOMELESSNESS

##### **742. Mr A. KRSTICEVIC to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question.

**Ms S.F. McGurk** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister.

**Mr A. KRSTICEVIC:** Can the Premier recollect a tent city that large being in the Perth CBD, since the Great Depression, and when is he going to house the 50 people who are in that tent city?

##### **Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

Mr Speaker —

**Ms S.F. McGurk** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The government has a waitlist. We work through that waitlist on a regular basis and in a progressive way. We do our best to provide public housing for people who have put in an application, in particular those who are on the priority list. The priority list is often made up of people who are suffering from broad and diverse serious matters. We get through that list as quickly as we can to get people housed. The housing waitlist is significantly shorter than when we came to office. More housing construction is underway than when the Liberal Party was in government.

**Mr A. Krsticevic** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Carine, you have already had two cracks. That is enough.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** As part of our COVID response, we have spent around \$800 million on housing and housing services, refurbishments and the like across Western Australia. That is what is occurring at the moment.

**Mr A. Krsticevic** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Carine.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The crocodile tears are from the member for Carine, who does not care about anything.

**Mr A. Krsticevic** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Carine, I call you to order for the first and second times.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** He does not care about anything or anyone, apart from coming into this chamber and just being nasty. That is the nature of this member, who has now been promoted by the opposition leader.

**Mr A. Krsticevic** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Carine, I call you to order for the third time.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is all that this member does.

**Mrs L.M. Harvey** interjected.

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

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** We will continue to build more and more public housing. We will continue to provide wraparound services for people who are homeless. We will continue, as part of the COVID recovery, to ensure that more properties are maintained and repaired. The shadow Treasurer did not listen to anything I had to say; hence, he is making inane interjections.

**The SPEAKER:** That is the end of question time.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE — THURSDAY, 8 OCTOBER

### *Standing Orders Suspension — Notice of Motion*

By leave, **Mr D.A. Templeman (Leader of the House)** gave notice that at the next sitting of the house he would move —

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable only the following business to be called on in the house on Thursday, 8 October 2020, and to proceed in the following order —

- (1) acknowledgement of country and prayers;
- (2) brief ministerial statements;
- (3) questions without notice;
- (4) petitions;
- (5) papers;
- (6) giving notices of motion;
- (7) bills—notices of motion 1 and 2; and
- (8) adjournment of the house.

## PUBLIC VIOLENCE — POLICE RESOURCES

### *Matter of Public Interest*

**THE SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson)** informed the Assembly that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the member for Hillarys seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

**MR P.A. KATSAMBANIS (Hillarys)** [2.56 pm]: I move —

That this house expresses its deep concern about the ongoing violent crime in Western Australia and condemns the Labor government's ongoing refusal to commit to a significant increase in police numbers, including to replace those taken off the front line to deal with COVID.

It gives me no delight at all to bring this motion to the house today. I just wish that we did not have to come into this place and continually ask the government, on behalf of the people of Western Australia, to step up to the mark and deal with the violent crime epidemic that we are living through. We see it almost daily in newspaper headlines and on television news footage. We hear about it from constituents. We hear about it from members of the general public, particularly from business owners in the CBD and Northbridge who are seeing their businesses dry up as people are discouraged from coming in and enjoying the vibrancy. The city is being smashed by violent crime, but it extends beyond the city; it extends to our suburbs and our regions—every country town across the state. I do not want to steal the thunder of other members who want to speak on this motion: the government cannot continue to simply ignore or pretend that this issue does not exist. We know that through COVID, crime generally and crime statistics have gone down. That is a good thing. We want to see more of that. One area of crime that does not seem to have been impacted by the downward slide of the COVID epidemic—in fact, it has continued to increase—is violent crime. Members do not have to take my word for it. I know that the Premier and the minister like getting up and saying that that is not true.

If members go to the Western Australia Police Force website and the section on crime statistics, they will see a tab of offence categories. Offences against the person covers homicide, sexual offences, assaults in family situations, assaults in non-family situations, threatening behaviour in both family and non-family situations, deprivation of liberty, and robbery. They are categorised as offences against the person. They are all violent crimes. Those figures date from 2011–12 all the way to 2019–20. In the 2019–20 financial year, those offences are the highest on record. Even more disturbingly, between the 2018–19 and 2019–20 financial year, the crimes of assault in family situations and assault in non-family situations, threatening behaviour in both family and non-family situations, and robbery, all went up. Those violent crimes, crimes against the person, are not going down; they are going up. I hope they have gone down since June 2020. However, this government has moved from monthly crime statistics to three-monthly crime statistics, so even if there has been an improvement, the public does not know about it. What the public does know is that bashings, such as the unfortunate bashing and subsequent death of Mr Emiliano Lombardi, are happening far too frequently.

There is violence in Northbridge. I noted with great interest that the Minister for Police was quoted in the media a short time ago as saying, essentially, that some young people were treating every weekend in Northbridge as though it were New Year's Eve, and that is true. That is where the minister and I are in total agreement. A bunch of idiots are doing the wrong thing and they need to stop. Unfortunately, that bunch of idiots are empowered and are allowed to get away with their stupid, dangerous behaviour because there are not enough police on our streets to discourage them from acting that way in the first place and stopping them before they harm other people, if they choose to do the wrong thing. The WA Police Union said quite clearly that on any given Friday or Saturday night, as few as 20 to 25 police officers could be available to police 300 000 people in the central Perth area, including the Perth CBD, Northbridge and surrounding suburbs, as well as the Burswood entertainment precinct, which includes Optus Stadium. There are 20 to 25 police officers for 300 000 people, many of whom are on the streets enjoying the entertainment precincts. The police union issued a media release on 2 August calling for more police at the Perth police centre. The president of the police union, Mr Harry Arnott, is quoted as saying —

The situation at the Perth Police Centre is absolutely dire. We are 200 police officers short just in Perth alone and if we want to address the issues currently plaguing our CBD we need more blue shirts ...

That is the police union. Our police officers are begging for more police and saying they need 200 more just in the central area around Perth's CBD and the entertainment precincts. That is not accounting for the fact that we do not have enough police in our suburbs and we certainly do not have enough police in our regions. I have said it before and I will say it again: this government has turned a blind eye to that year after year. The police annual report highlighted that in 2019 there were fewer police officers than there had been in 2017, despite the government claiming it had recruited 125 extra police, I think it was, for specialist squads. Despite that recruitment, natural attrition and redundancies reduced the overall number of police. Recently, during COVID, the government was forced to provide funding for 150 extra places, which is good. That is better than nothing. However, 150 does not replace the 400 to 500 officers who have been taken off the front line to deal with just COVID duties. They have been pulled out of police stations, pulled out of specialist squads, and they have been put on COVID duties—necessary duties—but it highlights once more how thin the thin blue line really is.

The line has snapped because the government cannot replace 400 to 500 officers with 150 and tell the public of Western Australia that "she'll be right", because she won't be right. It is not right to leave the law-abiding public of Western Australia at the mercy of thugs and criminals because the government is not prepared to put enough police on the beat to look after our community properly. The government has not done it. It has failed that test.

The Commissioner of Police confirmed just today that those 150 officers will not be fully operational until April or May next year. They make the government's statistics look good—it has lots of sworn police officers—but 150 of them have not graduated from the academy yet. They cannot have, because it takes 28 weeks for a police officer to graduate from the academy. Had the government put those 150 on a year or two years ago, when it had the opportunity to do so, they might be ready now to hit the streets, but all they are hitting is the bitumen at Joondalup—and they should hit it because we want those recruits to be fully trained and we want them on the streets. We need them as soon as possible. However, because of the government's inaction over three and a half years, it has left the public exposed, and it has let down the public. It has also let down police officers, because when there are fewer of them, they are forced to do more. The government should consider what it did over Christmas with the surge in Northbridge, again in response to media. That is what this government does: the more media there is on a subject, the more it tries to ameliorate the problem.

In response to media about violence in Northbridge, the government committed additional overtime money. It asked already overworked police officers to do more, and they did. Our police officers, our policemen and policewomen, step up. They go toward trouble when we run away from trouble. They protect us, and they stepped up, but at what cost? It was at a cost to their health—their physical and mental health. The more we drive those people to do more and more, the quicker we will break them. That is a sad reality. If the government thinks the solution to more police on the street is to fund more overtime, all it is doing is breaking those people quicker than ever and essentially condemning us to even fewer officers in the future.

The real solution is to step up to the mark, to provide a genuine and meaningful increase in the police force. The government has failed so far. It has failed dismally. Eleven of the 15 police districts at the last count had fewer than their authorised strength. On every single occasion that the opposition—be it myself as shadow minister or members of the Nationals WA in the other place—has asked questions about the authorised strength versus the actual strength of police districts outside the metropolitan area, not once in three and a half years has any of those police districts met or exceeded its authorised strength. It is continual failure, and the government is condemned for that continual failure. It has the opportunity to correct its failure one last time. If it does, it will unfortunately be too little, too late to count, as we are getting out of the COVID period and crime will inevitably go up, as the commissioner has admitted it will. It will be too little, too late, but it will be better than nothing. We get that opportunity, but it would have been better had the government focused on providing more police to deal with violence and out of control crime in our community earlier. We will see what the government does in the next few months. If it does not step up to the mark and if it does not provide a meaningful increase in police numbers, it will be condemned by the public of Western Australia, and rightfully so.

**MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Leader of the Opposition)** [3.10 pm]: I rise to contribute to the motion brought to this house today by the member for Hillarys. As the member for Hillarys said, it gives the opposition no joy to raise this matter. One needs only to go to the Crime Stoppers WA website to see that Western Australia is under assault. The rate of crime is very concerning. The Crime Stoppers website has 34 pages. In some of the cases on that website, people have been charged. The website has alarming statistics about assaults in our CBD and across the length and breadth of our suburbs. It is no longer happening just in Perth and Northbridge. It is happening everywhere. Every page on the Crime Stoppers website is about assault, robbery, burglary, attempted robbery, assault, burglary, car theft and so on. These things are happening in our suburbs.

We need only to go to the headlines in the paper to see exactly what is happening. In my suburb of Scarborough, the foreshore was doing very well. It had been cleaned up. The culture had changed. However, some alarming behaviour is now taking place. In January, at the Scarborough foreshore, two girls aged 15 and 17 years attacked a 21-year-old woman and a 26-year-old man who had been walking to their car after they had been to the beach, puncturing the woman in the lung, and lacerating the man's wrist, causing tendon damage. That is in my patch.

Further, we have had another scissor attack. What is going on in our community? I know about this one, because I know some of the young people who were in the service station when this assault occurred. A young man stole—I have to say allegedly, because this has not been to court—\$50 out of a young girl's pocket after she had gone to the ATM. That young person was confronted by another customer in the service station, and upon being confronted the individual produced a pair of scissors and stabbed that customer, a 21-year-old City Beach man, cutting his chin and requiring him to go to Royal Perth Hospital for treatment.

*Point of Order*

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Mr Speaker, I am mindful of the sub judice rule when we are talking about charges. I wonder whether you might give a ruling on what the Leader of the Opposition is now saying.

**The SPEAKER:** No-one has been named.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mrs L.M. HARVEY:** I did say allegedly. I do not think anyone who reads my contribution in *Hansard* could say that I breached the sub judice convention.

The young boy who has been charged with these alleged offences is yet to go to court. The two young girls who were in that service station were traumatised by this. One of them allegedly had \$50 stolen from her pocket, for goodness sake. That is what led to this violent incident. All those girls had been doing was paying for petrol and withdrawing some money from the ATM. I find that outrageous.

**Ms M.M. Quirk** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Girrawheen!

**Mrs L.M. HARVEY:** On 10 September, there was another scissor attack, this time in Highgate. The article states in part —

A man in his 50s is in a serious condition in hospital after he was allegedly stabbed with a pair of scissors during a violent attack in Highgate.

It is no wonder people are frightened to go into the city.

We cannot forget last week, on 18 September, the shocking footage of 45-year-old Mandurah woman Tammy Andrews. The article states in part —

A Mandurah woman has told how she was ambushed in her car and left with a gash in her head which needed 18 staples to hold her scalp together.

...

Ms Andrews said she saw a shadow coming towards her, and she turned her head away when she saw he was holding a weapon.

The man then threw the metal tool he was holding through her open car window and it hit her in the head.

“It came very close to my temple, it could have killed me,” Ms Andrews said.

“It’s not right. He shouldn’t be allowed to get away with it, I hope they catch him.”

She thought she was going to die as her head felt numb and blood gushed out while she drove to a nearby home for help.

Ms Andrews had suffered a stroke just months prior to this attack.

As I understand it, we still do not know who attacked Ms Andrews. That person, who was willing to confront a woman who was alone in her car, in a car park, with a metal bar, has probably not been apprehended because of the shortage of police officers on the frontline and is still out there somewhere. We know there is a shortage, because the statistics do not lie. We know there is a shortage because the head of the WA Police Union is telling us there is a shortage.

**Ms M.M. Quirk** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Girrawheen!

**Mrs L.M. HARVEY:** We know there is a shortage because police officers keep saying to us that it is really embarrassing. They say they are getting calls for help, and they have to tell people that they cannot get there. They have to ring people up and say, “Is that intruder still in your backyard? We don’t have a car to send to you.” These are the sorts of things that are happening in our suburbs. I know that every member in this place is hearing these stories from their constituency, just as we are. That is why we have raised this issue in this Parliament.

I refer to another article dated 23 September. The headline is, “Police investigating Armadale men’s refuge death release CCTV image of man they wish to speak to.” The article states that on 15 September, paramedics were called to provide assistance and found a 43-year-old man who was dead. When they arrived, they could do nothing for him, except call the police.

Those are the issues that are confronting our community. That is why we raise this matter in Parliament today. It is not the fault of the police. The police are doing the best they can. They are working overtime. They are exhausted. They need more resources. The problem is that this government is not providing the resources in the requisite time to give them the support that they need to keep our community safe. People will not feel safe in the CBD until the government gets its act together and puts more police on the frontline.

**MR K.M. O’DONNELL (Kalgoorlie)** [3.16 pm]: Greetings, Mr Speaker. How good would our society be without ongoing violent crime. However, sadly, violent crime continues to be a staple of our society.

One area in which violent crime occurs is when members of the community take violence into their own hands. Recently, a group of Aboriginal families escalated an argument and an incident, and they all piled into a car and handed out their own summary jurisdiction. Many charges have been laid for things like that. I do not wish to identify Aboriginal families. What I am trying to highlight is that family members have been going about their daily business, and one person says something has gone on, and it has then been followed by the leader and people have committed violent acts, when the day before that was never on their mind. The feuding can start out as a minor disagreement,

but weeks, months or years later, other members within the family structure take it upon themselves to take the law into their own hands and hand out their own summary jurisdiction. A recent example is two women and a man who were charged with acts with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, which is a serious violent offence in itself. That matter is ongoing in the courts. A major problem with this type of violence is when some members of the family pile into a car and go to sort out other family members. Imagine if you were sitting in your home and a car pulled up outside and people wielding baseball bats kicked in the door and stormed your house. It is not good. In another incident, a man who was trying to avoid a carload of people hid in a skip bin, but they found him and used baseball bats and other homemade weapons to belt him completely and utterly, causing serious injuries, including broken bones. This type of crime is unacceptable.

Yes, we do need more police. We need to ensure that the number of police recruits who go through the Western Australian Police Academy is higher than the attrition rate. We cannot have the attrition rate higher than the academy graduation numbers. We also need to identify positions within the police department that could be carried out by unsworn civilian staff. At the moment, auxiliary police officers are carrying out lockup duties at various property stores within the metropolitan area and some country areas. However, many police officers are still rostered to work on the front counter of police stations. These highly trained, highly skilled officers are ready to go out and protect the public, but they are allocated the front counter, and just have to wait for someone to come in to ask them to sign a form, witness a signature, take a report for a stolen rubbish bin or even take a report for a lost watch or keys. That sort of area should be identified as being appropriate for unsworn civilian staff to do; they could man the counters so that police officers do not have to be there. If a police officer was required to attend a counter, they could be called back off the street or the beat. In other places, police officers are in charge of property—they accept, record and hold stolen property that has been seized or evidence that has been collected. That role could be taken up by a civilian; a highly skilled police officer does not need to do that. The reserve office within a police station is another area in which police officers are used to ensure that the equipment is right and stores are all up to date. We do not need a highly skilled police officer to do that.

Another way in which we could improve police numbers would be to commence a police reserve, who could help out. I have raised this idea before. Officers who had resigned or retired might be suitable as reserve officers. I think I, for one, would be suitable, member for Armadale. We could look at re-employing re-engagees. Those people have already been trained and we could get them back in. When I was a police officer, there were many times when we were under-resourced due to a lack of funding. Even when I applied to join the Western Australia Police Force in the early 1980s, the government at the time stopped running the police academies, so I had to wait a year before I could get in. I think my time is up; I have to let the Nationals WA member have his go.

Several members interjected.

**Mr K.M. O'DONNELL:** All right; I will keep going.

We are not going to get away from violent crime; it is endemic. It is just a shame that it is occurring on a daily basis. I am probably not allowed to say it, but I would love the courts to stand up and support the police and the community by judicial officers putting themselves in their position and thinking what it would be like if something had happened to them or their granddaughter.

**MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland — Minister for Police)** [3.22 pm]: If I could have chosen a dorothy dix matter of public interest, this is the one I would have chosen, because it again gives us the opportunity to point out the failings of the Leader of the Opposition in her time as police minister in this state, and to put on the record the many things that the McGowan government has done to support the Western Australia Police Force and the community of Western Australia. We know that members opposite have no policies. There is not a single policy on their website or in the material they have put out. Today, they have exposed themselves even further; not only do they not have any policies, but also they do not have a strategy. There was a break between sitting weeks, but when the opposition came in here on Tuesday, they could not rustle up an MPI. It took them another 24 hours to get their act together and come up with an MPI—they reached for the bottom drawer and got out their old friend law and order. That was what the member for Scarborough did with her speech. She said, “Let’s see what’s on the Crime Stoppers website. Let’s see if I can find a couple of hideous crimes that I can just read to the Parliament. Let’s see if I can scan a few headlines from the past few months and perhaps just pull out the most horrific of them and read them to the Parliament. Let’s pretend that that is somehow a policy or a strategy.” Pointing out the problem or issues is not a solution. It is not a policy. The opposition has no political strategy. It has no strategy for policing. It has nothing.

**Mr D.T. Redman** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warren–Blackwood!

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** I think someone in the Liberal Party does have a strategy—that is, to undermine the Leader of the Opposition. Otherwise, members opposite would not have let this motion come forward, as they would not want their leader to be so embarrassed. Let us go through it. In the Leader of the Opposition’s time as minister, the assault rate in this state doubled. We saw double-digit increases in crime.

**Mr A. Krsticevic** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Carine, you are on three.

**Mr A. Krsticevic:** I didn't say anything!

**The SPEAKER:** Your mouth did; you might not have done!

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** The sanction rates of the previous government were so poor that it gave up reporting on them. Month after month I had to come in here and ask why it had abandoned telling us the clearance rates and sanction rates for crimes. Response times blew out. On top of that, they brought to this state the worst policing model ever. On what planet were just four metropolitan districts going to deliver a better service? Those districts were going to respond right across the metropolitan area. Do not take my word for it; let us go back to 2016, when you lot were in office. What did the then WA Police Union president, Mr George Tilbury, have to say? On 30 January 2017, just before the election, he said on Channel Seven news —

We have a crisis in this state with policing ... stop the rhetoric, stop the spin, do something about it, because the police on the front line are hurting.

That was during the Leader of the Opposition's time. That is when police morale was at an all-time low. What else did George Tilbury have to say on 6PR mornings? He said —

...clearly the Commissioner, the Minister, and the Government are not listening to the frontline ... officers in this state who are overworked and under-resourced ... they are out of touch; they don't get it.

That was George Tilbury, the president of the WA Police Union, back in January 2017. He was also quoted in *The West Australian* as saying —

“Front-line officers are frustrated and at breaking point,” ... “They simply can't keep up with the rising demands.

I can tell the house that Mr Tilbury has not changed his mind, because he told a crime forum in Kalamunda on 1 July this year that over the last few years there had been a proposal for a particular model of policing, and that under the old model, police officers were travelling extraordinary distances to actually be able to attend an incident. Under the member for Scarborough, our police force was in crisis. The failed district model had to be abandoned. The former government broke our police force into local policing teams and response teams. The response teams had to respond over mega districts. It was not just Midland and Perth in the one district, but Wembley through to the hills and Kalamunda and out to Ellenbrook. The former government was not listening; George Tilbury was right about that. People in the outer metropolitan area asked for a 24-hour police station like the ones in the inner city. No, the member for Scarborough was not going to give them one. The member for Scarborough still does not support a 24-hour police station in Ellenbrook or Armadale. The member for Scarborough also did not support the extended hours through to 7.00 pm; she was happy for Ellenbrook Police Station to close at four in the afternoon. She was happy for the Belmont and Armadale police stations to also close at four in the afternoon. What about Fremantle Police Station? It is a major policing district—one of the big four. Officers were moved out of a decrepit building and into an old bank building that was not fit for purpose. There was negative report after negative report. It was pointed out to the former government years before it left office, and it was on the never-never. What have we done? We have allocated over \$50 million. We are fixing up all the things the previous government did nothing about. We have also supported our police with body armour and body-worn vests to protect them, something the member for Scarborough was asked for years to do. We have given them body-worn cameras to better protect the community, but also to better protect police officers. They cost over \$15 million. We have made them personal issue to every police officer on the front line. Over 5 000 people have already been fitted for their vests. We have invested in mobile phones for all police officers, something that only earlier this year the member for Scarborough scoffed at. I tell members what: as I have been out to police stations around the state, they have not stopped thanking our government, the McGowan government, for giving them that tool and resource. It has already made a huge difference at the front line.

**Mr M.P. Murray:** Member, don't forget she opposed the Capel Police Station.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** That is a very good point. According to the member for Scarborough, the Leader of the Opposition, Capel Police Station was not needed. She did not support it. She said for the area to be policed out of Bunbury. Later this month, we will open that Capel Police Station, we will have the officers there and we will police the area around Capel. Not only that, we have invested another \$1.5 million in the Collie Police Station and a similar amount in the Donnybrook Police Station.

**Mr V.A. Catania** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member, are you supposed to be in the chamber? You seem to have a large amount of members here. Are you one of them?

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Not only have we supported our police officers with resources, we have also supported them with legislation. We have brought in a “slow down; move over” legislation that many emergency services, including the WA Police Union, wanted prior to the last election—it is a commitment that they were unable to get from the former government—so we could get vehicles to slow down to 40 kilometres an hour where a police officer

had pulled over a motorist. That is about officer safety, but the Liberal Party's leader did not support that. The government that opposition members were part of did not support it. It was one of the first things we did. We also got rid of the section 8 process—that undignified process. We have brought that legislation through; we have done it. We have also brought in legislation quickly for officers to deal with COVID.

In my criticism of the opposition side being a policy and strategy-free zone, I will at least say this for the member for Kalgoorlie: his was the only speech today with some positive suggestions. He actually had some ideas. He actually showed that he had thought about what could make things better. I do not agree with all the ideas he put forward. I think some have merit, and some of them we have already actioned. During this COVID time, we have brought some retired police officers back, member for Kalgoorlie. Some senior retired police officers have come back and been re-engaged as part of that COVID process. Of all the people we have heard from today, I have some understanding of that member.

The member for Hillarys put to the Commissioner of Police at his committee hearing today that violent crime had gone up. The commissioner told him that he was wrong. Why did he tell him he was wrong? He told him he was wrong because he was wrong. The commissioner quite clearly told the member for Hillarys that his assertion was incorrect. The fact of the matter is that burglaries are down by 60 per cent, car theft is down by 50 per cent and assaults are down by 20 per cent. These are huge figures, especially when they are contrasted to the all-time high point of crime in this state, 2016, when the Leader of the Opposition was the police minister. That is when high crime hit a peak. Under this government crime is at its lowest point in five years. Overall, crime is down by 29 000 fewer offences in 2019–20 compared with the situation in 2015–16. That is the former government's last year in office compared with our last completed financial year. There were 29 000 fewer offences. That is the record highlighted here today, much to the embarrassment of the Leader of the Opposition. When she was police minister, total crime went up by 17 per cent, crime against the person went up by 32 per cent and crime against property went up by 11.3 per cent, and today the Leader of the Opposition still did not have any idea. She did not have any policies.

Let us have a look at how good she is at detail. Let us look back to Monday, 25 January 2016 when there was an article in *The West Australian* with the heading "Harvey in burglary rate gaffe". Let us just see how good she is at the facts. The article was written by Daniel Emerson. It states —

Police Minister Liza Harvey was unrepentant yesterday —

**Mrs L.M. Harvey:** Where does he work now?

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** The Leader of the Opposition does not like me reading this out, does she?

**Mrs L.M. Harvey:** Where does he work now?

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I do not think it has anything to do with the chamber, so I call you to order for the first time.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Wherever Mr Emerson does or does not work, it does not change the facts. It does not change what the Leader of the Opposition said. It was not just reported in *The West*; it was on TV. It was elsewhere. The Leader of the Opposition just does not like me reading this article out. Let us hear it —

Police Minister Liza Harvey was unrepentant yesterday despite incorrectly telling West Australians this month that they made two-thirds of home burglaries easier by failing to lock up.

Mrs Harvey used the statistic as one of her chief lines of defence this month when confronted with the sixth consecutive month of double-digit crime growth, suggesting the figures were worse because of the public's carelessness.

That is the Leader of the Opposition blaming people whose houses were broken into—victim blaming. That was her only response. What did she say exactly? She said —

"What we know is that two-thirds of break-ins to homes occur through open doors and windows," the minister said on January 6.

I think the Leader of the Opposition said that at a press conference, and more people than Mr Emerson heard her. She went on to say —

"So when you think about your home burglary stats, if those people had locked their doors and windows it's quite likely they would not have been targeted for a home burglary."

She said that if two-thirds of people had only locked their doors and windows, they would not have been victims of crime. That was the leadership she showed as police minister of this state. The article from 25 January continues —

Yesterday, when launching a \$500,000 advertising campaign encouraging West Australians to lock up, Mrs Harvey revealed the official police statistic was 30 per cent entry through open doors and windows.

Member for Scarborough, 30 per cent is not two-thirds. If the Leader of the Opposition cannot get a simple figure like that right, can she get anything right? Can we believe a single thing she says? There are myriad articles from

around that time. Since the Leader of the Opposition does not like what Daniel Emerson had to say, I have an article by Trevor Paddenburg and Phil Hickey. I do not think either Trevor or Phil now work for the government. The article has the headline “Clueless”. That is a bit of a harsh headline. Why would the Leader of the Opposition get a headline like that? Let us go. Here is the spin outlined by the article. It says —

**SPIN 1: Going to the beach**

Police Minister Liza Harvey this month blamed everyday West Australians who “head to the beach and occasionally forget to shut the window after letting the breeze in” for making their homes ... targets for burglars and fuelling the state’s crime rate.

Another one reads —

**SPIN 2: Lazy drivers and homeowners**

Mrs Harvey went on to say that a third of home burglaries and theft from cars occurred “where doors and windows have been left unlocked or valuable items left in full view”.

The next one says —

**SPIN 3: Serial offenders**

In November, Mrs Harvey said prolific offenders were behind most home invasions and vowed to cut burglary rates by getting “these offenders off the streets and into prison”.

That did not happen. Then there was the spin on the tap-and-go-cards, also in November, when we were told that tap-and-go cards were the problem. At no point did the Leader of the Opposition actually say it was because they ignored the methamphetamine crisis that was driving crime; at no point did she say, “Actually, maybe our police model isn’t working.” That model was known by the acronym MOM—metropolitan operating model. That policing model was not rolled out to country areas. I watched from the opposition, and we saw the crime rates in the city soar and crime rates in the country remain static or go down. There was one key difference between metropolitan WA and regional WA, and it was the Leader of the Opposition’s crime model. It was the metropolitan operating model, under which she slashed the number of policing districts down to just four.

I turn to the issue of police numbers. There are a lot of furrphies here. The fact of the matter is that the Barnett–Harvey government went to the last election not promising a single extra police officer—not one single extra officer! It believed there were plenty. On the other hand, we made a number of commitments, including commitments to fund the regional enforcement unit for country roads and to put in place our meth border force to add additional officers for the 24-hour police stations. Since we have come to office, we have funded an additional 300 officers over and above attrition. The member for Kalgoorlie is quite right: it is not good enough just to cover attrition. That is why we have funded 300 additional officers over and above attrition. The number of police on the ground is up. A headcount on 30 June 2020 showed 280 more officers than in February 2017. Since then, hundreds have graduated from the police academy and hit the streets. Again, I think people will be pleased to hear this: currently, over 200 officers are in training at the academy—many more than we would need to cover attrition. The deployment of those officers is under constant review by the Commissioner of Police. I, too, want to put on record my thanks to the Commissioner of Police, his deputies, the assistants and all our police officers who have really stepped up during the COVID pandemic and done a magnificent job. They have managed to walk and chew gum at the same time. They have managed to deal with all the issues pertaining to COVID and they have kept up their regular policing duties.

Additional resources for police have been really significant. There has been a package of \$126.3 million to deal with COVID. An amount of \$91.2 million was announced in April 2020. There has been \$73.4 million for the recruitment of the additional 150 police officers; \$17.8 million to expand police tracking and tracing capabilities; \$14.8 million for 100 mobile intelligence cameras, also known as ANPR, or automatic numberplate recognition; \$3 million for the 200 GPS e-monitoring and tracking; and an additional \$35.1 million to meet additional operational costs for the Western Australia Police Force. We have put an additional \$400 million in the police budget, including \$90 million for police technology, including \$17.8 million for body-worn cameras, and funding for 40 drones. Again, we have seen their use in a range of situations. Police can utilise the speaker capacity of drones and they have been able to fly them over areas and give people warnings. In the early days of the COVID pandemic when people were asked to keep to a COVID distance, we were able to put that message to people on the beach—something that was not able to be done in other states. More recently, over the weekend, we saw our police helicopter and drones in the air in the search for the missing boy in the south west.

Given that this request for additional police officers is being made by a Liberal–National opposition, I wonder whether the opposition has been in touch with its federal counterparts to ask why we do not have more Australian Federal Police based here in Western Australia. Why do Queensland and other states have vastly more AFP officers than we have here? Why has Western Australia been given fewer Australian Defence Force personnel? Why are Australian Border Force officers really thin on the ground in Western Australia? Why does the Australian Crime Commission have such a minuscule footprint in this state? Peter Dutton is a Queenslander, and when I look at a comparison between

Queensland and WA, one might think they would be comparable, but they are not. Queensland gets deluxe federal resources compared with those in Western Australia. If the opposition wants to do something productive, rather than coming in here whingeing and making false claims, perhaps it could contact some of its National and Liberal colleagues at a federal level to see what they can do to help us get more federal assistance and get a fair share of the commonwealth resources to Western Australia.

I am going to highlight statistics from the most recent crime reports, since we have had some real furrphies put forward by members opposite today. The fact is, as I have already said, that crime peaked in this state back in 2016–17 when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Police and Deputy Premier. The number of selected offences against personal property has decreased by 33 per cent for the 2020–21 financial year compared with 2019–20, and that is a decrease of 18.7 per cent in regional areas. There has been a 38.8 per cent decrease against the five-year average, and if we distil out the regional areas, it is a 23.4 per cent decrease in the regional areas against the five-year average.

Only this morning, the member for Hillarys tried to put some leading questions to the Commissioner of Police and, frankly, he was put in his place.

**Mr P.A. Katsambanis** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Hillarys, you had a fair whack. Listen, please.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Frankly, he was put in his place. He said, “Isn’t it a fact that violent crime has gone up?” The commissioner told him that it is not. The fact is that our police commissioner has done an amazing job here. He has got rid of the opposition’s failed policing model. It is not just a matter of going to eight districts from four. He has put in place an additional regional operations group. Under the previous government, there was one north and one south ROG. We now have one central, one north and one south. He has brought to bear a lot of innovations. He has brought to the table his experience as CEO of the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission in Canberra for the best part of three years and added that to his former experience as a deputy Commissioner of Police here. I would like to amend the motion.

*Amendment to Motion*

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** I move —

That all words after “house” be deleted and the following words be substituted —

commends the Western Australia Police Force, notes the reduction in crime and acknowledges the McGowan Labor government’s commitment of significant additional community safety resources to support frontline officers, which includes the fast-tracking of an additional 150 police officers and the expansion of police tracking and tracing capabilities.

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale)** [3.49 pm]: I would like to speak on the amendment moved by the Minister for Police. Of course, when the member for Hillarys moved his motion about law and order he thought that he would make the headlines but, unfortunately, the member for Dawesville has made the headlines for the opposition today. I grant that the member for Dawesville has been able to get some headlines that other members of the opposition have been struggling to get over the last month, but given this morning’s headlines, I am not so sure whether he would like to have another morning like this morning. The member for Dawesville said, “The Premier needs to man up. I didn’t realise we elected a princess at the 2017 election.” As members can imagine, Twitter has gone ballistic! At least the member for Dawesville got attention, but I am sure that he would have preferred to get attention in another way.

Mr Speaker, as you would know from sitting on the opposition benches as the member for Albany, I was always asking the former Minister for Police, who is now the Leader of the Opposition, when we could have a 24/7 police station in Armadale. I always received a no—no, no, no—because the minister was sticking religiously to her failed Frontline 2020 model. Armadale is a regional centre and its police station used to close at four o’clock on a weekday and it would not be open at all on the weekend. I brought to the attention of the then minister, now the Leader of the Opposition, the case of a young school girl in Roleystone who was sexually assaulted. Where is the member for Darling Range? She always seems to be missing nowadays. She does not seem to be —

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Mr Speaker —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Okay, you can all have your say, but there is a point of order.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Mr Speaker, I believe that in the past you have ruled it unparliamentary for members to make remarks about whether a member of Parliament is in attendance in this place or otherwise.

**The SPEAKER:** I agree. Member for Armadale, I ask you to withdraw.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I withdraw.

*Debate Resumed*

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** The sexual assault occurred in Roleystone, which is in the Darling Range electorate. I brought it to the attention of the then Minister for Police that the father of this young female drove her to the Armadale Police Station just after four o'clock, about five or 10 minutes after. He pressed the buzzer because he was told that he still might be able to be attended to. No-one answered and he had to drive his daughter all the way to Cannington to make contact with the police. That is appalling. Under the Frontline 2020 model, the only major police station in the whole east metropolitan corridor that was open 24/7 was Cannington Police Station and it had to deal with everyone from this side of the Swan River past Armadale down to Boddington. The minister religiously came into this house and said that the 2020 model was the way we should be going. We now have a new police minister who listened to the concerns of her members and her constituents and police are now closer to the action. The work that the Minister for Police has done with the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence in that area has been first class. Of course, that issue is very hard to overcome but at least we have policies that are trying to address the issue.

**MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood)** [3.53 pm]: The minister has obviously been found wanting. She has worded the amendment very carefully: “fast-tracking of an additional 150 police officers”. The government is towards the end of its fourth year; sorry, the end of a four-year term —

**Mrs M.H. Roberts:** A Freudian slip!

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** Yes.

There is an election in March next year so the minister has decided that she had better get to and fast-track an additional 150 police officers so that she has something to say to the community. What is happening on television now scares us and it scares the community and it will scare the government when it comes to the vote in March. In response to a question asked by the member for Geraldton just recently, the minister said that the government delivered an additional 300 police officers. I do not know where they are but I do know where they are not. They are not in goldfields–Esperance, because its complement is down by 20 officers. They are not in the great southern because its complement is down nearly six officers. They are not in the Kimberley because its complement is down 16 officers. They are not in the Pilbara, because its complement is down 13 officers. They are not in the south west because its complement is down 16 officers. They are not in the wheatbelt because its complement is down 17 officers. We know where they are not. They are not in regional Western Australia.

In addition, earlier on in the week in response to a question asked by the member for Geraldton, the minister asked, “What did the National Party do at the last election? They didn’t invest any royalties for regions.” She went to roll out the old chestnut that all its members did was milk plastic cows and build singing toilets. It is the old chestnut, which is a debate for another day, but the National Party was part of a government that delivered a \$282 million package to increase Western Australia Police numbers by 550. We invested \$200 million into 400 new Government Regional Officers’ Housing houses in regional Western Australia. We invested \$120 million in the emergency services mobile network to improve emergency communications. We invested \$94.5 million in the WA Police community safety radio network. We also invested \$65.7 million in a district allowance for regional public servants, which included police officers. I know Harry Arnott because he was in Pemberton before he became the police union representative. He was very happy with that district allowance; in fact, he lobbied me extremely hard to support that. I know what he felt about that. I have not heard anything about the district allowance from this government. I do not know whether that has disappeared. It seems to have disappeared into the ether. We also invested \$10.5 million on regional police incentives program to attract police officers into hard-to-staff and hard-to-fill positions. We also contributed \$9.5 million towards the Carnarvon Police and Justice Complex. I remember that during my first term in opposition, this minister closed six regional police stations so she has form on that front. Having read the newspaper article with the latest numbers—*The West Australian* exposed it—the police are down on their complement in net terms and now the government is scratching away trying to deliver something to the community as it heads towards the next election so it is fast-tracking 150 police officers.

One last point before we go to the vote: the member for North West Central asked whether the government has done any sort of risk assessment on what has changed in regional Western Australia during the COVID crisis because a huge number of people are travelling around regional Western Australia. There were three tragic deaths at Mount Augustus recently. Those incidents took staff away from the Carnarvon police station, which is well and truly under complement. A whole range of issues emerge. The minister talks about the overall crime statistics. Sure, but other things come into play. Has the government done a risk assessment on what is happening in regional Western Australia during the COVID crisis, because some of the settings have fundamentally changed? This minister has not been up-front with the community. She has misled this house about what the last government did. She is also fast-tracking additional police officers so that she has some sort of agenda to deliver to the community as we go to the 13 March election.

Amendment (deletion of words) put and passed.

*Division*

Amendment (insertion of words) put and a division taken with the following result —

## Ayes (32)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr D.T. Punch	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr R.H. Cook	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr D.A. Templeman
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr P.C. Tinley
Ms E.L. Hamilton	Mr M.P. Murray	Ms C.M. Rowe	Mr R.R. Whitby
Mr T.J. Healy	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Ms R. Saffioti	Ms S.E. Winton
Mr M. Hughes	Mr P. Papalia	Ms A. Sanderson	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr S.J. Price	Ms J.J. Shaw	Mr D.R. Michael ( <i>Teller</i> )

## Noes (15)

Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr P.A. Katsambanis	Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr V.A. Catania	Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup	Dr M.D. Nahan	Mr P.J. Rundle
Ms M.J. Davies	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr D.C. Nalder	Mr A. Krsticevic ( <i>Teller</i> )
Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr R.S. Love	Mr K.M. O'Donnell	

## Pairs

Ms J. Farrer	Dr D.J. Honey
Mr K.J.J. Michel	Mrs A.K. Hayden
Mr M. McGowan	Mr W.R. Marmion

Amendment thus passed.

*Motion, as Amended*

Question put and passed.

**CORONAVIRUS — INTERSTATE AND INTERNATIONAL BORDER RESTRICTIONS***Motion*

**MR Z.R.F. KIRKUP (Dawesville)** [4.02 pm]: I move that this house condemns—sorry; not in this case “condemns”. I will pull that back a bit. It is “calls on”.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Let Hansard hear what we are saying, thank you.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I move —

That this house calls on the McGowan Labor government to show more compassion towards Western Australians trapped interstate and overseas through no fault of their own, and calls out the callous disregard, even contempt, for our fellow citizens.

**Mr R.H. Cook:** You did get the comma in the right place—not “even contempt”.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** It is not “even contempt” as in equal contempt. There is a disparity in the contempt.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Are you wringing your hands with grief over this?

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** It is the hand sanitiser, Deputy Speaker. Otherwise, I would, of course, be wringing my hands with concern about the way that Australians are being treated and their plight trying to get back to our country during this pandemic.

The opposition has moved this motion as a part of a considered contribution as we continue to try our very best to work with this government to make sure that we protect the health of all Western Australians. In this case, we want to make sure that we bring back Western Australians —

Several members interjected.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** The member for Cannington is very kind, but in this case, thank you very much.

Deputy Speaker, obviously I am trying to make a very serious contribution about bringing back Western Australians.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** It is up to you, members. You have the floor, member for Dawesville.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Thank you very much. The member for Cannington was not in his seat when he was interjecting, Deputy Speaker.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Cannington, you know better than that!

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** This is a very serious contribution. Of course, we are trying to work with the government to make sure that we protect the health of all Western Australians, particularly those off our shores who find themselves stranded overseas or those interstate trying to get back to Western Australia. We have noticed more recently some of the language used by the Premier who continues to suggest that the process of repatriating Western Australians in a manner that is safe and consistent with community expectations is somehow a difficult or unfortunate reality of being in office at the moment. I am concerned that more recently the Premier, when speaking about the repatriation and quarantine process, has effectively said that those Australians overseas who still call our country home and Western Australians who want to return to live their lives in Perth are somehow being dumped on our shores by the Australian government. Obviously, that is very disappointing language to use. The opposition and, in fact, I would argue probably the community more broadly has called out that language from time to time. No member in this place could genuinely suggest that as we look for a process to safely bring people home one should say that Australians are being dumped at the doorstep. That is not the way that we treat Australians. It is not just opposition members who feel that way. Earlier this week, an open letter from war veteran Stephen Spencer was published in *The West Australian*. He cites the concerns that I think all of us feel. There is clearly some concern particularly about the language and the way that this government has been motivated when it comes to treating Australians, particularly Western Australians, overseas.

Before I get to Mr Spencer and the case for all returning travellers, I would like to point out something that has continually been an issue for me—that is, the nature of the Premier’s language when he talks about using immigration detention centres for quarantining those returning home, instead of the hotel quarantine regime we have in place. Although an established hotel quarantine is in place, from time to time some improvements may need to be made, which is why we called for a public review. That has been denied by this government. The reality is that the process thus far, hopefully, has worked reasonably well. Thankfully, we have not had the same issues that have occurred in the eastern states. Certainly, Western Australia is not in the same circumstances as Victoria, although, during the very early stages of the hotel quarantine process, there was a risk that things may have gone sideways here. Then, out of nowhere, on 15 September, the Premier suggested that Western Australians could perhaps find themselves isolating at Christmas Island or Yongah Hill immigration detention centres. The Premier is quoted as saying —

“There is Christmas Island, there is Yongah Hill [immigration detention centre]. There are the defence bases with numerous accommodation facilities both in Western Australia and all over the country ...

“They could literally take thousands of people into those if they wanted to, and I think that would be a good back-up to what the state is doing.”

During question time today, the Premier said that nine hotels have been stood up. That shows there is obviously the capacity in Western Australia to start preparing for an increase in the number of people returning home. We know that as a result of the national cabinet decision on Friday, there is a commitment to increase the cap on the number of people who can come back to Western Australia. The cap will go from 525 individuals a week to 1 025 individuals a week by 11 October. It will be a staged process to make sure that, of course, the state is in a good position to respond to the increased number of returning travellers.

To suggest that Australians could find themselves at Christmas Island or Yongah Hill detention centres completely lacks any compassion. It is callous for our state’s Premier to suggest that an immigration detention centre is the right place for people to isolate when they are paying for it themselves. As a result of legislation brought to this place, people have to pay for their hotel quarantine arrangements now.

Firstly, it has been suggested that if someone is placed in an immigration centre, they will have to pay for it. Secondly, an immigration detention centre obviously does not have the same aesthetic, standard or even comfort as a hotel room. That is obvious and evidently the case. At the moment, some of the nine hotels that are used to quarantine people in Western Australia are very nice—for example, the Westin Perth. That is an appropriate place for people returning home to go into for 14 days. We know that isolating in a hotel already significantly impacts the mental health of a person, but to put someone in the Christmas Island detention centre when there is an option for a hotel to be utilised is very concerning and not the way that Australians should be treated.

I have no doubt that although the government endorsed the motion moved last week ensuring that Australians returning home from overseas should not go to Christmas Island to quarantine, I suspect that stands in stark contrast to the views of cabinet ministers. I have seen photos of cabinet ministers involved in refugee protests about the treatment of asylum seekers. I suspect that they do not want offshore detention centres used for asylum seekers, but the government voted for those immigration detention centres to be used for Australian citizens stranded overseas who are simply trying to return home. There is obviously quite a remarkable disparity and sad irony that cabinet ministers clearly do not agree with asylum seekers going to offshore detention centres such as Christmas Island, yet they want those centres to be used, voting for a motion recommending Australians go to those centres to quarantine.

The hubris of the Premier is only further underscored by the fact that last week, 135 people were in the Christmas Island detention centre because they had committed violent and very serious crimes. They had their visas cancelled as a result of those crimes and are awaiting deportation back to their home country. The Premier cannot seriously suggest that they are the people that Western Australians and Australians returning home should be isolating next

to in a detention centre. The Premier did not do his homework or think through this process; he just made some off-the-cuff remark about Yongah Hill and Christmas Island, thinking that the support that has been fomented publicly would somehow carry through to endorse his proposition that Australians should go into those facilities. That is not the case. People clearly do not want to find themselves in the Christmas Island detention centre because it is nearly the same as the hotel quarantine system.

The really interesting question is why the Premier was motivated to suggest that Christmas Island should be used in the first instance. We know that our state has the capacity to quarantine people, with around 10 000 hotel rooms in WA. As we have been able to almost double the number of people who come to our state each week, we know that the state clearly has the capability and capacity to deal with an increase in arrivals—people who have to quarantine. This was a gross overreach by the Premier, who showed that he cares very little about everyday Western Australians who find themselves stranded overseas.

We are not talking about people who are overseas on holiday or enjoying other recreational pursuits. I expect that members from across the aisle and certainly on this side of the house have oftentimes found that the people who contact them, either through their families or other representatives, are overseas for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with recreational holiday-making. We have heard from people overseas who have to return to seek medical treatment in their home country, where Medicare will cover them. In some cases, people's employment circumstances have changed and they need to return home because they simply cannot get a job overseas. Time and again, we have seen inequity in the way processes are applied to those who return home, which has meant that people have been trapped overseas for months.

As we often do during the dinner break on Tuesdays, the member for Carine and I went for a walk through the city last night. The member for Carine was very keen to see what the impact of homelessness looks like in our city, and I am always very keen to join him for a walk in the evening to see what is going on in the CBD.

**Mr R.H. Cook:** It sounds very romantic.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** It does. As we were walking down Hay Street, we saw a gentleman opposite the InterContinental hotel FaceTiming someone. I stopped and asked the gentleman whether the person he was FaceTiming was in quarantine, because I know that the InterContinental is a quarantine facility. He said yes, and that the person he was speaking to was trapped overseas for five months, I think he said, in Portugal. That person had been trying to get back to Western Australia for five months. That is a significant period. During those five months, she did not have the opportunity to return. After discussing the matter further with him, he said that after her visa had totally expired, the process allowed her to return and quarantine in Western Australia. Undoubtedly, the hotel quarantine system is doing its best to respond. We are lucky to have a very committed bunch of nurses and doctors, the Western Australia Police Force and Australian Defence Force personnel assisting in the hotel quarantine process. The reality is that that person should not have had to wait five months for a G2G PASS when they found themselves stranded overseas. The individual we spoke to was obviously relaying the circumstances that his friend at the InterContinental found herself in, but that happens all the time. Constituents or their representatives often contact our offices telling us about the circumstances that they find themselves in. I have yet to be approached by someone who has said that they were holidaying overseas and they could not come back. That has not happened. I suspect that close to 100 constituents in my electorate have had to return home since this regime has been put in place. There is a very real disparity in how the process is applied.

To suggest that after all the heartache and pain suffered by those people stranded overseas, and what they go through, they should find themselves in quarantine at Yongah Hill or Christmas Island is grossly unfair and it reflects the overreach of the Premier. Let us not beat around the bush. People who are quarantined on Christmas Island are not free to walk around the immigration detention centre and use the recreational facilities. That goes against the whole merit of what isolation is in the first instance. People would undoubtedly need to quarantine in their room for the majority of the time, if not the entire time. I have seen some of the images from inside the Christmas Island detention centre. It is obviously not nearly as comfortable as what we would expect from the InterContinental on Hay Street, for example. People are already in a very difficult circumstance, not being free to leave the room in which they are quarantining. It is not a good suggestion that they should be placed in a detention centre. The prospect of using places such as that shows that this Premier has no confidence in our state's health system. That is grossly unfair and does not honour the work of our doctors, nurses, the Department of Health team and the State Health Incident Coordination Centre, who have done a very good job of responding to the current circumstances. We have bought ourselves time to ensure that we have a very compassionate and fair quarantine process in Western Australia.

I realise and appreciate that the minister will undoubtedly suggest during his remarks that per capita, Western Australia is the second highest receiver of people coming into our country. Because our city faces the Indian Ocean, we are undoubtedly the gateway to Europe, Africa, India and the gulf states. It makes a lot of sense that more and more individuals are coming back to Australia via Western Australia. I believe in Western Australia. I believe that we have the capability to put a proper system in place and I believe that we can handle the increased workload. I do not see it—I would be genuinely surprised if any Western Australian does—as a dumping ground when we learn about the number of Australians who have to return to our country.

The language of the Premier in the last couple of weeks has continued to be ratcheted up, I suspect as he realises that he is continuing to lose political support and he has no more posturing to do on the border. Instead, he has started to demean those people who are trying to get home from overseas. That is clearly starting to bite. We cannot deny the real human impact of those people who have been affected, including Mr Stephen Spencer. We know about his case because his father spoke out about him to Seven West Media. Stephen wrote an open letter yesterday about the extraordinary steps he has taken to try to get back home. Mr Spencer is not only a former veteran of the Afghanistan war but also stranded overseas with his wife and two children and is trying to get back home. His father expresses frustration that is brewing within the Spencer family and states in *The West Australian* that Mr Spencer is demanding a one-on-one with Mr McGowan. I quote Mr Spencer's father —

... Mark McGowan here, there has been no help whatsoever. It's been extremely disappointing ...

I'm at boiling point. Mark McGowan speaks about (Christmas Island), I'd love to know how he would feel if that was his family having to go there.

They just say these things. Would you be prepared to do that?

I would just love to be able to get face to face with him —

That is, the Premier —

for about five minutes and have a real good chat to him about it.

I'm actually disgusted with the way they've handled it here and the caps they've put in place.

We get a real sense of the frustration that exists within the Spencer family. That is reinforced by the open letter from Mr Spencer in *The West Australian* yesterday, some of which I will quote —

We looked after our mates, we helped each other, we did the right thing for no other reason than it was the right thing to do. We promoted social classlessness, where the only meaningful metric in evaluating a person was whether they were a "good bloke".

Our sporting and military efforts over the last 120 years have epitomised these traits. The Anzacs are the most famous example, but I witnessed first hand the same courage and mateship in those I served with in Afghanistan. Australia at its best has proven itself capable of shining in the most difficult of circumstances; the undersized underdog who refuses to give up and abandon its post.

I can only imagine how saddened the Anzacs would be at the policies of Australia in 2020. An Australia that has left up to 100,000 of its own citizens competing in a financial Hunger Games to see who gets a seat on a plane.

Undoubtedly, there are ramifications as part of that conversation about the national cabinet process. I understand the frustrations that exist. That is why the caps have been put in place. Caps have been put in place, in this case, at the request of the states, with the support of the Prime Minister and the national cabinet and, indeed, the commonwealth government more broadly. The Premiers set the caps for the states for arrivals into their states. That is why New South Wales has stepped up and why, given the circumstances in which Victoria finds itself, Victoria has not taken any entrants. It is still dealing with its own statewide crisis. Clearly, the Australian government is just trying to support the work of the Western Australian government. The Western Australian government has set those caps. The Western Australian government, as Mr Spencer goes on to say, has frustrated this process for so long and it has created massive inequity in the task of retrieving people from overseas and bringing them back home.

It is important that we make sure that no matter how people return here, it is done safely. Of course, the opposition supports the government in whatever it can do. However, the system must be compassionate and fair. It cannot be a binary argument that people are either a zero or a one and are either let into the state or not. The capability must exist to consider individual circumstances and to understand the circumstances and disparity that people face and the circumstances in which they find themselves and allow people to come home. That is what is important here. We are talking about our fellow Western Australians: people whose children go to school here; people who work here; people whose families are here; people who have been born and bred here; or people who have settled in Western Australia and consider it their new home. They deserve to be able to get home with priority. The Liberal opposition does not want to see a single Western Australian stranded overseas. It is not good enough that someone such as the individual we spoke to yesterday found their friend stranded overseas for five months, unsure about their future, waiting for their visa to be cancelled before the G2G PASS system would allow them to enter into our state. Five months is far too long. We must have a system that allows flexibility. We must have a system that allows for compassion because many people who find themselves still overseas are there through no fault of their own.

We need to ensure that we have a government that has compassion. That is all we are asking for. The behaviour so far of some—indeed, the language of the Premier more recently—has been callous. It has been borderline in contempt for those who find themselves overseas. In this motion today we call on the government to show more compassion to those Western Australians stranded overseas and interstate through no fault of their own. Let us bring them back home safely and in a way that is compassionate and consistent with the Australian values of mateship, fairness and equality.

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health)** [4.24 pm]: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this motion. Another day in Parliament, another day on which the opposition calls into question Western Australia's hard borders. They are the borders that have kept us safe; the borders that allow us to open our economy. The government gives no apology for the state's hard borders. The borders we put in place have meant we have had no community-based spread of COVID-19 since 11 April. The Premier said today that it was 162 days. That is an enviable record and one that has allowed Western Australians to go back into the workplace in droves and people's lives to get back to the new normal. Obviously, to maintain hard borders requires hard decisions, and the government has had to make those decisions time and again. That includes making sure that when people come home to Western Australia, they do so safely and in a way that keeps people in Western Australia safe. The way we do that is by ensuring that we have proper stewardship of our borders by maintaining good hotel quarantining arrangements and making sure that we identify the public health risk and addressing it. The key way we address the public health risk is by ensuring that those coming from overseas, which represent our highest public health risk, do so by quarantining in a hotel for 14 days while any potential disease that may impact on them resolves itself. They then come out of the hotel and can go about their lives. They can continue on to other parts of Australia or, indeed, live in Western Australia.

The government wants those coming from overseas to do so. We want them to be able to come back to Western Australia and Australia so they can continue about their lives. Our priority is to look after them so they can come home safely, but also to protect those in Western Australia from any potential disease. It is for that reason that the government has continued to maintain strong controls on our hotels and will continue to do so. We have a range of hotels, all of which require extensive resources to ensure that we maintain that standard. All security contractors in those hotels have undergone strong infection control courses and training to ensure the necessary security arrangements are kept in place. Health and welfare teams oversee those hotels to ensure that we not only look after our guests, but keep an eye on the security arrangements. That involves at least three doctors and nine nurses. It involves welfare staff including psychologists and social workers—people of that nature. It includes infection control nurses, logisticians, administrators and coordinators—people who can manage the cohorts in the hotels. Every time we stand up a hotel, that is another group of highly trained medical staff who come off the frontline into those hotels. They perform an outstanding role, but there are limitations in what we do with those people. As a result, the commonwealth and the state are working together on the arrangement that brought about the cap on international arrivals. That cap is in place to ensure that Perth's hotels are not overwhelmed. This is the same problem that confronts hotels in Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide. As the member for Dawesville said, no international guests are staying at the hotels in Melbourne while Victoria continues to resolve the issues confronting that state.

We are aware that a range of people want to come home to Australia. We are sympathetic to their cause. Indeed, the Premier was one of the early sign-ups to the Prime Minister's call to increase the cap. He made that offer in the context of a national cabinet meeting, understanding that a range of people want to come home. The Premier wants to bring those people home. However, he wants to bring them home safely. The Premier made a commitment that we would work with the commonwealth to increase the cap in a way that would enable us to share the resources, and also not compromise our hotel quarantine system. As I said, the Premier was an early sign-up to that call from the Prime Minister, and it is one that we are committed to.

Therefore, it is extremely disappointing that we had a period of time in which the federal government was focused entirely on political pointscoring against the Victorian and Queensland governments, with Josh Frydenberg providing despicable commentary about the Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, and Peter Dutton providing underwhelming and, quite frankly, inflammatory commentary about the Queensland government. That commentary was entirely unwarranted and unhelpful. The Prime Minister says that he is trying to lead a coalition of consensus among all the Premiers. However, at the same time, his ministers are attacking the Premiers on a daily basis.

This also comes at a time when there was an outbreak of the COVID disease across residential aged-care facilities in Victoria, and Minister Richard Colbeck was exposed for the federal government's woeful management of that sector. Therefore, perhaps it is not surprising that the federal government switched tactics. No longer did it want to be part of a national consensus. It wanted to take part in a dog-eat-dog and, quite frankly, unattractive process of attacking the Victorian government. That was potentially to deflect from the incompetence of the Morrison government and Minister Colbeck in funding and regulating the residential aged-care sector. Despite the fact that the commonwealth government has sole responsibility for that area, it could not provide the leadership to prevent those deaths. The commonwealth government has financially strangled that sector for so long that it lacked the capacity to respond in any meaningful way to the COVID 19 outbreak in Victoria, and that led directly to the swathe of deaths that took place across those residential aged-care facilities. Therefore, it is not surprising that we had this dog whistling and cat calling from the commonwealth government. It wanted to deflect from its woeful inadequacy and comprehensive failure to protect the most vulnerable of Australians in those residential aged-care facilities.

We also had the rather hapless Deputy Prime Minister, Michael McCormack, wave about his head a letter that he had written to all the Premiers, unilaterally declaring that they should increase the cap across the country. That was in direct contradiction to the Prime Minister's commitment that he would work with the state governments to increase

the cap. The Premier found out about the commonwealth government's declaration to increase the cap during a press conference, when the journalist presented him with the letter that had supposedly been sent to him. That is no way for a national government to conduct itself. That is a pathetic and disrespectful process. The Morrison government should hang its head in shame. I know the political adage that if we are placed between a stuff-up and a conspiracy, 90 per cent of the time it is just a complete stuff-up. It was either a conspiracy by the commonwealth government against the states—while we are at it, it is just the Labor states, because the Prime Minister said in his letter that he already had the agreement of the New South Wales and South Australian governments—or a monumental stuff-up and failure to lead nationally and work with the states on this common issue. The Prime Minister does not even know what the Deputy Prime Minister is doing.

The Premier is fundamentally committed to bringing Western Australians home. However, he is fundamentally committed to bringing them home in a safe way that protects both them and the Western Australians who are here. The Premier wants to work with the commonwealth to find a single solution to bring those people home. However, we have not had that. The commonwealth government has arrogantly dismissed any contribution from the states and has simply sought to divide the states. It has attacked the Victorian government, because it hates Daniel Andrews and his popularity. It has attacked the Queensland government for political advantage, because that government is about to go to an election. It has also undermined the Western Australian government, which was one of the early sign-ups in committing to the Morrison government's efforts to increase the cap.

We want to increase the cap, and we will provide extra hotels to ensure that happens. However, is it too much to ask the national Prime Minister to lead nationally? Is it too much to ask the national Prime Minister to cooperate with the state Premiers in providing a national solution, because only the Premiers can deliver on a national solution? Let us not forget that the commonwealth government has entirely abrogated its responsibility for international borders. I never thought I would hear myself say that about a federal Liberal government, given the immoral way in which it treats the refugees and asylum seekers who are trying to come into this country. For some reason, when letting people come to this country may have potentially deadly consequences for our Australian population, Peter Dutton is completely missing in action. Perhaps if we had gotten someone from the *Artania* to apply for refugee status, we would have been given some assistance from the commonwealth government. As it was, Peter Dutton has been completely missing in action. It has been left to the hapless Michael McCormack to wade into the issue of border security. However, he has waded into that in a clumsy way that has completely destroyed any capacity for cooperation. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Premier would, out of annoyance and frustration, point out that the people with the resources, the capacity and the personnel to lend a hand in increasing the number of international arrivals is the commonwealth government itself. It is not unreasonable for the Premier to point out that the commonwealth has a range of facilities around the country that it could put in place, at the drop of a hat, to ensure the safe arrival of many hundreds, and potentially thousands, of Australians who want to return home. It is not unreasonable for the Premier to point out that the commonwealth could bring to bear the resource of the Australian Defence Force to assist the states to increase the cap. In particular, it is not unreasonable for the Premier to point out that we also have an army of Australian Border Force personnel, who, quite frankly, have been entirely missing in this whole saga.

We know they are not managing our borders, because Western Australian police and the Western Australian Department of Health are doing that. What are Australian Border Force officials doing? Where is the Australian Border Force at this time of existential external threat to the country? We know they are not working in our airports. We know they are not working in our ports. Quite frankly, all that activity, particularly air arrivals, has crashed. They must be leaning on water coolers and wondering when Minister Dutton is going to call on them to lend a hand. No, we do not hear about that.

All the Deputy Prime Minister did, without any reference to the Premier or other state leaders, was to undermine the Prime Minister and the national consensus by unilaterally declaring that the federal government would increase the cap. As the member for Dawesville alluded to, Western Australia is already doing a substantial proportion of the heavy lifting with the caps. We take 525 people a week. The only state that takes more arrivals than that is New South Wales. Queensland has a significantly bigger economy and capacity than Western Australia, yet it takes only 500 people a week. Adelaide takes only 500 people a week. I wonder whether they struggle to find 500 people who want to return to Australia through Adelaide! However, Adelaide takes only 500 a week.

**Mr D.C. Nalder:** That was nasty.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Are you saying he's wrong?

**Mr D.C. Nalder:** I'm saying it's nasty. I enjoyed my time in Adelaide; it's a great city.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** It is my second-favourite city, actually. I was just saying that not many people want to go there.

Western Australia takes the highest number of returning Australians per capita of any state, and that situation will remain when we go to 1 025 arrivals in three weeks' time. I am not surprised that the Premier pushed back. The Premier stood up for Western Australia once again.

**Mr D.C. Nalder:** He doesn't want Western Australian people returning home to be dumped in Western Australia.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** No, member for Bateman; he is standing up to the opposition for lining up behind Clive Palmer. He is standing up to members opposite, who day after day come in here and question our position on the hard border. He is standing up to members opposite, who day after day call into question the great work of the Chief Health Officer and the Commissioner of Police. He is standing up to members opposite, who day after day do not support the Western Australian people, because you, of all people, want to bring down our hard border.

**Mr D.C. Nalder:** When have I said that?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Where was the member for Bateman when Clive Palmer was challenging our hard border? He was lining up behind the Leader of the Opposition and supporting Clive Palmer. Either that or he was not supporting the Leader of the Opposition! He can have it one of two ways; he was supporting either the government or the Leader of the Opposition. Which side was the member for Bateman on? He has gone quiet, Madam Deputy Speaker! I am very sorry about that, because it would have been great to hear whether he was undermining the Western Australian government by supporting Clive Palmer or undermining the Leader of the Opposition.

We understand the struggles that people are facing in returning to Australia. We understand that the decisions that we make to keep Western Australians safe are hard. We understand the need to bring more Western Australians and Australians home, and the role that Western Australia plays, and will continue to play, in getting more Australians back home. It is important that we do that safely. We have to make sure that our hotel quarantine is of a high enough standard that we can bring people back safely and protect the Western Australians who are already here. We will continue to do that. The Premier is committed to bringing more people home, which is why he signed Western Australia up to increasing the caps earlier. Consensus was reached between him and the Prime Minister, and that was undermined only by the incompetence, political partisanship or rank opportunism of the Prime Minister's other ministers, who wanted some political gain over the Victorian and Queensland governments. We will overlook the party-political grandstanding that has taken place over the last few weeks because we want to be part of the solution. Western Australia is already doing the heavy lifting. We take in more people per capita than any other state. We will do more, but we need the commonwealth to assist.

Mr Spencer's argument is not with the Western Australian government. We are committed to bringing his family and other families home as quickly as possible, but we are also committed to doing it safely. Our priority is to protect Western Australians at the same time. The only thing that is holding back that process is the incompetence of the Morrison government in not working with the state governments, in not bringing people along with the national consensus and for failing to provide national leadership. Quite frankly, we expect better from the commonwealth. We expect its resources, leadership and cooperation. We want to do more for people overseas. We want to make sure that we bring them home safely. The only thing stopping that is the incompetence of the Morrison government.

#### *Division*

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy Speaker (Ms L.L. Baker) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

#### Ayes (13)

Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr A. Krsticevic	Mr D.C. Nalder	Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup ( <i>Teller</i> )
Ms M.J. Davies	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr K.M. O'Donnell	
Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr R.S. Love	Mr D.T. Redman	
Mr P.A. Katsambanis	Dr M.D. Nahan	Mr P.J. Rundle	

#### Noes (34)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr D.T. Punch	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr M. McGowan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr R.H. Cook	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr P.C. Tinley
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr S.A. Millman	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms E.L. Hamilton	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Ms C.M. Rowe	Ms S.E. Winton
Mr T.J. Healy	Mr M.P. Murray	Ms R. Saffioti	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr M. Hughes	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Ms A. Sanderson	Mr D.R. Michael ( <i>Teller</i> )
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr P. Papalia	Ms J.J. Shaw	
Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr S.J. Price	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski	

#### Pairs

Dr D.J. Honey	Dr A.D. Buti
Mrs A.K. Hayden	Ms J. Farrer
Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr K.J.J. Michel
Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr M.J. Folkard

Question thus negatived.

**McGOWAN GOVERNMENT — POLICIES***Motion*

**MR D.C. NALDER (Bateman)** [4.50 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan government for its handling of the domestic economy and local jobs, and the impact its policies have had on households and small businesses, resulting in high unemployment, record levels of mortgage stress and mortgage defaults, and a raft of social issues, including a spike in crime and ambulance ramping.

They are specific examples. We find ourselves in a really interesting scenario in Western Australia. We almost have a two-speed economy emerging in the sense that we are starting to see the results of a second mining boom. I know it concerns those opposite when we talk about a mining boom, but in the last week we have seen record levels of exploration, a surge in recruiting and employment in the mining sector and, in Australian dollar terms, near record prices for iron ore particularly and also recently for gold. Our two main mining industries and the companies involved are experiencing some of the most profitable conditions they have ever experienced in the state's history. That really means a strong surge in financial flows to the state, particularly from iron ore. If I just focus on the revenues from iron ore at the moment, we are seeing that the average price in US dollar terms is roughly \$US60 above what was forecast for this financial year back in December. According to Treasury, for every \$US1 increase —

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** The average.

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** I can tell the member for Cannington the average.

According to Treasury, for every \$US1 increase, there is an \$85 million increase to the budget bottom line on a per annum basis. To date, the average iron ore price is sitting above \$US113, which is adding \$330 million a month. The figure of \$US113 —

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** That is over a year.

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** I know it is averaged over a year, but if the government is receiving —

Several members interjected.

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** Deputy Speaker, I seek your support. I am not accepting any interjections. I believe members opposite can get up and have their say.

I understand exactly how the iron ore price works. I know it averaged \$US93 last year and I know it is averaging in excess of \$US113 and the spot price is well over \$US120. In fact, for most of last month, it was sitting at around \$US126. Those sorts of prices, if they hold, will deliver \$5.1 billion more for the year. I am not saying they will, and we will get back to that point. We will get back to the point that the Treasurer made last week about whether I thought this current mining boom was sustainable or not. I said I did not believe it was. It is really interesting to see the hubris from this government about how well the economy is doing in Western Australia when a lot of it is based on what is happening in the mining sector. That is the point I am making. If iron ore sits at the current price of over \$US120, the government will generate an extra \$5.1 billion for the year. On a monthly basis, we are talking about \$425 million a month. For the first three months of this year, the price averaged at around \$US113. That is nearly \$1 billion in additional revenue stream for the three months. The price has to fall well below \$US60 before that erodes over time. If government members want to talk about whether I understand the financials for a year, they can go for their lives. I do understand them.

Currently, the government has rivers of iron ore royalties flowing into the state coffers. Do I believe it is sustainable? When we see record high prices such as this, of course we do not believe they are sustainable. That is why the government should not be talking about how well the economy is doing. The whole economy is just about totally relying on what is happening in the mining sector. The government might say that there has been a spike in retail spending and housing, but look at the stimulus that has been ploughed in with JobKeeper and JobSeeker. Look at what has been ploughed in with the state government's own grants, and the federal government's grants, towards new homes. Of course we will see those sorts of increases.

Is that sustainable, Treasurer? I do not believe it is. That is my concern. The government is not looking at what is required for the economy for the medium to long term. If I am wrong, government members can get up here and explain why I am wrong. All the policies I have seen from this government are totally focused on delivering an outcome between now and March next year. What happens after March? The government says, "We don't care. We'll deal with that later." If our economy is doing so well, why was the Residential Tenancies Act issue extended for another six months? The government would not do that. It would extend it only if there was an underlying concern about the existing economy, yet the government wants to tell us that everything is fine and that we should not look too closely here.

Let us start looking at some of the statistics. I know the government can find some statistics to say that things are up and that we can see online advertising for jobs is up, and that is great, but the government tells me that the

Western Australian economy is performing better than domestic economies anywhere else, yet the latest statistics show that the domestic economies of South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland performed better than Western Australia in the last quarterly results.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** The politics of dancing!

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** The member for Cannington is obviously worried about this, is he not, when the statistics show that South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland all performed better than Western Australia in the last quarter? Why on earth is the government saying that we have the best economy? On what basis is the government saying that we have the best domestic economy in Australia? The government might want to grab a couple of little points, but let us look at what happened in the Western Australia economy in the June quarter. We saw a decline of six per cent for the quarter. What is really interesting is what the Australian National Accounts state. I quote —

Total final consumption expenditure decreased 6.8%, driven by a:

- 10.6% decrease in household consumption reflecting falls in hotels, cafes and restaurants, transport services, and recreation and culture

Partly offset by a:

- 3.5% increase in government consumption due to increased state and local and defence spending in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Private gross fixed capital formation decreased 4.2%, due to a:

- 10.7% decrease in dwelling construction as work commenced remained at low levels

We know that has started to pick up with some of the stimulus that both the state and federal governments have provided for a period of time. The accounts continue —

- 12.9 % decrease in intellectual property products with a fall in research and development

Partly offset by a:

- 3.9% rise in machinery and equipment reflecting increased mining investment

Public gross fixed capital formation decreased 1.7%, driven by a:

- 7.8% decrease in national general government as investment projects near completion
- 4.5% decrease in Commonwealth and state and local public non-financial corporations

It is interesting that although we see in the data that mining is doing well—we know that; it is actually booming again—overall, the domestic economy contracted by six per cent, which is worse than that in Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory. Here we have the hubris of the government spruiking that Western Australia is the best in Australia, and we are not necessarily seeing that.

Another thing that has been really fascinating to watch is the decline in housing prices. The average Western Australian household assesses its own wealth position based on the value of its residential property, and the greater the value of their residential property, the greater most Western Australians view their own asset position or wealth. We have seen a continual decline for the entire McGowan government term. It has declined since 2014; I acknowledge that. The Treasurer likes to get up and say that 60 per cent of the decline was under the previous government, but that is factually incorrect; 60 per cent of the decline has been under the current government and the largest decline was in 2019. The year after, the Premier went out and told everybody that it is time to go and buy a property. The government is out encouraging people to buy Western Australian property in a year when we have seen the largest decline over the last six years. I always say that the Premier needs to be very careful about the advice that he provides people, because people may listen to that advice and act on it, and it may cost them dearly. I believe he has a responsibility to those people to whom he provides advice. What makes this worse is that whilst the government is telling people it is a fantastic time to buy a house, it is out there quietly selling a thousand homes.

**Mr A. Krsticevic:** It is selling 1 300 homes.

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** The government is selling 1 300 state housing homes. It is out there selling them into a market that it is telling people is rock bottom. It is telling the general community that there has never been a better time to buy a property and trying to get people to buy the properties that it is selling in a declining market. The government is selling in a market that it believes has bottomed out. Why is the state government selling state housing homes at a time when the market is assumed to have bottomed out? If we look at the reports, a three-bedroom, one-bathroom home in Armadale had the state's lowest price in 2019 of \$150 000, and it was a state housing home. The government is out there saying that it cares about people. We only have to go down to the CBD in Perth after 6.30 at night to see who is sleeping in the malls, or go and look at tent city on the railway line, to see what is occurring here. We are selling state homes at a time when we have increasing homelessness. This economy is doing well, according to the Treasurer, and yet the people in our community we are supposed to be supporting cannot get that support. The

government has turned around and sold homes out from underneath them. The government wonders why the number of homeless people is increasing. Where is the government on this issue? It wants to stand there and tell us how fantastic our economy is doing, “We’re doing it better; we’ve managed this economy better; we’ve managed this pandemic better.” We need only look at the fact there are homeless people living in a tent city and the government is sneaking about selling homes from underneath people at a time when it is trying to convince other people in the community to buy a home, particularly those who struggle more than the average person. The government is saying that there has never been a better time to buy while it is flooding the market with other homes to try to put further downward pressure on the housing market. It is incredible that the government would do that.

This government claims that it is managing our economy well. If we want to know how the government is managing our economy, we need look no further than the unemployment rate. The government can say that there has been a big drop in the unemployment rate and the biggest gain of employment, and I know that the Treasurer will get up and say that, but he forgets to add what happened two months earlier in the decline, and how much further it fell compared with the rest of the country. The Treasurer has the benefit of a mining boom that is happening in the background at the same time. We sit here shaking our heads and thinking, hang on, we are doing so well, yet we have an unemployment rate of seven per cent compared with Victoria, which is in total lockdown, which has an unemployment rate of 7.1 per cent. Victoria is in total lockdown, and its unemployment rate is only 0.1 per cent worse than ours. I sit here, scratch my head and ask: why is the government in Western Australia acting with so much hubris around the economy when our unemployment rate is at seven per cent versus Victoria at 7.1 per cent, and when the national average is still lower than here? There is something fundamentally wrong. If we look at the data, 240 000 people in Western Australia are either unemployed or underemployed. That figure of 240 000 is certainly not something to crow about. We know that we have a serious issue when we get to over 100 000 unemployed people; we just need to go back in history to see that. We know that this data is understated because it does not include people on JobKeeper and JobSeeker. We have some real challenges in this economy to ensure that there is a sustainable future for Western Australians. I am not seeing actions by this government to deal with long-term sustainability and prosperity for Western Australians into the future. That is the challenge.

I want to share a few more statistics with members. The government says that it is looking after people by freezing energy charges this year. It says that it has managed so well fiscally—forget the fact that it has received billions of dollars from GST on iron ore—that it can freeze energy charges. The reality is that Western Australia now has the second-highest electricity charges in the country, just behind South Australia. Over the last three and a half years, we had the largest increase in electricity charges of any state in Australia. Even if we freeze charges, we will still have the largest increase in electricity charges of any state in Australia. Again, the government has put households in pain.

That is another issue I want to talk about. If Western Australian’s economy is doing so well and is the benchmark for Australia, why has the number of households in Western Australia that are suffering mortgage stress increased by over 100 per cent since the government came into office? It was already up by 67 per cent before the coronavirus pandemic hit in January this year. In January 2020, 152 000 households were suffering mortgage stress; in March 2017, that figure was sitting at around 90 000 households. The figure was already up by 67 per cent, but now 193 000 households are suffering mortgage stress, which means by definition that their monthly expenditure is greater than their monthly income. If our economy is doing so well, why do we have so many households struggling to make ends meet? Why is that the situation? Look over the lines from mortgage stress to actual mortgage defaults. It is forecast that our state average is going to be nearly double the national average of people who will have their homes repossessed. We know that the economy is being buffered at the moment because banks have deferred mortgage payments for people who are really struggling. That is going to start coming off soon. WA is forecast to have nearly double the national average of mortgage defaults over the next 12 months. It is another damning economic statistic. Households are struggling.

This is where it gets fascinating. I love doing research, twisting in and looking behind things. Let us look at what is happening with Keystart. Keystart is an initiative set up to support people who would otherwise struggle to be able to afford finance from a banking institution. The government is there to help them get into a home. These people would otherwise struggle to save a deposit, but the state government is getting them started. It is a great program, as I have said in this house before, and the way in which the policy was set up at its foundation made a lot of sense back then because the interest rate was based on the standard variable rate of the four major banks. Back then, we did not have disparity between the standard variable rate and what the banks were offering in the general marketplace. Over time, we have seen a growing disparity between the rate offered by the banks and the standard variable rate, to the point now whereby the standard variable rate is sitting at above 4.5 per cent and banks are offering two per cent.

**Mr A. Krsticevic:** It is one-point-something.

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** Yes, it is down below two, but let us keep it at two. It is 2.5 per cent higher. These people are struggling to make ends meet, and they are paying 2.5 per cent more in interest rates per annum. We want these people to succeed in paying down the debt so that they can refinance with a financial institution service and the

government can on-lend to other people and help them get started in the property market. What makes this worse is that at the same time, the government is trying to put downward pressure on the property market to drive housing prices down further by selling a thousand properties. That is not the only thing it did—it brought in the foreign buyers tax at a time when we said, “Don’t bring it in now. We like the principle but the timing is wrong. The industry is on its knees. Don’t do it now.”

The Treasurer may say, “Look how much we raised.” The Treasurer has not shared how much stamp duty they lost and how many rebates the government has given in stamp duty and foreign buyers tax for foreign buyers to buy an apartment.

**Mr A. Krsticevic:** Let’s not forget the redraw facility on Keystart that encouraged people to withdraw as well.

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** Yes.

I want to take this to the fact that these people are paying 4.6 per cent. What did the Reserve Bank do after the COVID outbreak in February? It dropped the interest rate twice in the month of February and mortgage stress declined in February with those two interest rate drops because people had got a bit further in front before the pandemic hit and then all of a sudden they were hurting again. What did the government do? It just kept it at the standard variable rate. What happened to the standard variable rate with the two interest rate drops? It dropped in the first one; the first quarter per cent went through and it flowed through to Keystart mortgage holders. How much of the second interest cut from the Reserve Bank was forwarded to Keystart mortgage holders? It was absolutely zero. Keystart mortgage holders got zero. What did the government say during the pandemic? It said, “We’ve got to protect people who are renting a property. We want to make sure that landlords can’t evict them during this pandemic because that would be unfair.” We believe that people in need needed to be protected; we do not have a problem with that. But surely that would also apply to people with a Keystart mortgage. We expected that the government would want to do something for the people who were struggling to make ends meet. I put a question on notice in the other house. I asked: how many people have had their homes repossessed under Keystart since the start of this year? The answer was 60. I also asked: how many people have had their homes repossessed since the pandemic? The answer was 30. The state government has been repossessing the homes of Keystart mortgage holders during this pandemic; and at a time when it introduces legislation into this place to support people who are renting a property without applying relief to some of the most vulnerable in the community to whom we are trying to give a leg up. What is interesting is that the government said, “We didn’t repossess those homes, those people abandoned them.” Those people abandoned their home; they walked out! I am going to look into that a little bit more. It is really fascinating that the government brings legislation into this house to protect people but at the same time I have found out by asking a question on notice that it has repossessed 60 homes of Keystart mortgage holders this year.

Again, the Western Australian economy is apparently doing so well. The point that I am trying to make is that there are elements in our economy that are doing well, but there are elements that are not. Members only have to go down to St Georges Terrace to see that. The government of its own volition decided to take responsibility for the City of Perth council. I am not saying that that was right or wrong and I am not judging that decision. But in taking responsibility for it, it therefore became responsible for how well it has been running in that period. The government of Western Australia appointed people to oversee it and it is responsible for what has happened inside the City of Perth pretty much for its whole term of government. It has been embarrassing for Western Australia.

My wife and I spent a few days in Perth city during the winter recess. She said that she had never seen Yagan Square so I said I would take her there. We decided to walk to Yagan Square at 6.30 pm. We wandered up from St Georges Terrace. We went through London Court; there were a lot of empty shops. We walked out onto Hay Street Mall and the malls had been barricaded. I do not know what time they were barricaded but they had already been barricaded by 6.30 pm. There were already people sleeping in shop entrances on Hay Street Mall at 6.30 pm. We walked down Hay Street and William Street towards Wellington Street. I saw a homeless guy sitting on the corner with his shopping trolley. He said good evening and was very pleasant. We walked across to Yagan Square. There was a slight drizzle and it was freezing cold. There was a guy about 50 metres off yelling at the top of his voice. He did not have a shirt on, just a pair of jeans. I thought, “Right, we’re not going in that direction.” I could see a couple of security guys sitting about 30 to 40 metres away. I thought we would stay away from that guy.

We went downstairs to the food hall in Yagan Square and only two shops were open out of about 30 or 40. It looked pretty dead. We wandered back out and walked towards Wellington Street and decided to go through the mall because there was not really anything to see in Yagan Square at 6.30, seven o’clock at night. It was pretty disappointing. We were about to go across Wellington Street when the guy who was wearing only jeans started coming towards us, still screaming his head off. I thought, “Hello.” I could not cross the street at that point. I stood between my wife and the guy. There were actually six guys and they were screaming. I thought, “Far out. I don’t know where this will go.” They came past us and kept walking onto the street. There were already cars going through the intersection and they had to slam on their brakes. Out of nowhere two policemen turned up—they obviously were not far off but they were not visible to me at that point—and tried to herd them off the street. We grabbed something to eat underneath 140 William Street where a couple of places were open and then walked down Murray Street Mall where we saw six or eight people sleeping. That was the first time that I have not felt safe in Perth. I have never felt that

before. I felt really uncomfortable. That is not a sign of the Western Australian domestic economy doing exceptionally well; either that or something is seriously falling through the cracks because if our economy is doing so well and it is something to brag about to the rest of the country, and if Australia is supposedly doing better than most places in the world and we have that scenario in the City of Perth, that is something that I am extremely embarrassed about as a Western Australian.

**Mr A. Krsticevic:** That was happening before COVID.

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** It was happening before COVID but what I am saying is that the government talks about how well the domestic economy is going and that we have the strongest domestic in Australia but it seems that the number of forgotten people is growing. The Labor Party has always made out that it is the champion of the forgotten people but the government has taken no action to address this issue. It is embarrassing for Western Australia. We want to be recognised as one of the best in the world, but the states and countries that are judged the best in the world are those that take responsibility for the most vulnerable in their community. If we are doing so well in this economy—from what I hear the government expects to deliver a budget surplus—the government has no excuse to have forgotten the most vulnerable people in the Western Australian community. That is one of the social issues that we are seeing as a result of the government's management of the Western Australian economy. That is one of the outcomes. We can add to that the increase—it appears to be an increase but maybe I am wrong—in violence in Northbridge, which seems to have started to skyrocket again. I do not understand that. I do not understand how that could be occurring—there is no excuse. The government is delivering a budget surplus and we supposedly have one of the best economies in Australia and, therefore, the world, yet there are increasing levels of violence, increasing levels of homelessness and therefore an increasing level of vulnerable people in our community. As I said, the mortgage stress results show that we have a growing issue. We know from the nearly six years of decline in house prices that nearly one in five Western Australian households with a mortgage are in negative equity. They owe more on their mortgage than they have in the value of their property. That is a serious economic concern when so much of Australia's wealth and prosperity is the equity that a person has in their home.

If we extend that through to business, particularly small business, small business owners utilise the equity in their home for accessing finance for their small business. If they do not have equity in their house value, they cannot get finance to get their small business going. Again, it is an underlying fundamental principle whether we agree with it or not. I am not saying that it was sustainable or realistic when Western Australia's median house price was higher than Sydney's median house price. I do not believe it was sustainable or realistic, but right now our median house price is less than Adelaide's and nearly \$50 000 less than Hobart's median house price. Something has gone awry in Western Australia. I believe the government's economic policies prior to the coronavirus pandemic have contributed to that.

I have shared these policies with the house before, but I will read them again. The first policy was the change in the regional migration status whereby the government on the political basis of its local jobs for local kids campaign shifted Perth from a regional city to a mainstream city like Sydney or Melbourne. I think the Premier said something along the lines, "I'm sick of seeing overseas people taking our kids' jobs." Every Western Australian, it does not matter which side of politics they are on, agrees with the principle that we want to put our kids first. I do not know anyone who disagrees with that. But the policy decision the government took to support that position did so much damage to jobs for our kids. It states in the government's WA jobs book that for every three international students—the government now says four—there is one job. When the government changed the regional migration status, those students started shifting to Adelaide and Hobart. Members should look at what happened to tourism and other things in Adelaide and Hobart immediately after that decision. Boy did we help the economies of Adelaide and Hobart. They went off because of the international visitors who come to see their kids or nephews or nieces or friends or whomever. On average, about five international visitors per international student visit them and spend five to six times more than the average international visitor. On average, the number of international students coming to Perth went down by something like 12 000 based on our market share of international students nationally. It was the equivalent of stripping \$750 million a year from our domestic economy—like that! International students did not need to buy new properties off the plan under their visa, like those with a 457 visa, their parents could purchase existing properties in the name of their kids. The government took those buyers out of the market, so, again, there was downward pressure.

Then the government introduced the foreign buyers' tax at a time when the housing industry was on its knees. I said in this chamber that it is not a matter of the principle; it is the timing. I was then accused by the Treasurer of putting the interests of foreign investors in front of Western Australians. I said, no, the government by pushing up that tax—this basic economics 101—is stripping demand from the market. The government promised it would be four per cent, but it loaded it in at seven per cent. What happened? The international buyers disappeared. Then the government tried to reverse that policy and a couple of years later the regional migration status decision—too late for this year, anyway. The government reversed that decision by giving massive rebates but it still claims, "Look how much money we've raised. We've raised \$20 million from foreign buyers from the foreign buyers' tax. It was the right decision." The government did not say how much stamp duty we have lost or how much was given back in rebates on stamp duty on the foreign buyers' tax.

These fundamental problems in our domestic economy were created by the government's own actions and policies, and they are still there today. The stimulus the government is providing at this point in Western Australia, coupled with the stimulus infrastructure spend and JobKeeper and JobSeeker coming from the federal government, gives an artificial sense of where the economy is at. I expect things to improve on the surface and there to be a tick up at this point in time. My concern is how sustainable that will be into the future and what will happen. That is why I said at the outset that when I look at what the government has been doing in this space, I believe it is trying to get to March. It is all focused around the election, and so every decision is politically based rather than what is in the long-term best interests of the state.

**Ms C.M. Rowe:** What'd you think we have been doing during the pandemic?

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** I am talking about the economy.

**Ms C.M. Rowe:** What'd you think we've been worried about?

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** As I said, Western Australia has a very high unemployment rate that is above the national average; 240 000 people are either unemployed or underemployed; 193 000 households are suffering mortgage stress—it is up over 100 per cent since Labor came to government—and the mortgage default rate is nearly double the national average. The member for Belmont wants us to understand what the government has been doing. What has the government been doing?

**Ms C.M. Rowe:** Looking after Western Australians.

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** The government has not been looking after Western Australians. The member was not listening to what I just said to her about 193 000 households suffering mortgage stress and that we have a mortgage default rate double the national average. How can the member say that is looking after Western Australians?

I have raised some serious concerns about actions of this government that have done a lot of damage in our domestic economy and highlighted some statistics that are a serious concern. Justifiably, we should be concerned about them. As I said, some of those concerns flow through to social issues in our community. I think the most visible example of how well, or poorly, this government has been doing in our domestic economy is what is happening in the community. We are seeing increased levels of crime and violence, particularly in Northbridge, and homelessness and issues in our Perth CBD. I want the city of Perth to be something we can all be proud of. At this point, after staying in Perth for three days, I cannot put my hand on my heart and say that I am really proud of Perth as a city and Western Australia at the moment. I believe a number of us feel that way. I would be surprised if the member for Belmont is happy about what is happening in the Perth CBD at this time.

Those are the concerns I would like to raise. I expect that we will see further improvements. That will be interesting to see. The stimulus from the housing grants and sustained high iron ore and gold prices in the mining sector will continue to have a positive effect. The Treasurer pointed out that he does not believe that price is sustainable; nor do I. Therefore, the government cannot bank on that price and pin its claim about effectively managing the domestic economy on what is happening in that space. That coupled with concerns about what is happening in households and homelessness, and this government continues to have some serious challenges.

**Mr P.A. Katsambanis:** Acting Speaker.

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** Acting Speaker.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman):** Treasurer.

**Mr P.A. Katsambanis:** I called first.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** It flips. That is what I am told to do.

**MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park — Treasurer) [5.28 pm]:** Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I rise to comment on what was a bit of a stream of consciousness from the shadow Treasurer. Some of which I have heard before, some of which was just about the fact that he wandered through the city once and what he saw. I want to start by saying that I am actually proud of the city of Perth. I think our CBD is something we should be proud of. It has changed fundamentally over the last 15 years, and with the city deal announced on the weekend with the commonwealth government, we will see it change even more in the next little while. It is something we can be proud of. I go there every week. I was surprised it was a member's first visit to Yagan Square.

**Mr D.C. Nalder:** My wife's first visit.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** It was the member's wife's first visit to Yagan Square. I go there probably every week. I take my kids. I have two daughters, aged 10 and 11 years. We go into the city because I like the city. It is dynamic and exciting. We go to Yagan Square. I notice the member referenced the vacancy rate in the Yagan Square food hall. How long do members think there have been vacant premises in Yagan Square? Is it one year? The reality is—I know this because I have responsibility for it—that the vacancy rate in the food hall has always been a problem because of its design. There is no doubt that that was exacerbated during the COVID restrictions. A range of businesses that were just getting there had the dramatic impact of having to close because of the coronavirus. I do not think it is

sustainable as a food hall. There should be something else there. Its design and how it was done has been an ongoing problem. I suspect that once students are in that area, with the city deal and other developments, that will change Yagan Square fundamentally. I think Yagan Square is a very good development, along with the sinking of the railway and connecting Northbridge with the CBD. It is a good thing and we should celebrate that. It was started by the former government. The opposition should celebrate it instead of condemning it.

I want to make one point. The shadow Treasurer said that he thought Labor governments were about taking responsibility for those most vulnerable in our community. That is why we were elected. Until the day I leave this place, I will always remember sitting on the other side of the chamber defending or critiquing the then Premier and the member for Bateman, who was the Minister for Finance, who said that Aboriginal people should not be living in remote communities anymore, and they are going to be closed down. I remember that fight with the then Premier. The member for Bateman was the finance minister at the time. He said that Aboriginal people should not live in remote communities and those remote communities needed to be closed down. Tony Abbott, the then Prime Minister, had withdrawn from a decades-long responsibility for essential services. He said, "We're not going to fund 'lifestyle choices'." Colin Barnett and his government backed that. Just before the coronavirus restrictions came in—it must have been about February—I announced that \$270 million would be allocated to fund those essential services. I always support the most vulnerable in our community. I will come back to that in a minute.

The private member's motion is broad, covering the domestic economy, ambulance ramping, mortgage stress et cetera. I will go through some of the issues that the member for Bateman raised. Again, he obsessed over the iron ore price. He rages against it, along with his colleague Hon Dr Steve Thomas in the upper house. As I keep saying—I think he understands it now after interjections from me and the member for Cannington—it is an annual average price. Members have to understand that. That is something that Hon Dr Steve Thomas does not yet understand, after lots of questions I have answered in the upper house. It is not a point in time; it is an annual average price. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the price of iron ore is high. The opposition is frustrated that I have been so audacious as to adopt a very conservative assumption around the iron ore price. Sitting on the other side of the chamber, when the member for Bateman was finance minister, Troy Buswell was Treasurer and Colin Barnett was Premier, I learnt that locked into the forward estimates was an unsustainable high price of iron ore. Guess what happened? The former government spent accordingly and when the price dropped, it found it had no clothes. That is why we ended up losing our credit rating, that is why we plunged into deep deficits and that is why the economy went into recession, during and after the greatest mining boom in the state's history. That is what happened. The iron ore price is high.

No other revenue sources are mentioned by the opposition. No-one mentions what has happened to other revenue sources or the GST pool. The reality is that iron ore is putting us in an extraordinarily fortunate circumstance at the moment, but it is not sustainable. We cannot and we will not assume that it is here to stay. It will assist us—do not get me wrong—with our capital spend and our asset investment program. In a couple of weeks, members will see the largest asset investment program on record. The shadow Treasurer will see that I am not just interested in the figures leading into March. The reality is that everything is designed around March because that is the time frame around which the federal government has designed its programs—JobKeeper and JobSeeker. Although we get on really well with the commonwealth government, I am sure that it is not designing its policies around the state election timetable. The vast majority of that asset investment spend will be in 2021 and 2022. Why is that? History has taught us that the real impact usually occurs two years after these great disruptions. The member for Bateman is right: all this stimulus and intervention from governments—state and commonwealth—is distorting everything. Whether it be the unemployment rate, skills shortages, inflation or GDP, that is what stimuli do. We are taking an economy that has been buffeted by incredible economic restrictions deliberately imposed by governments around the globe and we are trying to stimulate; we are trying to create distortions to the normal economic cycle. That is what economic policy is all about and that is what a stimulus is designed to do.

No-one has said that the economy is wonderful. I think the good data frustrates the opposition but no-one is saying that the job is done and this is wonderful. There are underlying serious issues that will take some time to work through, I suspect deep into the next term of government, regardless of who wins the election, because we know that when unemployment gets high, it is sticky and it takes a long time to come down. That is what history has taught us.

Philip Lowe, the governor of the Reserve Bank, briefs the nation's Treasurers, as he does with national cabinet. He is very good. The points he makes to us are also made in his public commentary. His great worry is keeping people connected to jobs, and that is what we are focused on. That is the utter focus of the tiers of government at the moment. I suspect that we in this place are all familiar with the dramatic social consequences of long-term high unemployment. We need to do what we can to avoid that. Philip Lowe says, "Don't worry about tax cuts; the bang for the buck in tax cuts are minimal compared with infrastructure spend. Get on and do your infrastructure spend." It is very interesting. Every day, he badgers the governments—mainly the states because the states carry the majority of the effort around infrastructure spend—to spend more and get money out quicker. The other component he focuses on is monetary policy. There is probably a bit more that can be done, but it has probably maxed out that particular bullet. Some more things can be done, particularly if we start getting into the unconventional space. The third point

he makes relates to regulation reform—making it easier to do things, easier to set up a business, easier to invest that money and easier to move between jobs. They are the three points that he makes time and again, and he is right. We are all trying to do that.

We have introduced reforms, whether it be the planning reforms of the Minister for Planning or the tourism reforms of the Minister for Tourism—with his brainwave interjection, he referred to one sometime ago relating to small bars. At the same time, we need to do the things that the Minister for Child Protection talked about during question time today—we need to pump extra support into those social services.

The data around crime during the coronavirus restrictions has been very interesting. No doubt, PhDs will be written on this in years to come. There has almost been a collapse in some opportunistic crime, particularly during this period. I note that the police commissioner made this point today when he appeared before a parliamentary committee. The increase in family and domestic crime during that period required that effort. The minister talked about that at great length in this place. We will continue to provide support in that area. That is not just a one-shot investment. There has been significant investment over the term of this government but that area will clearly need ongoing support, which we will provide, and we have in mental health and those other spaces in the community that have really borne the brunt of the pandemic.

These interventions cannot be permanent because we cannot afford that permanency. Also, to be honest, I do not want the state government in that landlord/tenant relationship any longer than it needs to be. It is not a natural place for a state government to be, regardless of its political colour, but it is there now and it will stay there. Similarly, with the commonwealth government in respect of intervening in the insolvency practice around letters of demand and therefore insolvencies, both personal and corporate. When all this comes out over the next couple of years, I hope JobKeeper, the new Newstart, does not go back to the old levels. I do not think it will, to be honest. I think the commonwealth government has learnt a lesson from this period around how low Newstart was and that it was unsustainable—it was too low. JobKeeper and JobSeeker, as well as our policies, will start to come out over time and we will be left with what this has done to us in the long term. By then, hopefully, we will have a much more normalised global economic environment in which to operate. That is what we hope, but there will be an impact. I tweet about this stuff and talk about it because plenty of people, not just in this place, are obsessed about the negative data; and there has been plenty. But I also want to point out how well Western Australia is doing. This is without dispute: WA is doing, on a comparative basis with all the other states in Australia, damn well. I say again that Australia is one of the global leaders in respect of its health and economic response to coronavirus; therefore, WA is one of the leaders on the planet in how we have dealt with it. I will continue to point out to Western Australians that they have done damn well. Remember back in March, the Prime Minister and the Premiers in the national cabinet said that these restrictions would be in place until the end of September. That was why we had the end-of-September deadline, but it has broadly extended many of those things until March 2021. I remember thinking at the time that it will take us a decade to get over this.

Treasury has tried to model this. It was very difficult because it was modelling things that it never thought it would have to—that is, deliberate government decisions to close down the economy. How does it model that? In its worst-case scenario, Treasury had a 12 per cent quarterly contraction for June. In the end, thankfully, it was not 12 per cent, but it was still the largest on record—six per cent. Compared with other states, that was pretty good. I think I said during question time at some point that compared with states such as New South Wales and Victoria that had opened up their borders, they had much larger declines. Looking around the planet, Britain had a 20 per cent decline and the US had 10 per cent, from memory. They are huge declines. Overnight, England reimposed some restrictions that are expected to be in place for six months. Last night, I was exchanging texts with friends in London, wishing them all the best. They are devastated by this. The confidence and morale of a country are shattered when this sort of thing happens. That is why the Premier so clearly defends the Leader of the Opposition's agitation to bring down the border, and he will continue to do so, because Western Australians have made that sacrifice. That sacrifice can be measured in a six per cent contraction in the June quarter, and we want to protect it. That is why there has been such strong support for what we have come to refer to as the hard border.

Yesterday, I referred to the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, Guy Debelle. Yesterday morning, he gave a speech. I thought: the Reserve Bank will have to take note of Western Australia because when we get briefings from the Secretary to the Australian Treasury, he notes the performance of Western Australia. He has a real interest because this is an experiment that no-one ever imagined would ever take place. He has been watching Western Australia quite closely. I will quote again what Mr Debelle said in his speech yesterday. He said that the strongest recovery has been in WA, with an improvement in business investment and a sharp rebound in the housing sector boosted by the support from both the federal and state governments. That is correct. I am surprised that the member for Bateman critiques that support. Yes, this will come off. There will be a bring-forward impact of what we have done—that is, the latent demand for construction of new homes. I suspect that a flood of returning Western Australians has had an impact on the established market. That obviously drives through to new builds. There will be a consequence of this in due course and we will find out what that is. By then, hopefully, we will have some form of managed population growth again, which effectively halved overnight with the restrictions on international travel. Guy Debelle highlighted things that the governor talks about in his public commentary around

the importance of confidence for households and businesses to invest et cetera. Our confidence in Western Australia has returned to pre-COVID levels. It has gone really well. We are seeing that flow through to retail trade, which experienced, up until July, the strongest annual growth in seven years. A couple of things are driving that. I think we are all familiar with what they are. We have had this wealth effect.

Coming back to commentary in some of the advice we received from the federal Secretary to the Treasury, levels of poverty—“poverty” is defined however the commonwealth Treasury defines it—have been at record low levels. Treasury has never, on its records, seen it so low. This is an economist definition of “poverty”; they look at all sorts of things—bank balances et cetera. That is not sustainable.

**Mr P.A. Katsambanis:** It is mainly income though.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Yes, JobSeeker and JobKeeper.

**Mr P.A. Katsambanis:** Because of the increase in JobSeeker.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Correct. There have been huge increases in term deposits with banks. Also, superannuation has had a massive impact on that. People have taken out their superannuation when they could, and pretty much stuck it in the bank, thinking it might be needed in the near future. Undoubtedly, that has had a huge impact. That has driven a lot of retail activity. It has catalysed the shift to online retail for many people. Everything is personal—an example I can think of is my mother-in-law, who was very hostile to the whole idea of online retail. She is a certain age; she just did not trust that. But in fear for her own health, she got into that space and she will not be brought back—away she goes! I suspect that has happened with a lot of people; hence driving what has been retail. My mother and my mother-in-law—those on pensions—received two lots of \$750. That was effectively spent and went out the door. We are seeing a lot of impact on the retail industry. The commonwealth policies are working; I always acknowledge that. The JobKeeper and JobSeeker policies, despite the distorting impacts they are clearly having on people wanting to return to their previous role, will be incredibly important policies in Australian history. People will look back on this time and analyse it, write PhDs and talk about it et cetera. They are signature policies that have been very successful in Australia, compared with that in almost any nation around the globe.

The member for Bateman is right when he says that our unemployment rate is high—it is high. Of course it is high, but it is not as high it was. It is going the right way. The payroll data that I talk about, which is a new dataset that the ATO has been releasing since the coronavirus, although a bit volatile, is certainly showing the same message that we are seeing from the official figures around job creation in Western Australia. The member for Bateman is right: it was a record increase, but it was also on the back of a record decrease a few months ago. No-one is hiding from that fact, but the reality is that 32 200 jobs were created in August. That is the largest increase on record. I do not dispute that that was also on the back of the largest fall in jobs on record earlier in the year.

The Premier talked about this: today, the commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment released its internet vacancies index for August. That highlighted that job advertisements increased in WA by 10.6 per cent, or 1 700 jobs, for the year to August 2020—the highest in the nation. They are strong indicators of demand. Across the spectrum, it is dominated by tradies. I previously talked about the stimulus that we are putting in place that is driving a lot of that demand. I dispute the characterisation of the economy that the member for Bateman made. Prior to the COVID restrictions, the economy was doing well. The domestic economy grew by 3.4 per cent, in year-end terms, in the March 2020 quarter. As members will see very shortly in the *Annual Report on State Finances*, the final quarter, the June quarter, had an impact, but for nine months Western Australia was effectively unscathed. For 75 per cent of the year, we were unscathed. In fact, we were ahead on both the projected surplus position, as members will recall from the midyear review, and economic growth.

**Mr P. Papalia:** You did such a good job that you wanted to rest on your laurels!

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** It did not quite take, Minister for Tourism. I am like a bad breakup. It takes a couple of days. But I will get there.

The first three years of this government were very much around budget repair and fiscal repair. That has been well ventilated in this place. That certainly created the environment that we now have in which we can spend, and we will be spending. I have talked previously about the asset investment program. During this entire COVID period, we have been focusing on household and business support, and we will continue to do that.

I want to specifically address a number of issues raised by the member for Bateman. He talked about the decline in the median house price. I reiterate that 60 per cent of that median house price decline relative to its peak took place under the previous government. I will take the member through that. The median house price fell from around \$550 000 in the March quarter 2015 to \$507 750 in the March quarter 2017, a \$42 000 drop, and the momentum was strong. That is the reality. At that time, the member for Bateman did not talk about that in this place. He never mentioned the issue that was occurring right under his nose. Last week, on 15 September, the ABS released data that showed that two-thirds of the 11.9 per cent house price fall from its peak in March 2014 was under the previous government. There is no doubt about that. The flip side, of course, is that home affordability in Western Australia is strong. Western Australia is the most affordable place in Australia in which to buy a house.

The member for Bateman also talked about mortgage stress. That is interesting. He used data from an outfit called Digital Finance Analytics. That is actually a blog. It is not an enormously credible dataset, but it is a dataset that the shadow Treasurer has decided to pin his credibility to, and so be it. Since Digital Finance Analytics started, it has always been part of “the sky is falling” set. I suspect that goes well with the member for Bateman. I want to make this point. When DFA defines mortgage stress, it does not consider in any way household assets. That is not part of the equation when it comes to its analysis of mortgage stress. A person may have assets in the millions or billions of dollars, and still be under mortgage stress. That is why the data series that the member for Bateman likes to hang his hat on is not credible.

The member for Bateman also used that dataset to say we will have record defaults. The fact is that the data used by Digital Finance Analytics does not flow through to the more credible real time data around bank arrears and court mortgage repossessions. I will deal first with arrears. I refer to a report from Standard and Poor’s on 30-day-plus arrears by state, based on residential mortgage-backed securities. That is an important dataset that is captured. It is as close as we can get to a real time dataset. Under the former government, that doubled. In 2013, it was 1.2 per cent. In March 2017, it went up to around 2.3 per cent, which was the highest rate of any state or territory at the time. It then peaked in April 2019. The most recent figure is for July 2020, when it went back down to 2.6 per cent. The number of 30-day-plus arrears doubled under the former government.

The data for repossessions is similar. The member for Bateman talked about Keystart. I want to refer to Supreme Court data. The banks need to go through the court for repossessions, so this data is straight from the court. In 2011–12, the rate of repossessions peaked at 1 500. That was obviously during the time of the former Liberal–National government. In the first nine months of this year, there were 836 mortgage repossessions, which is around 10 per cent lower than when the former government left office in 2016–17. I make the point that it is easy to find a blog, as the member for Bateman did, and extrapolate from that, rather like Chicken Little, that the sky is falling. However, when we analyse the data around arrears and mortgage repossessions, it highlights the inadequacy of the particular blog site that the member for Bateman likes to utilise.

On a more serious note, we are all speaking with the executives of various banks. They are all saying the same thing, that effectively what they are seeing in Western Australia is consistent with what they are seeing around Australia with arrears, both credit card and mortgage, and defaults. Ultimately, there is not a lot of activity in this space. As I said earlier in my contribution, we will not know the true situation until we get government out of these current interventions.

The member for Bateman critiqued the Keystart process and the fact that it is designed to drive people into mainstream commercial banks. That is what it has done its entire time. That includes the entire time the member for Bateman was Minister for Finance. I can tell the member that the interest rate is not having any impact on demand for the Keystart product. We have had to increase the borrowing limit for Keystart three times, and maybe even more, because of the huge demand for its product. That contradicts the complaints of the member for Bateman. It actually got to the point that I was a bit worried—not that it will not tear us apart—about our exposure to the property sector. Keystart is doing what it should be doing in these unprecedented times. The demand for the Keystart product is extraordinary.

I am actually in agreement with the member for Bateman’s critique of the social housing funding mechanism and the fact that it is effectively funded from the sale of social housing. That is not new. For many decades, we have been selling public housing to fund public housing. Sale and new construction has always been happening. Recently, as part of our government’s \$5.5 billion WA recovery plan, we made a significant extra investment in social housing. In particular, the Minister for Housing has been given a large spend for refurbishments. A refurbishment is much greater than just maintenance. People have to move out, and the place is stripped and refurbished, and, hopefully, has another 20-year life. One of the main reasons social housing properties are sold is because the property itself—not the land, but the property—has come to its end of life, and it is sold off, I assume, at land value. The purpose of refurbishment is to refresh properties so that they can be released to tenants who need them.

I get it. The member for Bateman hates the foreign buyers tax. He is campaigning to abolish it. We will be campaigning to point out that the member for Bateman will be abolishing the foreign buyers tax. That tax is delivering exactly what we expected. The revenue projections for the foreign buyers tax have held, including during the coronavirus period. Nonetheless, I will be pointing out ad nauseam that the Liberals will abolish that tax should they win the election.

The member for Bateman never came back to the issue of Keystart and repossessions. Although we have intervened in these relationships, people can still be evicted, and houses can still be repossessed, but it is a bit of a process. When we have a huge asset base such as Keystart, people abandon properties, usually with huge outstanding rental arrears. People should not be surprised about that. As a government, we do not leave the property to rot. We take charge of it again, and the law requires us to go through the repossession process. That is why we have data from the Supreme Court that highlights the fact that the repossessions rate peaked in 2011–12 under the former Liberal–National government.

It is a diverse motion from the member for Bateman, and I want to finish by making some points. On any dataset, Western Australia has handled the coronavirus better than any other state, and Australia has handled the coronavirus

better than most nations on the planet. There is no doubt about that. The fundamentals of both the Australian and Western Australian economies are strong. We have handled it well. Thankfully, most of us have managed to get back, really, to life without restrictions earlier than anyone expected. The hard border, both domestically and internationally, has allowed us to do that. I understand that it is causing pressure on families. My sister is desperate to return to Perth with her family. She lives in Melbourne. She cannot get into Western Australia. She has had a couple of goes with the G2G PASS but she cannot get in. This is having an impact on families.

People also understand that the six per cent contraction in the June quarter was the wealth sacrifice that Western Australia made to eliminate community spread, and they are very reluctant to give that away or risk that. I watch the situation in Melbourne very closely; thankfully, the numbers there are going the right way. I have absolute confidence that the Victorians will get on top of this and that it will continue to go the right way. We all want that to happen. Western Australia's hard border allows us to fly to Broome and provide business to all the regional tourist operators that the Minister for Tourism keeps telling us about. It allows us to live a life as close to normal as possible. Of course, there are issues that we now have to deal with, such as record low rental vacancy rates and skills shortages in agriculture and aquaculture. These are difficult problems, but we will deal with them.

I do not accept the approach taken by the shadow Treasurer that the government should not be talking about the positives in the economy. The government has managed this situation well. We did not take the blunderbuss approach that the opposition wanted us to do—that is, bang, to spend all the fiscal capacity in one hit and, when the smoke cleared, check who was still standing. We have been a lot more surgical in our responses than the opposition would have liked. There is one main reason for that. I wanted to ensure that this budget not only deals with the initial impacts of the restrictions and provides a clear recovery plan, but also, and importantly, regardless of the outcome of the next election, provides the capacity on the balance sheet to perhaps manage another outbreak. Who knows what is coming at us in 2021? We may have to do more when JobSeeker and JobKeeper finish in March, as they are currently planned to do. We may need to use the balance sheet again. A blunderbuss approach is not a sensible approach. It would not be a sensible use of taxpayers' money to provide a \$10 000 grant to every business. There is a better way to do it, and I think we have done that well in WA. We have been surgical, we have been considered, and we have looked at where we can maximise the impact of our spend.

The biggest difficulty over the next two years will be in getting money out the door on those infrastructure programs, but we are determined to do it and to support the economy. No-one says for a minute that the impacts have not been huge on our economy, community and society from what has happened with the coronavirus, and what continues to happen around the world. Until the globe is back to some form of normal activity, Western Australia will continue to be impacted by this, and the state and the commonwealth will need the capacity to respond. I think that the budget, which will be delivered in two weeks' time, will highlight that we not only have responded well but also continue to have the capacity to deal with whatever may emerge in the future.

**MR P.A. KATSAMBANIS (Hillarys)** [6.03 pm]: I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Bateman and to highlight the impact of the government's policies on people in my community—that is, people who live in the electorate of Hillarys and across the northern suburbs. In many ways, I think the people of the northern suburbs, including the people of Hillarys, are often the forgotten people when we talk about the Western Australian economy and the problems that people are facing. I also want to address some of the issues that the Treasurer raised in his response to the member for Bateman, because I think they were interesting and point to a government attitude that in some parts is laudable but in other parts contributes to the pain that households and small businesses in my electorate and across Western Australia are suffering. Some of the attitude of the government also contributes to a higher level of uncertainty for those people.

The starting point is to talk about what is going on out there. The member for Bateman described Western Australia as having a two-speed economy. Ordinarily, I would agree with him, but I think there is an added layer and an added complication, which the Treasurer also spent a bit of time talking about—that is, the artificial short-term stimulus, which has created almost a three-speed economy. There is one group at the top—the miners, particularly iron ore and, to a lesser extent, gold. They are doing very well, thank you very much. As a result, the disproportionate reliance by the state of Western Australia on iron ore royalties is growing. We are very quickly becoming a one own-source-income state. We have put a lot on the back of iron ore. In the old days, it was said that Australia rode on the sheep's back; Western Australia rides on iron ore's back right now. I think everyone is barracking for the price of iron ore to stay high, but even the Treasurer acknowledges and accepts that it is unlikely to be sustainable over the medium term, let alone the long term. That is one level of the economy.

At the bottom end is a group of people who are receiving income that they have perhaps not received before. I do not criticise or condemn those people, but they are getting short-term stimulus from the impact of JobSeeker in particular, and also JobKeeper. It is an artificial stimulus that has led to quite a significant distortion. That will wash out financially from our system, but no-one can predict the impact of that washing out on real people with real lives, including small businesses. I will get to that in a minute.

Then there is the group of people in the middle—that is, the majority of Western Australians—who are not benefiting from the rivers of iron ore and are not recipients of JobKeeper or JobSeeker. Those people are doing it tough, and

they are telling us so. Whether they are workers, pensioners, self-funded retirees or small business people, they are doing it tough, and have been doing it tough for a long time. In the first three years of this government, before the pandemic hit, they were hit with additional household fees and charges. Electricity charges went up. Water charges went up. Motor vehicle registration and other government fees continued to go up and up. The average Western Australian family is paying more than \$850 a year in additional government fees and charges than they were paying prior to this government coming to power. This is during a time that the government has been crowing about its growing budget surplus, aided and abetted, primarily, by the increase in iron ore royalties and, finally, from getting a fair deal from the federal government on our GST revenue. That fair deal continues to wash through our accounts in a positive manner. Again, in the current financial year—we will see the budget in a few weeks' time—there will be an increase in overall GST revenue to Western Australia because the percentage relativities are going up, irrespective of whether GST goes up or down across the country. There are two very strong positives there helping the government budget, but the government is not helping the family budget by restraining its increases. Thankfully, during the pandemic the government wised up that people were really, really struggling, and it pulled the reins on it and stopped the increases, but it has not given anything back. The government has not given the \$850 a year back in any meaningful form, so people are still doing it tough. The Treasurer lauded that we have done better than any other state. On some measures we have, but on other measures we have not. The published unemployment rate in Western Australia is still higher than the national average, which means a lot of people out there want a job but do not have one—way, way too many people. We understand some of the reasons for that, but there are a lot of unemployed people. We are not doing well on the unemployment measure.

I turn to yesterday's Australian Bureau of Statistics data on payroll jobs and wages. I note that the Treasurer has made a great deal in the last 24 hours about the payroll jobs figure, which shows that payroll jobs in Western Australia from the start of the pandemic on 14 March through to early September had fallen, but less than the national average. However, he did not spend any time analysing the fact that the other side of the data showed that payroll wages, that is the overall money people take home from their employment, had fallen by 4.3 per cent in that time, which is basically around the national average and is far worse than the equivalent states of South Australia and Queensland, as well as the Northern Territory—the non-COVID mainland states and territories. It is also far worse than the ACT, but I do not think that is a fair comparison. I am not going to say that the government has not done well because real jobs and real wages in a real economy such as Western Australia have fallen more than in the protected economy that is the ACT, which primarily revolves around public service wages and spending. In comparison, wages for Western Australians who are in jobs have fallen by more than wages for Australians in South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, which reinforces that people out there are doing it tough. They are doing it really, really tough, and so are small businesses.

The Treasurer discussed very clearly the boost to retail spending because of the economic stimulus of the federal government. Yes, retail spending has gone up, but hidden in those figures—to his credit, the Treasurer alluded to it, but did not extrapolate to highlight the real consequences—is that the growth has primarily been happening in online sales at the expense of sales in bricks-and-mortar stores. We are seeing a transfer of Western Australian money that would primarily be exchanged over the counter at Whitford City shopping centre, Beldon shopping centre or anywhere across the metropolitan regional areas to big conglomerates in big warehouses primarily in the eastern states. With that, once JobKeeper comes off, we will see a massive shift in jobs in retail and associated industries. That will seriously impact disproportionately on two groups that do not deserve to be impacted. The first one is women, because retail, particularly part-time work, is driven a lot by the employment of women. Similar to retail, bank branches and the like are also closing at a great rate of knots. That will impact on jobs in those retailers for women. It will also impact on jobs for young people who get part-time jobs at night or on weekends. If those retailers are shutting because patterns are shifting and people are buying online from big warehouses in the eastern states, the retail spending figures will continue to look good, but the retailer employment figures will plummet, and that is a serious risk to our economy as soon as JobKeeper starts tapering out—and it is going to start tapering out at the end of this month. There is going to be a transition, but it is already going to start tapering out by the end of this month. That is a really, really big risk, and people are very worried. The Treasurer said that perhaps people have withdrawn their superannuation and stuck it in the bank. I think for many people that is a prudent move, because it is their money and they have decided to put it in the bank for a rainy day, because they are worried a rainy day is coming. They really are.

Households are doing it tough. The shadow Treasurer, the member for Bateman, spoke about mortgage stress and defaults. For real people out there who are in mortgage stress and default, it is cold comfort to say that 2011 might have been worse or it might have been better. It is about what they are suffering right now. We see the league tables published and usually the top six or seven hot spots for mortgage stress and default in the whole of Australia are dominated by Western Australian postcodes, so it is quite clear that mortgage stress and default is a disproportionate problem here in Western Australia. That is that middle-speed economy. That is the group in the middle that is not benefiting from the rivers of iron ore and gold that are coming into Treasury coffers, and it is asking for assistance from the government. We see the social issues associated with that such as the rise in violent crime and the lack of investment in dealing with it at every level, including, but not limited to, police. We see ambulance ramping. People living in the northern suburbs such as Hillarys, Padbury, Craigie, Beldon, Mullaloo and Kallaroo are genuinely

worried when they hear that on Friday there was no ambulance available for a significant time in the entirety of the northern suburbs. That is not good enough for a government that crows about its economic management and big budget surplus. There is no point squirrelling away the budget surplus if the government cannot provide an ambulance on call in the entirety of the northern suburbs of Perth to someone who needs it for a significant period of the day. That is not good enough. The government should invest in the emergency departments so they can process ambulances quickly, and if it needs to, it should invest in more ambulances, but it should not let the public down, it should not let the people of the northern suburbs down and it should not let the people of the Hillarys electorate down.

I turn to homelessness. We speak a lot about the really visible homeless, and the media like to focus on them as well—I think too much sometimes.

**Ms S.F. McGurk** interjected.

**Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS:** I see that the Minister for Community Services and many other portfolios sighed there! There is a big focus on the visible homeless, but how about the minister come to the northern suburbs with me and I give her a tour showing the invisible homeless—the people who nobody focuses on; the people who are the quiet homeless. Come to the car parks along the northern beaches. By northern beaches, I mean north of Hillarys Boat Harbour; I do not mean Trigg, Scarborough or Watermans Bay where the car parks are visible and there are no trees. Come to the car parks along the coast north of Hillarys Boat Harbour. Yes, homeless people have been living there for a long time, but those numbers are growing. We are not just seeing single people or groups of single people, but families with young children—families whose members had jobs, homes and schools for their children who are now living out of their cars. They have exhausted all the possibilities. Perhaps they are the people the member for Bateman spoke about who handed in their keys to a property for which they could no longer afford the mortgage. Perhaps they have exhausted their network of friends and relatives. That happens in the northern suburbs. A lot of people in the northern suburbs do not have a family network because a lot of us, myself included, come from somewhere else—primarily overseas, but also interstate. People do not have a broad family network. They end up shuffling around in those car parks at night, moving around the shopping malls during the day, and generally trying to get their lives back together. We cannot forget those people. We do not want to create any more. We bring motions like this to this place because we do not want to create any more of those people. We want people to be given an opportunity. We want people who fall down to be given a hand up and allowed to stand back on their feet again. That is not happening.

Then there are the small business people. Small businesses are doing it tough. Small businesses always do it tough.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS:** I grew up in a small business and I ran small businesses as an adult. I consider myself essentially at heart to be the product of small business and to be a small business person. Small business always does it tough. But in periods such as this, during a pandemic, all they ask for is a fair go. Today, I noticed that the Minister for Small Business, who is here—he is usually here during these debates, which is good of him—came into this chamber and told us about his support for travel agents. He was quite proud to tell the chamber that we are the only state to provide a specific support package for travel agents. That is all well and good. Should we cheer? Should we clap? Should we give the minister a gold star? The fact is that we are the only state that did not provide a specific support package for small business people who did not qualify for payroll tax relief. Six months down the track, the minister has carved out one group from all the small business people who were seeking relief. It is a very deserving group; I have advocated to the minister on its behalf. I know that the minister's response has been good and positive all the way along here, and he has finally provided some support. It is a bit late, but it is going to be really, really helpful. But we still remain the only state without a comprehensive small business support package. Every time we raise it with the Premier, he says, "You want us to give money to every single ABN holder who might have got an ABN 10 years ago and still holds onto it." How does every other state manage to weed out the small businesses that deserve it from someone who might be wanting to take a lend? Every other state has managed to do it.

**Mr P. Papalia:** They didn't put enough money in for more than eight per cent.

**Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS:** Maybe it was the eight per cent that they figured was worthy and necessary. Some small businesses have done pretty well during this period, but some are still doing it tough out there. Travel agents are one group doing it tough, but so are lots of other people. They could have really used that money to help them with their business transition in March, April or May. I am sure they are happy to be getting it in September; I am not begrudging it and I am saying good on the minister for finally doing it. But the government has not supported small businesses across the board in the way that every single other state has managed to, and that is disappointing.

That leads me to some of the comments that the Treasurer made. In his contribution, the Treasurer said that the revenue boost that the state government is obtaining right now is unprecedented. He did not use these words, but he effectively said that it is a bit of a windfall, so we as a state have to be careful not to hardwire the expense side of our budget with recurrent expenditure on the basis of what is windfall revenue. I am disappointed that the Treasurer is not here to hear me say this, but I commend him for that. I fully support and endorse that statement. He highlighted that there is going to be an asset program in the coming budget. That is heartening because when we

have windfalls, we want to invest in the future. We want to invest in infrastructure for the future rather than hardwiring recurrent expenditure. The investment should be essentially shovel-ready investment that enables job creation at the same time as building infrastructure to genuinely stimulate the economy, because we know that jobs are down and unemployment is high.

If the Treasurer is genuine about an asset program, perhaps he could look at some of the needs in the northern suburbs and my electorate and the needs of people in my electorate when he looks at how to spend that asset program money. Obviously, the most crying-out need in my community is the need to fix the crumbling infrastructure of some very, very old schools that are past their use-by date. I was elected as the member for Hillarys in 2017. It seems a long time ago; it was only three and a half years ago. In my very first speech in this place, I highlighted that the Hillarys Primary School and Springfield Primary School buildings are past their use-by dates. They are wonderful, absolutely amazing school communities, with great teachers and great leader principals, fantastic committed parents and friends of the schools and enthusiastic students. I am sure that is the case of almost every school in the state, but these are the schools I visit and the people I see. They are totally committed. The parents are committed to their children's education; the principals and staff are committed to educating the kids; and the kids are bright and cheery and want to learn and have fun, but they cannot do it with the threat of ceilings falling down, or, as we saw last week, the actuality of ceilings falling down on children. It is not the first time it has happened at that school. That is the really galling thing.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** It happened under your government.

**Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS:** I will take that interjection; I will accept that. It has happened over a number of governments. Hillarys Primary School on Lymburner Drive was built in 1973 as a temporary school. It was not built to last; it was meant to move to another site. We will not get into the specifics of how it ended up being a permanent school. The government spent a little bit of money on it through my advocacy. We got some extra funding to build additional car parks, because the school is not on a major road.

**Ms S.F. McGurk:** Our government paid for it, but it's because of you.

**Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS:** I advocated and advocated. The minister wrote to me and said, "Yes, I will give you some money in the next round." I even got up here and made a grievance to this Minister for Small Business. It was good; it happened. We have some maintenance money to tidy up the old concertina doors that have been around since 1973. Any member of Parliament who has been into their schools will know exactly what I am talking about. Those buildings! Thankfully, there was no asbestos in the roof that collapsed. There is asbestos all over these schools. Hillarys and Springfield primary schools in particular are verging on dangerous, and we saw what happened last Thursday. They are perfect school communities to support with an asset investment program. They are absolutely perfect school communities. We should not play politics with these things. We should not spend money on schools based on electorate pendulums or the whims of one government or another. I totally accept that this neglect goes well beyond the term of this government, but I have only been the member for Hillarys in the term of this government. I can only advocate to this government. That is why I am here advocating to the Minister for Small Business.

**Mr P. Papalia:** You were the upper house member for north metro.

**Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS:** As the Acting Speaker (Ms S.E. Winton) knows, my allocated areas were Butler and Perth. I was advocating for them and I did that to the best of my ability.

The government has an opportunity here to help the students, teachers, principal, parents and the school community to get the school buildings that they need and deserve. It can preserve the good bits, such as some of the newer buildings that were built in the Building the Education Revolution and some other buildings that have been built over the years but it should replace the crumbling old buildings with new ones. I am sure that there is plenty of documentation inside the department to do that.

With the redistribution of the boundaries, Beldridge Secondary College has come into my electorate. I did not have a high school within the old boundaries of my electorate. The allocated high school for students who live in the suburbs of Padbury and Hillarys is Duncraig Senior High School, which is groaning at the seams. The school is a victim of its own success and it is also a victim of demographics. It was built to cater for around 1 200 students or so but it now has 1 600 or 1 700 students and its projected enrolment is up near 2 000 students. It needs significant investment and it needs it now—it absolutely needs it now. It is not good enough for the school to be repurposing specialist classrooms for generalist teaching, which is also what is happening at Hillarys Primary School. It is so full that the classrooms that had to be moved out of the block where the ceiling collapsed the other day now have to meet in the library and the enclosed gathering space. The community will bear that; it understands. But it needs to know that their government—not the Liberal government or the Labor government but the Western Australian government—is prepared to invest in that school. It is the same for Springfield Primary School and Duncraig Senior High School. These communities deserve the same support that has been given to other communities. If there is an asset investment program and these schools are not on the list, I will have to question how these funds are being allocated. I know that every member advocates for their community. Every member says, "My community needs this and needs that." I am sure that there are other deserving schools. I am not asking for one cent to be removed from

any other deserving school. I am asking that from the pool of money, the rivers of iron ore, there is investment in some of the schools in my electorate: Hillarys Primary School, Springfield Primary School and, although it is not quite in my electorate but it is where a large chunk of people in my electorate send their children, Duncraig Senior High School. I am asking for a fair investment in those schools because they deserve it and they need it.

The opposition moved this motion today because it wants to highlight to the government that it is not good enough to say that everything is okay because iron ore prices are high, that it is not good enough to say that everything is okay because JobSeeker and JobKeeper are masking some of the problems within our economy and that it is not good enough to say, "We're trying our best but it's all too hard." There is more that the government can do for households, small business and students.

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA)** [6.33 pm]: I will be very brief because I know that the Minister for Small Business wants to make a contribution. I will run through some of the issues that are affecting the economy in a big way and will come to affect the economy in a big way. I am talking about the looming shortage of labour and logistics for harvesting, especially of vegetable crops. If the research done by Deloitte Australia comes to fruition, households can expect up to a 60 per cent increase in the price of vegetables in the coming weeks and that will have implications for all householders. It also has severe implications for the growers themselves. We know that about 70 per cent of staff who harvest vegetables in WA are usually backpackers or international seasonal workers but only about half of the usual number of those is available, as the minister well knows.

We have been told that many of the backpackers who are available in the state are choosing to do hospitality work in town rather than going out bush to look for the jobs that they might have normally done. As a result, many growers have had to cut back, sometimes up to 50 per cent, in their forward plantings, which is obviously going to have a significant impact on the availability of vegetables in the coming year. I am aware that many growers in my area are having trouble sourcing labour. I refer to the Gingin salad bowl, if you like, through to the citrus areas in the midlands and up into the melon growing areas in the midwest. Those labour shortages are really starting to bite. Along with that is the looming shortage of truck drivers to assist with all sorts of industry efforts. The Nationals WA met with the Western Roads Federation and the Australian Livestock and Rural Transporters Association and were told that there is a real shortage of truck drivers; indeed, at least 500 truck driver jobs remain unfilled as well as a number of heavy vehicle mechanics, operations and administration roles. If those critical jobs remain unfilled, other jobs will not be able to be taken up because there will not be a supply chain to enable the economy to function. It is predicted that the shortage will become much worse as Christmas approaches and interstate drivers who are in WA return to the eastern states to be reunited with their families. The industry wants greater exemptions for the transport industry to allow drivers to enter and work in Western Australia until more drivers can be trained. Industry is prepared to pay to bring in, test and quarantine drivers if the government puts that on the table. Industry has solutions and it is ready to talk to the government about how that can be done. It is not asking the government to pay for it all. It wants the government to cooperate with it to ensure that its measures work. It is also asking that better roadside testing be available in places such as Norseman, Eucla and Kununurra so that drivers do not have to uncouple their road trains and head down the road to access COVID-19 testing in hospitals, which not only adds a huge amount of inefficiency because it takes time, but also raises animal welfare concerns.

I will talk briefly about some of the experiences of growers. I will outline the situation of one grower in my electorate who has about 250 hectares of fruit trees. They need labour for between six and eight months because between the various crops on their property, that is the time that they supply to markets. They are experiencing significant labour shortages at the moment. They usually employ up to 120 workers. Despite a real effort over many years, only 20 per cent of their workers are local workers. Most of those are permanent staff. The work includes pruning, picking and packing. They supply to a range of national retailers and normally export to 15 different countries globally. Their labourers are required from February to October. They encourage Australians to enter the workforce but they have been generally unsuccessful in attracting Australians to work in those areas and rely on seasonal workers from other countries. They are asking the government to put itself forward and opt in to the federal government's Pacific Labour Scheme and the Seasonal Worker Programme. As far as I understand, all the other states have opted into that program. They are not all underway but they are working towards it. There is an ability for the government to do something about these workforce shortages in the medium term by getting involved in the Pacific Labour Scheme and the Seasonal Worker Programme to get workers in. They want an established pathway so that it can be done properly. In all cases, the industries are keen to ensure that Western Australia remains a safe haven, if you like, from the ravages of COVID, but they want to see the necessary measures put in place to allow that to happen. Since March, the Nationals have been calling for solutions. I have a time line of letters asking for the government to deal with matters such as the labour shortages. In the first instance, we were calling for backpackers' visas to be extended to allow them to continue to work. That has been done. I am not saying that none of the measures have been taken up, but we have been calling for and pointing out that these looming shortages will have a really sharp impact on our economy and on many businesses.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Please!

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms S.E. Winton):** Minister, he is not taking interjections.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It looks like that will happen this harvest. It is workers like shearers, vineyard workers and essential workers of all sorts.

People in my electorate have come to me about jobs that are jobs enablers. They have jobs putting in a new processing plant or a large livestock facility and they need some key personnel to come into the country to install or set up the equipment, and then jobs would flow from that. They have been trying to go through the channels to get the G2G PASS to get the people into the country to do that work, but they are meeting brick walls, and being told that it will be six or seven weeks before they will get an answer on whether they can get in a key person to enable them to continue their business. These people are running egg production facilities, horticulture and hatcheries, which are all very, very important to the food security of Western Australian households. We will see that sharp point if those shortages come to fruition. I have been told we will see a very sharp point at which we will have sudden and rapid increases in food prices and threats to food security.

The Premier today in answer to a question from Hon Mia Davies about this very matter said that farmers need to do more work, such as listing themselves on Studium and Seek, to get workers out to places that need them. A grower I was talking to said that the type of people who respond to the Studium site are students who are looking for up to 20 hours work a week. They cannot work more than that because of their support payments et cetera and he is too far out for them to take up the jobs. It is not an option for him. He has been advertising on Gumtree, through the Harvest Trail and placing ads locally, but he is getting no more than a couple of calls at a time. He is really doing the work to try to get those people, but simply cannot get staff out to his operation, and we have a very serious situation looming.

We understand the security of our citizens is paramount. We are not asking for quarantining et cetera to be done away with; we are asking for some key personnel to be prioritised and for government to work with some of the key industry groups like Vegetables WA and road transport organisations to ensure that key personnel can get into the state. We are not asking for any favours and in most cases we are willing to help pay for these things, but we certainly need a clear pathway to get key people in. The Minister for Small Business would appreciate how that would flow through to all the small businesses in a local community that benefit from the larger organisations getting staff. Of course, we also know that broadacre areas have staff shortages for the harvest et cetera, which is accentuating the problem of a shortage of heavy vehicle drivers. That is becoming a real problem for supply chains for all sorts of industries in Western Australia in not only agriculture, but also mining and general supply to the building industry, which is experiencing a boom because of the current stimulus packages.

I am going to wind up at this point so that the minister has an opportunity to speak. I am sure that my constituents and the chap with the 250 hectares of fruit trees really want to see Western Australia pick up and opt in to the Pacific Labour Scheme seasonal worker program, and work towards putting in place quarantine and other protocols necessary to bring in those workers. They want to see the government do that because we cannot see that Wander Out Yonder will yield results. We know that so far a bit over 400 people have been found to fill 7 000 jobs. We need an answer. Thank you very much.

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Small Business) [6.45 pm]:** I thank members for their contributions. With respect to the member for Moore's concerns, as he knows, I am very aware and sensitive to the fact that there is a significant shortage of workers in the horticulture and agriculture sectors. The government has responded, as the member recognised, through the creation of a campaign, including government funding to support people willing to go and do that work with, I think, a \$4 000 grant. It is not my portfolio. My element of the campaign does not have funding enticement; we are just notifying people of the hospitality and tourism opportunities in the regions and the attractiveness of doing that work. I believe there is a degree of attraction in the nature of the work and where it lies.

On the challenge in the agriculture sector, there is a government campaign and communications plan to let people know where the job opportunities are and how people might make contact with employers seeking workers. There is also funding from the state government of \$40 a day, which I think amounts to around \$4 000—I cannot remember—with a view to attract people, support them and assist them. That is one response. I understand that the Nationals, in particular, are focused on advocating for the Pacific Labor Scheme to be renewed or allowed. That is a consideration for the Chief Health Officer. The Chief Health Officer's advice on the potential risks associated with that program recommencing will always be taken. The advice has been wonderful and has resulted in the best outcome probably on the planet for the economy and health.

That aside, I think the member gave some potential suggestions of where we might go. The member has heard the Premier suggest that he has spoken many times to the Prime Minister asking that further incentives be provided to people currently on JobSeeker. The Premier has suggested that the federal government should for this one season enable people to retain their JobSeeker and retain the money from working without being penalised. I think that is a wonderful suggestion, and any advocacy by the state Nationals with their federal colleagues and the federal Liberal Party would be appreciated. That is one potential pathway forward that might be faster and more effective than waiting for Pacific Islanders. Despite that there was a Pacific islander program, I am not sure that if we were

to enable them to enter the country, enough would be willing to come, because they have concerns about COVID, too. Their families would be concerned about them going away overseas and potentially being isolated from their families and home support. All of those things are concerns. It is a competitive market. Every other jurisdiction has agricultural demands as well. We know that there is a potential workforce resident in Western Australia if we can attract and incentivise them to do the work, noting that labour is an attractive and valuable commodity right now. People's time and energy is worth more than it was before COVID.

There is demand for labour right around Western Australia, and not just in agriculture, as the member for Moore knows. In the regions in particular, every type of small business is flourishing. The member for Bateman mentioned small business once when he moved the motion but he did not talk about it again. The member for Hillarys spoke about small business, but only in negative terms. I have spoken to literally hundreds of small business people in the last couple of months since the restrictions were lifted. There is a boom going on, particularly in the regions. It is not just in hospitality—accommodation and tourism—it is also in retail. The member for Hillarys observed that retail will collapse when JobSeeker and JobKeeper ends. The observation he made that captured my attention was the suggestion that people have migrated online. I am sure that the member for Moore has spoken to some of the retailers in his electorate because he is a bit more connected than some other people. I have walked regional businesses door to door and spoken to retailers. I can tell the member that some sectors are booming; they are literally doing more business than they ever did before COVID, including sports retailers, bike shops, surf shops and even gift shops in some regional towns. Western Australians are doing two things: they are going for a wander out yonder, responding to the wonderful opportunity they have to encounter destinations like nowhere else on the planet. They have it all to themselves right now. They are also knowingly making a contribution to their fellow citizens. I have met businesspeople who say that their city customers are deliberately choosing to spend money in regional centres as they pass through or when they stay overnight and explore the region. I do not think that phenomenon is just linked to JobSeeker or JobKeeper. We will know soon enough because it is about to taper down.

The other element is that even though the federal government is seemingly not willing to consider incentivising JobSeeker recipients to go out to the regions this year, it is about to taper down JobSeeker. When that happens, the environment will shift.

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No, it goes down. I have spoken to people in the tourism industry and hospitality, racing and gaming. I have also spoken to a lot of liquor licensees who are having difficulty enticing casuals back to work because working at that level is almost commensurate with, if not exceeding, what they might have been getting before in return for time. It will be interesting to see what happens. I hope that JobSeeker remains at a level that people can live and survive on. It was terrible before. As the Treasurer indicated, I hope the federal government has received that message. A number of dynamics are now at play. A lot of casual workers are getting JobSeeker. A lot of hospitality outlets are having difficulty enticing them back to work. Perhaps it will become more attractive for people to work in the agricultural sector, although I think it is a competitive market. As I said, labour is a valuable commodity right now. I am getting texts from hoteliers saying they are having real difficulty attracting staff. That is an interesting phenomenon. When something is scarce, it is more valuable.

**Mr R.S. Love:** Would you look at those seasonal worker programs?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** That might be considered within the policy associated with protecting the state. It is undeniable that the hard border and the ability to open up our economy, with the safety offered by that hard border, has made a significant contribution to the state. It is not just related to iron ore. That is laughable. Anyone who says that iron ore is making our community vibrant and creating this booming phenomena that we are experiencing in the regions is out of touch. A lot of other sectors are booming right now, including housing construction and manufacturing. The other day, we announced more than \$100 million for the defence industry sector, infrastructure build and training spend to facilitate future growth in our defence sector in Western Australia. Infrastructure will be near term, right across government. We announced \$150 million for tourism infrastructure as part of the \$5.5 billion recovery plan. Massive government investment projects are underway, including all those that the state government was looking for. We are all very competitive in the process, proposing projects, but they had to be shovel-ready with a view to getting going in the next six to 12 months. We need a return in terms of jobs. That is occurring. It is true that the resources sector is doing very well. A large amount of investment is occurring in the resources sector concurrently. There is a lot of demand for labour in our market. I am not sure whether the Pacific islander program would be successful even if we opened the border. It is a competitive environment. A lot of jurisdictions want those people, and I am not sure that all the people who used to come would be willing to come.

That aside, the member spoke about specific individuals in his sector and whether it would be possible for them to be considered through some mechanism to get a G2G PASS and come in. If he has not already done so, I urge the member to seek a meeting with the Minister for Agriculture and Food and ask her to approach the emergency coordinator. The minister can make the case for specific individuals who might be high priority—the enablers, as the member suggested. That is happening in other sectors. Other individuals have been given exemptions because of the nature of their skill set or because they have a very particular or unique skill set, or a limited number of people

have that capacity. As the member knows, a lot of other people have been given exemptions after being encouraged to live here permanently—migrate and do the job, if they have a job. That is a specific employment opportunity and a key enabler for that particular sector. I urge the member to work with the minister. I have done it in hospitality. Initially, a lot of those exemptions were focused on resources, some health services and those sorts of categories. We advocated for the hospitality sector because some skill sets are very scarce on the ground and are actually an inhibitor on the economy. That does not mean that people get a pass straightaway; it means that they get into the process and the police conduct that vital role of deliberating around the threat versus benefit. They mitigate the risk and carry out those sorts of processes when considering that category of individuals. That might help.

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Some of the people who come to me are successful while others are not. I am not talking about individuals; I do not campaign for an individual, but I make the case for a category. For example, in the early days of the pandemic, when things were very tight—they are gradually becoming less so as there is more confidence in the safety of the process and we also have the ability to manage the threat and the risk—we did not have hospitality workers such as chefs. We can now make the case for those people. It does not mean that their case gets up or that the process is faster than it was before. That time frame is long by necessity. I urge people to be patient and determined and continue with the process. I also urge the member for Moore to talk to, and work with, the minister. I encourage her to assist in advocating for specific groups. The member is not talking about hundreds of people but some of these individuals, who are definitely enablers. I urge him to do that. It is happening in other sectors. Agriculture is a vital sector. I understand that it is under a lot of pressure right now.

As I indicated at the outset, I am not the one who is making these decisions. Like the rest of cabinet, we contribute. Consideration has been given at all times to what we might do as the environment shifts. It is a very difficult environment in which to make predictions very far into the future. I am very encouraged by the numbers that we have been seeing on the east coast—I think everyone is. Hopefully, that will enable confidence within the office of the Chief Health Officer and the emergency coordinator to consider further measures that might address the challenge. The government is very aware. It is very focused on trying to do something for the agricultural sector. It is also very aware that it is a crucial moment. I will be interested to see what happens with JobSeeker and whether things shift in the near term. That may also have an impact on the wider tourism and hospitality sectors. They are confronting the same sorts of challenges.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

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