

QUALITY OF LIFE — WESTERN AUSTRALIANS

Motion

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [10.14 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house expresses its concern that the quality of life for many Western Australians has deteriorated as a direct result of the policies of almost seven years of Labor government.

I move this motion intentionally because it is the last day of parliamentary sittings for the seventh year of the Labor government and, particularly, the third year of the second term of the Labor government, so it is three-quarter time in real terms, and it is only appropriate that the house looks at and reflects upon the performance of a government. In anyone's language it is only appropriate. In political and real terms we are basically back to normal. Although COVID is still there, essentially, the restrictions, the closed borders, that existed for the two years from 2020 to 2021 have lifted and now the political landscape is back to where it was. It is hard to reflect back prior to COVID and remember that the political landscape going into COVID was dramatically different from what it is now. There was the Darling Range by-election 18 months prior, with a 9.4 per cent swing to the Liberal Party, the federal Liberal–National government had been re-elected unexpectedly and our polling showed that the Liberal Party was going to pick up six to eight seats in February 2020. That all changed, of course, with COVID. COVID completely changed the landscape so all political oxygen was taken out of the air. Mark McGowan was canonised in the eyes of the community. It was almost like Stockholm syndrome in Western Australia with people fawning over their captor. He was elevated to a status that had been unseen in political terms. In addition, COVID meant that all oxygen was gone—issues such as cost of living, health, education and law and order evaporated because all people wanted to hear was the Premier and members of the government commenting and letting them know that they were safe. Now, of course, that has changed significantly. The dark clouds of COVID have gone, former Premier Mark McGowan has gone and people are focusing yet again on quality-of-life issues such as: Can they pay their mortgage? Do they have to wait in line for an operation? Do they get a quality education? Do they feel safe in their homes? All of these issues impact directly on Western Australians, and it is only appropriate that the Parliament, as we go into the election year, assesses the performance of the government.

I would like to spend a little bit of time on my two primary portfolio areas: law and order, under police, and juvenile justice, with corrective services. I hope when we get a response from the representing minister that we do not spend an exorbitant amount of time talking about the Barnett government, which has happened during the last seven years. This infatuation with the Barnett government has to stop, guys, with all due respect. I am flattered that the Labor government after seven years continues to be focused on, and almost obsessed with, the Barnett government, but the Labor Party has been in government for seven years, and it is directly responsible for the policies that exist now. A lot of people are hurting out there now. The winds have completely changed—I promise you! People are starting to focus on things that are important to them, and they are willing to change their votes again. They will not vote for a party, or a man in particular because he closed the borders. Just ask Prime Minister Anthony Albanese how he feels about whether the winds of politics have changed. There has been a massive shift in political fortunes in such a short time, and that will only get worse in the next 12 months. As I said, there has been arrogance from the members opposite. In question time, in answer to every second question, we have this almost galling obsession with the previous government, which just shows the current government has lost sight of the process and is still focused on the past.

Turning to law and order, we hear from the Minister for Police quite consistently how wonderful things are and how crime has gone down. We hear this consistently. I tell members that in real terms there is an element of truth in that because during COVID crime went down. Go figure—people were stuck at home. They were stuck in their houses and as a direct result stealing, in particular, went down, and drug-related issues went down considerably because there was no access into Western Australia. But let us have a look at whether crime has gone down in real terms and Western Australians are better off now after seven years of Labor rule than they were. I direct members to the Western Australia Police Force website. This is not the gospel according to Pete; go and have a look at the WAPOL website. There is a litany of figures there to show that crime is, in fact, out of control in Western Australia. Across the state, over the last two years, there has been an increase in selected crimes against the person of 12.5 per cent. Family related offences—that is, domestic violence—is up by 40 per cent over that period of time. That is on the back of a reduction in the number of dedicated police officers to the family and domestic violence unit. In addition, total selected offences against the person are up by 9.2 per cent. Then, of course, we can look at the drug offences—down by 8.4 per cent—but that, as I said, is a direct result of COVID. Members should desperately look at the figures. In the metropolitan area, for example, the number of offences over the last two years has gone from 172 045 to 199 030. In the regions, the figure is even worse: it has gone from 58 000 to 74 000. Go and have a look at the figures for Geraldton, Broome, Kalgoorlie, Bunbury, Albany, Karratha, Onslow and Northam. The figures for every one of them have increased significantly. Members should ask people whether they are better off now, in their homes or businesses, than they were seven years ago. Ask the people of Hillarys, Warwick, Armadale,

Bentley, Wembley or Hamilton Hill whether they are better off now than they were seven years ago and they will say no. That is just a few; there are dozens and dozens of them.

This comes at a time when 473 police officers have resigned. According to the Minister for Police, that is entirely attributable to the economy. Rubbish! Go and talk to police officers. Another 300 have resigned so far this year. Go and talk to police officers; I do it on a daily basis, and trust me, they talk to me, in increasing numbers. It has gone from a trickle to a tsunami. There is so much disillusionment out there, but we yet again hear that it is as a direct result of other opportunities. That is just garbage. In terms of law and order, ask people whether they are better off now than they were seven years ago. Ask them that. Point to those crime figures. I point all members to the WAPOL website, and ask them to come back and prove me wrong. They will not be able to.

Juvenile justice is a massive sore for this government. What we saw in today's announcement would quite frankly have been laughable were it not so serious. Are we better off? Are the juveniles who go into the justice system now better off and more resilient, with enhanced self-esteem? Is the community safer as a direct result of the juvenile justice policies of this government? Absolutely and utterly: no. Banksia Hill Detention Centre is the only juvenile justice detention centre in Western Australia, and it is a rehabilitation facility, I might add, not a punitive facility.

I refer to the annual report on the Banksia Hill website and witnesses at estimates hearings. Things have completely deteriorated as a direct result of the policies of this government over the last year. There have been multiple incidents and riots; staffing issues; constant lockdowns; multiple issues of self-harm and suicide attempts; and hundreds upon hundreds of cases of attempted self-harm at Banksia Hill Detention Centre and unit 18, and I will talk about that in a moment. One in four detainees at Banksia Hill Detention Centre go straight from Banksia Hill to an adult prison.

Are we a safer community as a direct result of the policies of this government in juvenile justice? Absolutely not. It is doing it wrong. Ask the Inspector of Custodial Services, the former Inspector of Custodial Services, the President of the Children's Court, the former President of the Children's Court, the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Professor Fiona Stanley. Of course, the government's response is to ignore all those experts in the field of juvenile justice and to label detainees as terrorists, rapists and murderers. That is what the former Premier and former Minister for Corrective Services did, because they knew it was politically palatable out there; it was a vote-winner. By doing that, most people out there are going to agree with the government, but is it resolving the issues? Is it actually transitioning those juveniles from being disengaged, disaffected angry young men and women and rehabilitating them so that when they come out, they can make a productive contribution to society? No. It is making them angrier and more determined to live a lawless life, which is such a shame.

I have been very consistent in my views on this. I have made comments about the fact that the government's policies with Banksia Hill have not worked. I have made those comments on numerous occasions, particularly in January 2022. I am absolutely bemused that the minister in recent times has been saying that I said in January 2022 that I wanted to close Banksia Hill. Wrong, minister, wrong. Talk about licence; that is an abject lie. I have, on no occasion, said "Close Banksia Hill"; not once. I have always said that things were not working at Banksia Hill, and every single juvenile justice advocate agrees with me—every single one.

Fortunately, there have been some improvements at Banksia Hill; it is still not enough, but there have been some improvements. But it has been made worse by the establishment of unit 18. There was an announcement last year about the Marlamanu diversionary program in the Kimberley. I thought, "That's promising. Rather than taking these Aboriginal juveniles off country and booting them down into the city into a tiny little cell for 22 hours a day, let's have a diversionary facility in the Kimberley." That was announced in May 2022 and was due to be completed in June 2023. Guess what? It has not even started. I have asked numerous questions on this and I know Hon Dr Brad Pettitt has also. It has not even started. The people in the Kimberley are pulling their hair out. This is bleedingly obvious: if you really want to make a difference to the lives of these young Aboriginal men and women, have a diversionary program and do something productive. It has not even started.

However, the ultimate stain on the record of this government—it transcends all areas and portfolios—is unit 18. It is an absolute disgrace and it should never, ever have been opened. After one of the riots at Banksia Hill, the former minister took film crews in there to show them all the damage that was done. He had all the nodding heads out there in the community: "Isn't this terrible? You know what we're going to do? We're going to lock them up now. We're going to take them over to Casuarina Prison, put them in unit 18, put them in those cells for up to 22 or 23 hours a day, and make them better citizens." Of course not.

I have never, ever once condoned the behaviour of lawless juveniles. There must be a degree of punitive action, but it must also be rehabilitative. As a former educator, you will not find anyone in the space of disengaged youth who disagrees with me. Having said that, the government said when establishing unit 18 in July 2022 that it was a temporary facility. It made it quite clear in its media releases and in its rhetoric that it was a temporary facility. I was willing to grant the government that because, quite frankly, the government's record at that stage was appalling.

Extract from *Hansard*

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 30 November 2023]

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Hon Peter Collier; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Louise Kingston; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Sophia Moermond

It reached a pinnacle when we saw the image of a young 16-year-old girl on the roof of Banksia Hill with a gun to her head. That gained international condemnation, not just for the WA Labor Party but for Western Australia. To see that image of that young 16-year-old girl with a gun to her head was absolutely disgraceful. As I have said before, if members honestly think that that made that young girl's life better, they are dreaming; it did not. It made her life worse, and the lives of those around her. But the government wanted the throw-away-the-key mentality. It thought, "Yes, that's going to work; it's going to show that we're tough on these thugs, we're tough on these young juveniles", knowing full well that a lot of the community out there would agree. But if we just explained the situation and asked, "Do we actually really want them to be better individuals and therefore make a better society?", perhaps they would not agree.

Again, multiple questions asked by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and me have shown the despair in this horrific unit. There have been constant lockdowns, folding-up restraints, self-harm and suicide attempts. It was just appalling. Every time the former Premier opened his mouth, he would say, "No, they're terrorists, they're rapists, they're murderers"—constantly. It was not working, and it is not going to work. That attitude is not going to work. One of the first things Premier Cook said when he was elevated to the position of Premier was that he wanted a change in attitude at Banksia Hill Detention Centre and at unit 18. The new minister supported those comments. That happened on the back of the appointment of Tim Marney to implement a new model of care program at Banksia Hill, so I actually had a semblance of hope. As a former educator, my genuine desire is to see change and to make those kids better kids, and there were promising signs. Unfortunately, it has amounted to absolute nought. There has been some shift in programs and culture at Banksia Hill, but unit 18 remains an absolute stain on the record of the Labor government and on Western Australia. We now have a situation in which we put those young men—they are all young men, 49 of them—into a cell for 20, 21, 22 or 23 hours a day. I asked recently whether any had been in the cells for 24 hours. Imagine being in a cell for 24 hours? They could not answer. We will get that response in due course. I find it extraordinary that they could not answer that. If they were in a cell for 24 hours, that would make the matter even worse—absolutely worse.

The rhetoric of the new minister changed to a degree. It changed from "terrorist" to "challenging", "complex" and "often dangerous". Challenging, complex and very often dangerous just rolls off the tongue each time. We get that; we know that. Putting them into a cell for 22 or 23 hours will not make them any less challenging, complex and sometimes very dangerous. What does he think: that putting them into a cell for 23 hours a day will make them any less complex or dangerous? It was inevitable.

I did numerous press conferences and said that, unfortunately, one day, someone was going to die as a result of those policies. Unfortunately, I was proven right. I hate being right in this instance; I hate it. Cleveland Dodd lost his life as a direct result of being locked in a cell at unit 18. That young man lost his life. He was the very first juvenile to lose his life in a juvenile detention centre in Western Australia. That we can allow that is such a shocking indictment of where we are at as a society. We not only put a gun to the head of a 16-year-old girl but also put young, vulnerable, complex—yes, complex—disengaged young men into a cell, say, "Deal with your demons", and then ignore them. Of course, as a result, it is the topic of numerous investigations, including a Corruption and Crime Commission investigation, to see what happened on that night.

Having said that, Cleveland, rest in peace. Rest in peace, young man. Unfortunately, his passing, as tragic as it is, will hopefully lead to some change or shift in the mindset of the Labor government. Please, listen. I have been making these speeches for the last two years, and no-one opposite listens. I really wish they would because it is not just me saying this.

What made it worse was that, just when I thought things could not get worse, I saw the Minister for Corrective Services stand in the Legislative Assembly three weeks ago with his makeshift weapons and give stabbing signs. That was the lowest ever point of this Parliament. How on earth did that happen? What political genius suggested to the minister that that was appropriate? Who suggested to him that standing there with those makeshift weapons, purportedly made by the detainees, was appropriate? It was the most disgraceful display, and it will be the low point in that minister's parliamentary career. It was absolutely disgraceful. When the media grilled him about it—he copped it from the media—he said that he was responding to the Liberal and National Parties' call to immediately close unit 18 and house them at Banksia Hill.

No, minister, do not dare associate me with that disgraceful display. I want nothing to do with it. You do not dare associate me. I want nothing to do with that whatsoever. The minister must own that. He made the conscious decision to stand there with the weapons and make the stabbing displays. It is absolutely disgraceful. At the same time, he is making juvenile comments about the opposition about some share house or something or other. I do not know how long his minions in Dumas House spent trying to work that one out. I wish he would spend as much time focusing on his portfolios as he did on making those stupid, juvenile comments. We might have had some change.

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Today's announcement is no shift; it is a plan to have a plan. It has taken them 18 months to get to here and nothing has changed. There is still no prospect of unit 18 being closed. More lives will be lost, and dozens of detainees will leave Banksia Hill and unit 18 more angry, frustrated, confused and disengaged than when they went in. The community will be less safe as a direct result of the policies of the WA Labor government.

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [10.34 am]: I rise to support the motion. I acknowledge Hon Peter Collier and his comments about law and order and juvenile justice. Before I get into some other matters, I also want to comment on the juvenile diversion centre in the Kimberley. It is a youth diversion facility. Quite frankly, I do not understand why it is taking so long for a decision to be made about that facility. On that issue, we continue to see such high rates of crime and disaffection. Terrible confrontation occurs on an ongoing basis in communities like Broome, Kununurra and right across the north. We all witnessed some of those things in the media recently, with kids as young as eight or nine carrying knives. We have to do something about that. At the end of the day, the government has control of the purse strings and is able to make those investments. It is able to make decisions about what programs can be introduced to resolve some of these basic community safety issues. I endorse Hon Peter Collier's comments, which I think are very profound and should be reflected on over the Christmas period because we absolutely need to do something more.

Before I speak about some other matters, I send a message to the government: please keep an eye on the ball over the Christmas period. I thank the government for the work it did on the Fitzroy Crossing bridge. I put that on the record. Notwithstanding the slow start, the fact that the government delivered that in that amount of time is a credit, and I will give credit where credit is due. I also come back to this point: the government cannot take its eye off the ball in relation to the responses to inevitable emergencies that will arise, such as cyclones, floods and fires, just because there is a Christmas break and everyone goes on holiday. The slow response in the first few days had a heavy impact on the Kimberley community. I know that many people were in such a distraught position because it took so long to deploy emergency services on the ground. I do not know the detail of the decisions; an independent inquiry into that was never allowed. The government could have gained many learnings if there had been an independent inquiry into the emergency response. We have to do better. We cannot have our ministers sitting here in Perth running the whole government. There has to be much more focus because we will be confronted with fires, cyclones and emergencies over that period, and we must be ready to deliver.

I comment briefly on the health system. We have a health system that is in chaos and a health system in which seven of the 10 worst performing emergency departments in national public hospitals are in Western Australia. This state has the highest incomes from mining sector royalties and huge economic opportunities that are delivering revenue into Western Australian government coffers. Record taxation revenue is being poured into the Western Australian government coffers, such as stamp duty payments, which I have been making a point about; the state had \$600 million of additional stamp duty from a rise in insurance costs. The government is doing nothing about taking pressure off households that are suffering under the weight of taxation. Meanwhile, the government has record revenues pouring into its coffers. I do not know what the plan is, but we constantly see the government trotting out the latest initiative or a record investment in this or that. Members opposite treat the government revenue like it is their own money. It is not about investment, folks; it is about outcomes. That is what people want.

They want to see outcomes and results. We see that seven out of 10 of the worst performing emergency departments in Australia are in Western Australia. Perth public health hospitals have been forced to declare more than 500 code yellows in the past year. That should not be happening in Western Australia. Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital was impacted the worst, with 144 code yellows in 2021–22, and these results continue. We see the current health minister Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson's captain's call on the women's and babies' hospital, when clinicians say that it should not move to Murdoch. We see the business cases being ignored. This government is not taking notice of that professional advice and delivering the outcomes that we need. We see that last year, there was 66 000 hours of ambulance ramping, with ambulances stuck at hospitals. Putting aside the clinical problems, millions of dollars of investment is tied up in this, but those ambulances are not on the road or getting out there. The Premier should be honest, because it was the Premier who called it a crisis when there was 1 100 hours of ambulance ramping for a period under the Barnett government, yet there was 10 000 hours of ambulance ramping over the whole of 2017. The Premier should stick to his word, because if that was a crisis, what do we have now? I note the comments of my colleague Hon Peter Collier about the constant reference to the Barnett government. There is something we can reference: the fact there was not only 10 000 hours of ambulance ramping, but 66 000 hours of ambulance ramping, and we are still running around 5 000 hours of ambulance ramping every year.

I do not need to go more into crime other than to mention the terrible increase in domestic and family violence. It is a scourge across our state, particularly in the regions where I live. Even at the moment, in the Kimberley there is 11 times more chance of being assaulted in a family situation than in Perth, an impact that then spills over to our police. The number of assaults on police continues to escalate and is out of control. We must do more because that is driving down morale in the police force. Other important, basic areas in life that people want this government

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to work on are health, the cost of living, crime and safety, and housing. When this government came to power in February 2017, the average rental for a residential home was \$375 a week. The average rental for a unit was \$340 a week. That has increased 60 per cent. Today, right now, it is \$600 a week.

Hon Pierre Yang interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: It is \$600 a week.

Hon Pierre Yang interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: It is \$550 a week for units.

Hon Pierre Yang interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Thank you, President. Rentals are now \$600 a week for a home. I know that in places in the north, that figure can be up around \$900 a week. We know that the insurance cost of a home can be about \$200 a week. This is driving people into their cars, onto the streets, and out of our regions. It is a constraint on our economy that creates massive stress and difficulty, particularly for single mothers who cannot afford massive rental costs that continue to escalate. The problem is that this is not going backwards. The government has a responsibility on housing. It is failing, even though it keeps talking about its record investment in building houses. However, there is still 20 per cent fewer public housing homes built each month on average under this government than under the Barnett government. It is not delivering on social housing. There is much more I could say, but this government is failing on every parameter important to the people of Western Australia and it should reflect on that over the coming months.

HON LOUISE KINGSTON (South West) [10.44 am]: I thank the previous speakers. I start today by again talking about issues in the timber industry, such as no credible science being used, the widespread effect that has had on communities and the lack of understanding of how those communities work.

I then go to the live sheep export closure and the lack of government support for the sheep producers. I have a report that was commissioned by the North Eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils. The report's background states that NEWROC —

- ... is a voluntary organisation of Councils and includes Presidents and CEOs of seven Local Governments; the Shires of Koorda, Mt Marshall, Mukinbudin, Nungarin, Trayning, Wyalkatchem and Dowerin in Western Australia.

It has been established for over 25 years. The direct effect just on their area from the collapse of this industry is in the tens of millions of dollars. There are 400 000 sheep in that area alone, and 180 local businesses producing a gross value of \$18.7 million. That is just in those areas, so imagine extrapolating that out across Western Australia, and the effect on those people at the moment. They were literally reduced to tears yesterday when telling us about the poor farmers up there and what they are having to do. The effect on schools, the rest of the community, the other businesses associated with that industry cannot be recognised enough.

Then we have the changes to the marine parks and fishing businesses. Every business in Esperance will be affected by this and face closure. Where is the economic assessment again? Where is the economic assessment on either of the other two? Where is the consultation?

Again, we collected nearly 13 000 signatures to extend that consultation on gun reforms and it was not listened to. The housing crisis, which Hon Neil Thomson mentioned, in regional Western Australia is even further compounded. There are issues with the health sector and access to healthcare professionals. The patient assisted travel scheme is the lowest in the country at 16¢ a kilometre. In New South Wales, it is 40¢ a kilometre. In a state as big as ours, we have to understand the effect on some of those people who live in regional and remote communities accessing healthcare. The Country Age Pension Fuel Card that we introduced has not kept pace with the rise in costs. There are education issues. A review was commissioned by the State School Teachers' Union WA and chaired by Dr Carmen Lawrence, who was WA's education minister in the late 1980s before becoming Premier. The report, *Facing the Facts: A review of public education in Western Australia*, states —

Teacher shortages, excessive workloads and violence in schools are just some of the day-to-day problems, and with the public system educating the majority of WA children, they deserve the very best from a quality education environment.

...

... 6000 teachers had retired or resigned from public schools in the past three years, largely down to workload pressure.

We also know that there is a surge in public service stress claims. The latest data from the Insurance Commission of WA showed that the number of mental stress claims from the public service had risen in the 2023 financial year for a sixth straight year. The number of such claims lodged each year is now up by almost 45 per cent since Labor came into power in 2017. Then we have the cost-of-living increases on top of that. People are out there desperately trying to survive, put food on the table, and keep a roof over their head. It is absolutely unforgivable. I come back to our signature royalties for regions program that has been decimated and is now being spent on things in the city instead of where it was intended to be. I ran a community resource centre for years, as members know. We saw people in those CRCs who cannot navigate a system that has become complex and difficult. It leaves them in a situation in which they come to us because they are desperate. Those CRCs are woefully underfunded. The services that they deliver and the importance to those communities is not recognised adequately. In the years that I was there, the number of people I continued to see grew year on year. The ability to access services became less and less. The ability to assist people to access services became more and more difficult. There was more and more compliance and regulation for us behind the scenes with less ability to deliver those needs to those communities. I think that is what we see across all of those sectors I have mentioned today. In this house we sit here and look at pieces of legislation, but I am not sure it is ever fully understood how difficult it is for those people—who are the majority of people in Western Australia—who are not able to access education services in regional areas in particular. It is the same in the city. I have highlighted that with that report. We need to fix it from the bottom up rather than the top down. We need to understand what people need and how we facilitate that. In the short time that I have been here, I have raised this over and again. I spend time in the electorate talking to people who say they cannot navigate the system. That has to be a failure. It has been far worse since 2017, based on the figures I produced.

We are facing a lot of change in the future in terms of our ability to meet our net 2050 targets. Considerations need to be made in terms of that. How do we facilitate that transition so that the people of Western Australia benefit from the changes and are not impacted negatively by those changes? It is easy to get caught up in the buzz and excitement of it all and we tend to forget that things at that level need to be delivered in a way that takes our most vulnerable and marginalised along for the ride. I concur with what Hon Peter Collier was saying earlier about assistance for people who find themselves in the juvenile justice system. During my time at the community resource centre, I saw many people fail to get services at a time when they needed those services. They need to be able to reach out in a way that is beneficial to them, so they do not feel persecuted or like they are going to be put into a system from which they can never get out. A lot of the children struggle to find a way through once they get into the system. They are, for the most part, kids who have a lot of potential. I remember having a discussion with one of our local police officers and I was talking to him about a program I wanted to put in place. It was a program in which people would be rewarded for good behaviour rather than punished for bad behaviour. He had done some stunts in some difficult places like Halls Creek and Roebourne and places like that. He had a lot of lived experience. He said, “These kids can be turned around easily. All it takes is for somebody to recognise that these kids have a value; they have a value in society.” They are clever kids. He said, “If they weren’t, they wouldn’t be getting into trouble; they would be sitting at home in front of a video game machine just playing video games all day long.” He said they want to get better and they need those services. That is where it is lacking in terms of intervention in situations at the time when it makes a positive rather than negative difference. I think we all need to turn our thinking to that. How do we develop those programs in the future so that we take the people who we need to take—the most vulnerable and the most marginalised people—along with us on that journey, rather than leaving them behind?

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [10.54 am]: There is no question that the cost of living is hurting people in Western Australia. There is no question that we are at record low vacancies in rental properties, but why is it, we have to ask ourselves, that people are still flocking to WA? Why are they coming? It is because they want what we have here. They want cheaper houses. It is much cheaper to buy a house here than on the east coast. They want cheaper electricity. They want a cheaper cost of living more generally. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, more than 1 000 people a week—1 000 people a week—are moving to Western Australia. If it is so terrible, as has been described to us in the last hour, why are those 1 000 people a week coming to WA? It is because we have it better here than they have where they are. There are better jobs and a better lifestyle; the cost of living is better than where they are now.

I am going to talk about the cost of electricity, for example. The cost of electricity on the east coast has increased in the last year by between 19 and 25 per cent per annum, depending on where people live. That is the price of electricity. No wonder more than 1 000 people per week are moving here. Why do we think there is a significant difference in electricity prices between the east coast and here? I wonder what the difference is between electricity providers on the east coast and electricity providers in Western Australia. I wonder! Could it be because they privatised their electricity services and we did not? Although, there was a government that promised to privatise electricity. Which government was that? Oh, that is right! It was the Barnett government that we are obsessed with! That is who that was. As a consequence of that decision, our electricity prices are lower than any on the east coast. That is part of the reason why more than 1 000 a week—more than 1 000 a week—are moving to live here.

I want to touch on the important announcement made today by the Premier and the Minister for Corrective Services about a purpose-built youth detention facility to replace unit 18. That is a very significant announcement and I would have thought we could have had a little bit of grace from the other side, which has been calling for this. I know there was not any. I heard; I listened carefully. I know there was no grace. It was a very important announcement and a very important decision to build a new high-security, therapeutic youth detention facility to accommodate some of our most challenging youth offenders. The youth justice infrastructure review confirmed that Banksia Hill Detention Centre cannot safely and securely accommodate that very high-risk cohort, so they recommended a new centre be built adjacent to the existing facility, providing those young people with the level of monitoring, supervision and support that they need to stabilise their behaviour and return to Banksia Hill. There has been a significant difference, for example, in access to very important things that others have called for in respect of time out of cell and access to education since those young people in unit 18 have been moved out of Banksia Hill. Those who are in Banksia Hill have had much greater access to education and time out of cell, for example, since those most challenging have been moved out of unit 18.

I want to touch on a number of other things as well, because it is the case, even though we have 1 000 people a week moving here, that the cost of living is a serious issue for very many Western Australians. That is why we have included \$715 million worth of cost-of-living relief measures in the 2023–24 budget. The household electricity credits have made a significant difference to very many Western Australians, and, indeed, to small businesses, as well. We were able to do that because of not only our strong economy and management of our finances, but also assistance from the federal government. In the past five years, we have spent more than \$2.8 billion on delivering cost-of-living support to Western Australians, including increases to the senior's cost-of-living rebate; the hardship utility grant scheme payments; the fare-free Sunday sessions, with public transport being free for the first Sunday of every month; the very important and highly utilised regional airfare zone cap scheme to support affordable flights for regional residents, for which there was an additional \$20 million in this year's budget; and keeping fees and charges low, with the household basket of fees and charges to increase by just 2.4 per cent from 1 July this year. It is the fourth consecutive year that rises in the household basket of fees and charges have been kept to below inflation. Did the Barnett government that we are so obsessed with manage to do anything like that? No, it did not. It means that the rises are well below the projected inflation rate of 3.5 per cent, compared with up to 25 per cent, for example, in Sydney. In addition, we have the two-zone fare cap on Transperth public transport, which started in 2022.

Those are very important measures, and we have recently announced more, including, for example, \$20 million in rent relief for those at risk of eviction if they cannot afford their rent. I think it is worth noting that the Victorian government has allocated \$2 million to rent relief. How much has this state government allocated? We have allocated \$20 million. I think that is worth noting, as well.

A whole range of things were raised, and I am not going to be able to respond to them all. I want to touch on health. Minister Sanderson has recently reported very significant improvements in trend across time on ambulance ramping, and elective surgery numbers going up, as well, and we have also employed significantly more nurses. I think Hon Louise Kingston mentioned teachers and education. As a former education minister, I know that across Australia, fewer students are choosing to study teaching and more are leaving at an earlier stage. That is not a Western Australian problem; that is a national problem. That is why, nationally, education ministers are working hard on that issue.

However, since last night, there is a group of women who are worse off in Perth in Western Australia. I want to touch on them. I think it is important to talk about this. I find it appalling, not just because I am a woman, but because I am the Minister for Women's Interests, and we are on day 6 of the 16 Days in WA campaign. Apart from the appalling decision made by the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth, Basil Zempilas, and the City of Perth to close that service at a time when there was an offer of another \$3 million on the table from the state government to keep it going, apart from the actual decision itself to close the service in the middle of the 16 Days in WA campaign, what is he saying to those women? The thing about that service is it is unlike any other service. It will take any woman. We need to call it out for what it is. Some of those women present with very challenging behaviours and some of those women would not get through the door immediately in some of the other services. This is the only service.

Hon Neil Thomson: You sat on your hands!

Hon SUE ELLERY: We did not, my friend. We contributed \$3.5 million out of the Building Better Cities deal.

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I listened to the member in silence, and I had to try hard, because I do not always understand what he is saying, but I listened to him in silence. He can pay me the same respect.

Making that decision to close that service in the middle of the 16 Days in WA campaign, which draws attention to women suffering from the impacts of family and domestic violence, either shows incredible stupidity, or it is the most aggressive decision that is lacking in core values that I have seen. I cannot yet decide whether it is that stupid or it talks to his values. I cannot decide which one it is. What appals me more is that I have heard nothing from

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Libby Mettam and nothing from the opposition spokesperson on homelessness, who I note is in another position. I have heard nothing from them, and I do not know why that is. Is it because they do not want to offend he who has been tagged as their potential new leader? I do not know. Is that the reason? Why are they not calling it out for what it is? We should all be speaking up and saying, “Let’s work together to find a solution for this.” Do members know who will be using that venue tonight?

Hon Lorna Harper: No-one.

Hon SUE ELLERY: No-one will be using it. What is the plan for the future of that site? There is no plan. Who will be using that site next week? Who will be using it next month? No-one will be using it. It will stay empty, because he will not sit down and talk about how we can extend the delivery of that service with an additional \$3 million from the state government. A very well regarded not-for-profit organisation, Ruah Community Services, provided that service, which is one of the most challenging to provide because of the nature of the clients who turn up there looking for a safe space. Do members know where those women will go? Do members know where they went last night, or where they will go tonight, next week and the month after that? They will go into the emergency department at Royal Perth Hospital or they will be picked up and held by the police, kind of turning a blind eye to the fact that they are providing a service that really is not theirs to provide. That is where those women will go.

I think that the decision to close that service in the middle of the 16 Days in WA campaign to draw attention to family and domestic violence, when two-thirds of the women who turn up at that service are victims of family and domestic violence, is appalling. It is either one of the most stupid or the most lacking in value political judgements I have seen. I have seen a few stupid political operators and I have seen a few political operators with no values, but if we read the subtext, this person wants to be in this building. If that is what he stands for, that is a sad reflection. I hope that someone from the other side will say something publicly about that, because if there is a group of people who are devastatingly worse off because of a decision by the City of Perth and the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth, it is that group of women. It is appalling.

I want to move on to talk about other things. In half an hour we are going to be talking about training. I make a quick comment about that to note that in terms of people being better off over the life of this government, there is no better indicator than the number of people who are doing training who could not do it before because the previous government put training at TAFE out of the hands and the reach of ordinary Western Australians by increasing the fees for those courses, some by up to 400 per cent. That is what the previous Barnett government, which we are obsessed with, did. We are a bit obsessed with it because we had to clean up the mess. We had to clean up the finances and then put training right at the heart of our jobs and skills agenda, increasing the number of people who are training and significantly increasing the number of women who, for the first time in their lives, are seeking formal qualifications. We made a record investment in infrastructure in TAFE, with a massive investment in rebuilding and refurbishing TAFE buildings right across Western Australia. We have invested in short and long courses. We have more women than ever undertaking training and more young Western Australians than ever going straight from school into a TAFE course, and we have achieved a greater number of enrolments and completions than ever before through this government’s significant investment in training. We have made very significant increases across the board.

Let me see whether I can fit in any more great news. I also want to talk quickly about some of the things that we are putting in place in the building space. I am not going to get time to touch on that other than to say that we have taken a range of measures to assist the construction industry, which is going through a very difficult period post-COVID.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [11.10 am]: This is a fairly simple motion before the house today. If I can summarise it in this way, the question before the house is: who is getting the benefit from the boom times that we are experiencing? Is it the people of Western Australia? Have their circumstances improved or worsened over that time? I think we are going to demonstrate it is significantly worse. I was glad to hear the Leader of the House talk about cost of living because I will be doing that a bit myself. Let me say at the outset that the state government does not control interest rates, before we get too excited about laying the blame for everything at the feet of this state government. Members may have heard me say this before, but this state government is the richest state government this state has ever seen. It is the richest state government that any state in Australia has ever seen. It has had higher incomes than any state in this nation’s history, and who is the beneficiary of this massive wealth?

The Leader of the House suggested that people are coming here for a range of reasons. They are probably coming here because there is wealth in the system, but this government is sitting on the wealth. This government sits on massive multibillion-dollar surpluses at a time when people cannot pay their mortgages, cannot pay their rent and are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. That is the simple message that we need to address and this house needs to be aware of. This government remains rich.

I ran the Scrooge McDuck campaign under the previous Premier for a number of years because since February 2019 this state has been in its latest mining boom. As we get to February 2024, we would have been in the biggest boom this state has ever seen for five years. However, the people of Western Australia are not getting the benefit of it. Interestingly, the quarterly financial report came out yesterday. I know many members are very interested in economic figures, so I thought I would bring out a bit of the government's report. How has the government fared in its first quarter of the current financial year, bearing in mind that it has been rolling in wealth and the money bin? Scrooge McDuck may have retired but Donald and Daisy are still very rich. Are there any guesses out there for the higher royalty income? Any guesses how much iron ore income went up for you guys this quarter versus the previous quarter to September? It went up by \$434 million. That is nearly half a billion higher than the first quarter of the previous financial year when the government announced a \$5 billion surplus, which admittedly was only the third-highest surplus it announced over the last three years. Once again, on last year, which was a boom year, iron ore royalties are up by \$434 million. Landholder duty, so stamp duty, is up \$47 million. Licence vehicle duties is up \$30 million. Motor vehicle registrations is up \$17 million.

I acknowledge the document says that land tax is down half a billion dollars, but land tax is down half a billion dollars in a temporary manner because the land tax bills had not been sent out yet. When land tax comes in, in the second quarter, the December quarter of 2023, the government will catch that half a billion dollars back up. Instead of a small \$93 million increase in income because the government dropped half a billion dollars, it is going to be up half a billion dollars in income in the first three months of the current financial year. Once again, this government is rich. It was rich. It is getting richer. It remains rich. A great swathe of the people of Western Australia are still poor. Someone working in the mining sector at the moment is probably doing all right, but a huge part of Western Australia is not—may I suggest, particularly the part that is struggling to pay higher motor vehicle registrations, higher vehicle licence duty and higher landholder duties or stamp duties. It is not only that the government is making a mountain of money out of mining; it is also pushing up taxes.

The Leader of the House said the government handed back money through electricity credits and that is very true. But let me say this: if the government's pre-election budget in 2024 is another cash hand-out of electricity because that is the easy thing, that will be a disgrace. The reason is that the government has had the greatest opportunity of any government in any state in our country's history to reduce the burden of taxation upon people, particularly those who are struggling to keep a roof over their heads and to put food on the table. That is the group. That is the group that we should be looking at. That is the group that is missing out. Yes, it is getting electricity credits, but the government could make more permanent changes. The government could apply more long-term downward pressure. The government could freeze fees and charges. The government could do lots of things to assist that group of people who it is not assisting.

It is all very well and good to say, "Well, today we have announced the extension of Banksia Hill." Congratulations. That is millions and millions of more dollars to a group of people who break the law, are a threat and risk to themselves, other prisoners and the staff; that is great. That is not helping that group of people who are struggling to put a roof over their head out in the community. That is not helping that group of people who are trying to have food on the table. Well done on that announcement, but that is not helping the group of people who we need to target here, the group of people who are struggling with interest rates going up. The interest rate is at 4.35 per cent and most housing interest rates have gone from a couple of per cent to six to seven per cent and maybe a little higher. That group of people is not the group of people who the government is helping. It is not helping the business community that is struggling with not only taxation but also regulation and an overburden of regulation.

The government is insistent upon using this massive wealth to look after its own future not the future of the people of Western Australia. It will have another massive budget surplus this year. I think it will beat last year. It will beat \$5 billion. It will probably hit \$6 billion again. It will be another massive budget surplus. There is no doubt that the iron ore price has been resilient and will probably stay up a bit longer yet. Fees and charges and state taxation continue to rise. The government comes back to the people and says it will give them a bit back in electricity credits because that is the easiest thing because it does not change our long-term bottom line. It does not change our long-term future. We are not going to significantly give it back to the community.

I have a proposition for the government. It is probably a concept that the left wing of politics has always struggled with. Perhaps the government should consider that just possibly taxes and charges and royalties that the state gets are not the government's money; it is the people's money. It belongs to the people. It belongs to the community and it should be used and spent for the betterment of the community, rather than the political aspirations of a government. That is a really odd concept. I suggest that perhaps members leaning to the left of politics have a different view on that. From my perspective, as I sit out here on the right-hand edge of the political sphere, the reality is that it is the people's money. When the government has discovered more money than it knows what to do with, which is what it has done the last few years because of its massive budget surpluses, it should be giving —

Hon Dan Caddy: Good economic management.

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Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I love that; it is “good economic management” from the government. The government’s policies have delivered the high iron ore price. The government’s policies delivered COVID so the massive infrastructure spends pushed up the iron ore price. It was government policy that did these things. What an absolute nonsense.

Several members interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: In the first two years the deficit and debt level that the government projected was exactly the same as the government that likes to harangue and disparage the one before. This government was taking debt out to \$43 billion, exactly the same as the previous government. In 2019 that changed. Why did that change? It changed because the price of iron ore boomed. Iron ore royalties went up by \$6 billion and the government’s surpluses went up to \$6 billion. I know that that is more than one hand’s worth of counting for members opposite and they have to use their second hand for it, but \$6 billion more is coming in and there will be \$6 billion more at the end. The government’s financial management did not change almost anything. It just claimed credit for what went on, and it continues to claim credit for the accidental boom that it inherited, but the government needs to share it with the people who give it to it.

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [11.20 am]: I, too, rise to make a contribution to the motion moved by Hon Peter Collier, although I intend to allow the mover of the motion time to reply at the end of my contribution, so I will not use the full extent of my time.

There are any number of things we could talk about on such a broad motion, particularly the seven years of Labor policies that are having a detrimental effect on our communities. However, I want to focus on a policy announcement made yesterday that will have a definite negative impact on the quality of life for many Western Australians, particularly those who live anywhere near Leach Highway, over the next couple of decades. That is, of course, the wonderful Westport project and the announcement yesterday about a site for a new container terminal in Kwinana.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: What’s that going to cost?

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Well and truly more than was budgeted for, honourable member.

Over the last couple of years, I have talked in my reply to the budget speech about the fact that there was no way that the government was going to deliver Westport in the time frame or anywhere near the budget it committed to. Of course, yesterday’s announcement all but confirmed that the \$4.2 billion estimate is well below what it will cost and it certainly will not happen by 2032. I have said before in this place, and I will say it again, that it will not happen before 2040. That means that the people who live along the existing freight route from Fremantle port, particularly those along Leach Highway, will endure years of growth in the amount of freight traffic and, as a result, I am sure that they will be very proud to live along what will be Perth’s longest car park. We will have incredible traffic chaos on that highway as people try to take their children to school or get to work, because this government does not have a plan to manage the freight task in the absence of delivering the much-vaunted Westport project. Of course, since it was elected, it has been promising to deliver a business case. We still have not seen a business case, and yesterday’s announcement just kicked that can a little bit further down the road again. The government not only does not have a business case, has spent \$50 million up to earlier this year to acquire land for a project that does not have a business case, has a project that does not have a plan to cope with the additional container traffic between now and whatever mythical year in the next century the project will finish and has to deal with all those issues around traffic, but also has the wonderful problem that the existing users of the port of Fremantle have no idea about whether they will need to invest in very expensive capital works to continue their operations in Fremantle. Of course, they need to update equipment; they need to replace or repair the equipment they have, but they have no idea whether they should do that because they have no idea when or if the government is ever going to deliver the Westport project.

This is just another example of how poorly managed the government’s infrastructure spend has been. There will be massive blowouts in cost and time on this, just as there has been on Metronet. I cannot see much change from \$10 billion for the Westport project and, as I said before, I cannot see it occurring before 2040. That is going to cause massive ramifications for the people of Western Australia, particularly for anyone who lives near those freight routes. They will be deeply affected by the chaos that will be caused through a complete lack of planning and a complete lack of understanding of what is being done. I look forward to the contribution of the mover of the motion in his reply as he addresses some of the issues raised by the minister.

HON SOPHIA MOERMOND (South West) [11.24 am]: Even though the subject matter is heavy, it was an absolute delight to hear everyone’s considered points of view for the first time in the chamber. I will speak briefly in support of the motion moved by Hon Peter Collier. It always strikes me how much the honourable member cares.

I also want to acknowledge that although people may want to come here from other states, that does not mean that our standard of living has not gone backwards; nor does it mean that we cannot do better in Western Australia. When I look at our society, I see people in pain. We are living in a time when it is obvious that many people are suffering,

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and we see this represented everywhere. I acknowledge that global influences also affect that. We can see the dysfunction in particular in the number of homeless people in Perth and the surrounds, the number of people who are begging and the number of people dealing with substance abuse and sometimes with abusive patterns of behaviour such as porn addiction. We are seeing an increase in that as well, and that is a direct contributor to the increase in violence against women and children. All those things can be addressed with sensible regulation.

On the closure of the centre for women in East Perth, it was noted that Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and I were the only members of Parliament at the protest and the presentation of the e-petition.

One of the things that I have noticed in society is that there is an overall lack of health and wellbeing. We are seeing increases in the incidences of cancer, obesity, autism, allergies and autoimmune diseases, and the obvious causes are simply being ignored. There is zero regulation of the food industry, with non-foods filling the shelves in supermarkets. That is something that could be fairly easily improved. Thank you for listening.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [11.26 am] — in reply: I would like to thank those members who contributed to this debate. It is a pertinent debate because it is at the three-quarter mark of a government's term, so inevitably it is going to get judged. It will not be opposition members who judge the government in about 18 months; it will be the people of Western Australia. If members opposite, particularly the Leader of the House, cannot feel the winds of change out there, they need to get out more. The points that have been raised today were raised because of the very real reason that they exist.

Thank you very much to Hon Neil Thomson, Hon Sophia Moermond, Hon Louise Kingston, Hon Colin de Grussa, Hon Dr Steve Thomas and the Leader of the House for their contributions. Quite frankly, this sort of debate and political dialogue is helpful. In this instance, I will respond almost exclusively to the comments of the Leader of the House. The reason that people are coming to Western Australia is that they have been locked out for the past three years. When the borders opened, of course they would come here, and I have no problem with that whatsoever. The simple fact of the matter is that people out there are really struggling. My electorate office is in Warwick. I am not saying that I am a "Nigel no friends", but if members spent a day in my electorate, they would see the despair that we have to deal with on a day-to-day basis. We deal with homelessness in particular, but we also provide support with cost-of-living pressures. Yes, WA is and always has been a great place to live, but, judging from the comments of the Leader of the House, if members opposite honestly think that everything is just peachy out there, they need to get out more. It is not. I promise members that the winds of the political cycle have shifted. If they look at the federal polling and say that that will not be captured at least partly at the state level, I can promise them that that has happened.

I turn to electricity. The Leader of the House's almost juvenile attempt to explain the cost of electricity shows a complete lack of understanding of the electricity market. She tried to link the potential sale of Western Power to electricity prices. That has actually nothing to do with it whatsoever, and she probably needs to get some advice from the Minister for Energy.

The Leader of the House spent an enormous amount of time talking about Ruah. It is almost as if she has an infatuation with the City of Perth. I feel so much for women who have to endure the scourge of domestic violence. The Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations did an inquiry into this very real issue, and we went to the Ruah facility. We also went to one in my home town of Kalgoorlie, only to find that there was only one facility there, which could accommodate 10 women. I specifically asked what would happen if it was full. I was told that women would have to be turned away. That is heart-wrenching, particularly at the moment when we are dealing with the scourge of domestic violence and doing everything we possibly can to overcome it. I imagine that most of us will go out to the front steps of Parliament House very shortly and show a collective desire to overcome domestic violence. I would like to think we can do something about it. I identified the issues of the number of police officers dedicated to domestic violence. They have been reduced in the last two years, which is disappointing. With regard to the Ruah facility and other facilities for victims of domestic violence, I recommend that members look at the excellent report that the estimates committee did about this very issue and also look at the government response to our recommendations for increased services for crisis accommodation.

Hon Dan Caddy: Do you condemn the City of Perth?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No, I will not get into that at all.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members!

Hon PETER COLLIER: Sorry, I am trying to deal with this in as sensitive a way as I can. I say to members opposite to look at their government's response to this committee's recommendation to increase crisis care in Western Australia. They should look at it and then come back and say they are proud of that response.

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Hon Sandra Carr interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Just look at it.

Hon Sandra Carr: Did you miss the announcements this week about investment in prevention?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Can I just say —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members! Please, direct your remarks through the chair.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Can I just say, with indignation —

Hon Sandra Carr interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Do you mind?

Hon Sandra Carr interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Do you mind?

Hon Sandra Carr interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Here we go!

As I said with regard to that, members should look at the government's response to the report. Then, I want to see some outcomes.

I stand by every word I said about unit 18 and also about today's announcement. Today's announcement was a nothing announcement. I make it perfectly clear: it was a nothing announcement. The minister said that there would be a discrete, standalone facility, but the government has to work on a business case and funding. At this time next year we will still be talking about this. I add that this is for a temporary facility that should have been closed at the end of 2022. In July 2022 this was going to be a temporary facility. It is still in existence right now. There are still instances of detainees being in those cells for potentially 22, 23 or 24 hours a day. Today's announcement is nothing. It is just cosmetic. As I have said, I do not stand alone in my views on unit 18. I acknowledge that there have been some changes in the attitudes at Banksia Hill Detention Centre, but unit 18 remains a despicable facility. It should never have been created, it should not exist at the moment and most definitely should not continue to exist for potentially another 12 months, if not more.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.