

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 13 June.

HON W.N. STRETCH (South West) [12.04 pm]: I am pleased to support the motion and I thank His Excellency the Governor for his courtesy in opening this session of the Parliament. I pay particular respect to the way the new Governor and his wife are going about their duties. In a very short time they have endeared themselves to the people of Western Australia as people who know the State very well, are keen to know it even better, and will take a keen interest in the process of government and the workings of Parliament. In that context, I also pay tribute to our former Governor, Major General Michael Jeffery, and Mrs Marlena Jeffery, for their service to the State. The former Governor was also a very keen student of the workings of the Parliament and my colleagues who were former ministers assure me that little business passed unremarked and, if any explanation was needed, he called for and insisted on getting it. It is very important that we have people like this who not only treat the position of state Governor with the ceremony and respect that it deserves, but also take the trouble to understand the system over which they ultimately preside.

I also pledge my loyalty to the Crown, to the Parliament and to the people of Western Australia, and acknowledge the trust they put in me and all other members by electing us to this place. We take that honour and great responsibility more and more seriously as the years go by.

As members know, the Address-in-Reply is an opportunity for members to rove around their electorates to a certain extent and to comment on various parts of them. Representing the south west of Western Australia, as you do, Mr President, is indeed a privilege because that area is not only an economic powerhouse of the State but also it is a scenic and an extremely pleasant place in which to live. It has been my privilege to live in the area between the south west and the great southern since 1953. I have become very attached to that area; I do not believe there could be better or nicer places in which to live, although every member feels that way about their electorates as time goes by.

So much is happening in my area that it is hard to pick out the highlights. I shall do a little travelogue of it, although not as detailed as the travelogue usually done by my former colleague, Hon Tom Knight, who took great pleasure in taking us to every town and meeting all the interesting people who lived there. Suffice to say, they are wonderful people, it is a wonderful area and it is very rewarding to see the way people appreciate the work that is put in on little things.

I suppose I should address this comment to newer members. As a member of Parliament, it is not the huge things one does in the electorate for which a member will be remembered, because there are few opportunities for us to change the world - I have seen only two or three over my 19 years in the Parliament. The majority of the time of members is spent rescuing ordinary people and small businesses from the inevitable grind of the bureaucracy. It is important to realise that this happens whichever party is in government, because the very process of government is a slow and clumsy business. It is not like the law and it does not "grind exceedingly fine"; it grinds extremely roughly at times. The job of representing the people is to make sure that people are not drawn innocently into the mill by the mostly unwitting processes of government. We see that happen all the time. This reminds us of the importance of establishing where members of Parliament actually sit in the whole scheme of things.

Many people in business - large, small and very small husband and wife or family operations - feel they are over-governed and that there is too much government and too much interference in their lives. One day when we were in government, I called on a person in a medium-size business and I asked him how things were going and whether the Government was doing anything that it should not be doing or not doing things that it should doing. He thought about it for a while, being a reasonable sort of chap, and he said, "No, on the whole I think you are doing a pretty good job; you are keeping the hell out of my way and you are allowing business to progress in a reasonably unfettered way." In other words, he said to stand back and do not interfere unless there is a real need; simply facilitate the operations and do not try to fetter people with regulations and bureaucracy just because Parliaments think something should be in place. Nine times out of 10, more damage is done to the ultimate result by interfering than by standing back and letting humanity carry on the way it has for thousands of years.

That leads me to comment on the debate about globalisation, nationalisation and corporatisation, because we are in danger of getting lost. We seem to think that this is a new order in the scheme of things; however, those concepts have been around for thousands of years. Every now and again we must stand back and accept that we are a collection of ordinary people elected to do a job on behalf of those who trust us to administer on their behalf. We are not given unfettered power to rush in and make a huge number of rules; we are not given big cars to travel around and make impressive speeches at functions; we are elected to act as earpieces and mouthpieces

in the parliamentary forums. We need to look at what we are as a species. We are a competitive animal; we are nothing special in the animal kingdom. We have the same ambitions, competitiveness, desires, weaknesses and strengths. Fortunately, homo sapiens have developed a few more strengths than many of the other species, which have allowed them over the years to dominate the small “e” environment. That is a responsibility we have taken upon ourselves. We must always remember that we must not be afraid of competition in any form, because we are essentially competitive beings. That competition has existed since time immemorial. With regard to globalisation Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Empires have all grown because of economic competition. The competitive spirit or necessity, driven by economic or other imperatives, has forced expansion, if we like, of small “g” globalisation upon the world.

Hon Kim Chance: It is an interesting point. It was said the other day that there is actually less movement around the world of people this century than there has been in earlier centuries.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: That is the case. Even though we have the ability to move around the world, we do not necessarily have the incentive. Globalisation tends to be used by some people as a bogymen that will destroy civilisation; whereas only people will do that. We as individuals can manage that competitive spirit either to our betterment or to our detriment. We see competition in school playgrounds. There will always be competition. People will rise, they will fall and they will be pushed down.

The job of parliamentarians is to help people when they need a hand to compete against the system when they are being unfairly prevailed upon. Conversely, as legislators, it is important that we do not pass silly laws that impose those pressures. That is a huge impost on both Governments and Oppositions.

This place reflects the ultimate in competition. Parliament is an adversarial place, but it must not become a bitter place. I am rather sad that in the past 10 years Parliaments have tended to become bitter places. At all levels, we must guard against that. The general acceptance now tends to be that the winner takes all and the main power group is the font of all wisdom. We all know that is not so. If Parliaments are to work properly, they must work in an atmosphere of goodwill and reasonable cooperation. We will not take away the competitive spirit, nor should we. However, we must remember that goodwill and cooperation are the keystones to making the Westminster system of Parliament work well. I think it was former Senator Withers who said there was no such thing as permanent enemies in politics. That is very true. Politics is a dynamic reflected in most Chambers around the world as the left, the right, the weak, the strong, the wet or the dry. It is a fluid dynamic. It is a bit like living in a house. As I was discussing earlier with a colleague, it probably pays to move every 10 years or so. People do not often move their political allegiances; rather their understanding and concept of politics changes according to their experiences of life and politics. It is often interesting to reflect on the correct age - if there is such a thing - at which to become a member of Parliament. It is a mistake to move people into Parliament when they are too young. I acknowledge also, with my lofty years, that it is a mistake to stay in Parliament for too long! It is also important that people move into this place with a very good understanding of the dynamics of the human race, which cannot be learnt other than by experience at the coalface. Organisations of all parties generally must bear this in mind. Unless we have seen the hardships, joys, challenges and achievements of our fellow man - I am using man in the anthropological sense - it is very hard to make fair, comprehensible laws. At all stages our aim must be to make fair laws.

It is easy to turn this Chamber into a totally political place and that is possibly what the bear pits of the lower Houses are. In upper Chambers it is important that we act in a fairer, more bipartisan manner. In that regard it is important that we assess the way in which we approach the committee system. I do not know how far I can refer to the debate on the committee system, but it has been proved that the winner-take-all concept is not the best one. Being an older party, the Labor Party is more mature than the Liberal Party at managing its factions. As it found, in the long term, the domination of all positions by one faction is not a workable scenario. In the same way, the committee systems of the House must allow for give and take. Obviously at times they will be used politically. However, how far that is allowed to go rests with the maturity of the members and the House. I will be interested to see how this committee system pans out. I do not think we do our electors a great service by taking all power to ourselves, whatever side. This could have been a weakness of this House in the past, and there is a danger of its becoming a weakness in the future, not due to the strength of the opposing main protagonists, but to the bargaining strength of the minor parties versus their minor numerical strength and representation in the community. There is always a danger in this climate when, on political matters, the heart takes over from the head. I think we are going through one of those phases now. There is nothing new about that. It is like bringing up teenagers: we could say it is a stage through which they are going. Without being patronising to the electorate, it is a stage. In my political career I have not known such a volatile electorate. It is difficult to understand. It could be due partly to rural hardship, stress and concern about the environment. However, there are underlying factors we have not yet succeeded in properly analysing; nonetheless, there is great distress in the community. To be honest I think it does the political protagonists no great credit to play on those uncertainties and play one group against the other for political purposes when, in the end, people are being

ground down by the system. The system is perpetuated by Governments of all persuasions at various times and it is very difficult to reverse that trend. In our electorate in the south west, as you are well aware, Mr Deputy President (Hon Barry House), as is the President, the forest debate is an intensely damaging debate in the community. When we take into account the human cost of what we are doing to families and people in the community we must look at ourselves and ask: what were our motives in taking this action? We must also ask ourselves what is the ultimate good for the people in that area. What difference has it made to the environment, the forest and the ecology? Has it been worth the cost in human hardship? When a person of 30-odd years with a new house, a wife, a two-year-old child and another on the way, asks, "How can I pay for all this when I am on the dole? Three months ago I had a good solid job in a good, solid, sustainable industry? Why are you doing this?" we must all look into our hearts and ask why we are doing it and what is the ultimate good. All parties have been guilty for various reasons. I hope that the people who felt so fervently about the need to close down those mills have the answers and solutions. I do not believe that the solution is taking money out of one pot and putting it into another. We must look deeply into our motives and ask why we did it in the first place.

The position is similar with dairy deregulation. Western Australia had a viable, if subsidised, industry for many years. I acknowledge it was subsidised. We need to question the ultimate benefit of deregulation. We know under which Government it happened, but we know that all Governments subscribe to the theory. How much of it was political pressure, how much was economic imperative and how much was driven by outside influences? Western Australia with four per cent of the national dairy industry was not particularly significant.

I talked to Victorian producers during my recent trip to attend the Centenary of Federation celebrations, about which I will speak later. I also spoke to them on an earlier trip, because the genuine grief and anxiety in the Western Australian dairy industry had to be analysed and understood. The Victorian dairymen said they did not really care about Western Australia's dairy producers because their production represents about only four per cent of Australia's production. The Victorian dairymen can have a four per cent fluctuation in seasonal conditions, and can suffer a four per cent reduction through a minor disease, such as a mastitis outbreak. They can cope with that. They do not want to take over the Western Australian market. That has nothing to do with it. They respect WA's right to exist as an entity, and the four per cent is not a button off their shirt.

We heard a lot of scare tactics about corporations rushing milk across the border and all those other things that can be done because of technology. Again, we must look at the ultimate benefits. I did not hear the consumers complaining that they were paying too much for their milk on the supermarket shelves. They do not buy that much milk, and the amount they spend on it is a fairly small proportion of the household budget. I have grandchildren who must be fed soya milk and all sorts of things. Whether it is an imperative or a fad, I do not know, but one can always find reasons for such things. However, generally speaking, the price of milk is not a major item in a household budget.

Members of Parliament need to look at why we get into a confrontational situation and grind up people in debate. I take no pleasure or pride in it. I do not think any one of us is happy about such outcomes. We must bear that in mind in the future. I am not whingeing about the past, but we must look at what we have done and how we can do things better in the future. One of the best outcomes of the committee system is our getting to know each other better, and getting to know our weaknesses and strengths by working together on committees. We can bring a more reasoned, hopefully intelligent, approach to some of these problems that will always occur in the community. People will always look to us for solutions.

Turning to the communities of Manjimup, Pemberton, Northcliffe and so on, I was very disturbed at the inference the other night during a debate that the timber communities will gradually solve their own problems because the supply of timber will dwindle to such an extent that mills will close and their proportion of timber can be spread among other mills. That is a dreadful indictment. We are looking not at the base of the problem, but at bandaid-type solutions. We are forcing more people into a position in which they will need to be rescued. I do not think those sorts of self-fulfilling prophecies are the way to help those communities.

I am very pleased that the previous Minister for Education agreed to upgrade Manjimup Primary School. I do not know why, but under many years of representation by my good friend Dave Evans, the former Labor member for Warren, the Manjimup school was not upgraded. He and I inspected it when I was a member for Lower Central Province. Even then the toilets were substandard. There was an old brick square in the middle of the bitumen quadrangle with bird wire around the top to stop the birds flying into the toilets. We told Dave something had to be done. He agreed and said, "Good God, do you realise these toilets are exactly the same as they were when I was at school here." He is even older than I am. He was a fine member for the area. Only with the last Government was the commitment made to rebuild that school. I hope that the current Minister for Education will continue with that planning. Money urgently needs to be allocated in the budget so that planning work can proceed. It would be a terrible indictment of any Government if we took the cynical view that if we let

the timber industry wither, we would not have to worry about the kids any more. We must maintain not only the infrastructure, but also the morale of the people involved.

To the credit of the previous Government, it put a huge amount of money into Manjimup. It had Manjimup Senior High School virtually rebuilt and moved the TAFE facility there. It spent \$1.3 million on East Manjimup Primary School. It is now the turn of the bigger, central primary school to be upgraded. I make the plea to the Government to consider that very urgently.

The closure of the potato chip factory in Manjimup was a serious blow to the town. Now under the chairmanship of Eric Phillips, the M.A.E.S. company is operating the business again. Its management has taken over the huge building, and is making a genuine attempt with its own resources to put some certainty back into the horticultural industry in Manjimup, which cannot afford to lose another major industry. Like all country communities, Manjimup is very resilient. It has moved from the production of tobacco, to timber, to plantations and a heap of other produce. It has wonderful soil, a wonderful climate and great-hearted people. Given a reasonable amount of assistance and funding from government it will prosper again. All the towns around that area are suffering from the timber debate. Generally, if the Government can bring forward public works in those areas to give heart and employment to those towns, it will go some way towards mending the deep hurt that has been caused there.

I am pleased to see that a chip milling facility appears to be going into Donnybrook; if it does, it will return much stability to the area. Every shire in my region has spent untold, and in many ways unjustified, money vying for the location of the chip mill in its area. An interesting aspect about this type of facility is that it is not a subject for lobbying. The proponents decide the economics and location of a chip mill. Therefore, an enormous amount of time and funding was spent studying roads. Numerous studies were conducted in the south west to examine where the roads could go to serve the chipper. That is fine. However, nobody knew where the chip mill would be located, but the studies went ahead anyway. I know towns must be prepared for these things, but a huge waste of effort has gone into extensive preparation in so many areas. I am glad that the situation is now reasonably settled and that the mill will proceed.

It was sad to see the closure of Australian Leather Holdings Ltd in Darkan, which is just outside my region but very much part of my sphere of interest because I represented it before the boundary changes. Darkan is similar to Kojonup, where I live and work. The closure of an industry like that, which may employ only 10 to 15 people, causes a huge loss of jobs to such communities. Although that industry cannot be artificially stimulated, it is incumbent on the Government to give all the assistance it can to the shire and to the proponents to try to find alternative uses for the infrastructure that is there now.

I refer now to a couple of sadder matters. I note the passing of an old Bridgetown identity, Harold Rowan-Robinson. Harold was a former soldier who was in Timor during World War II. He was one of the guerilla-type fighters who did a lot to defend our north west frontier there under difficult circumstances. Another former teacher of mine, an officer by the name of Rolph Baldwin, was also in command up there, along with several soldiers from the Kojonup area. The stories of that campaign, fortunately written by Harold, relate the hardships and the wonderful assistance given by the Timorese people to the Australian soldiers up there during the war. I believe that is the reason that all of us feel a pang of guilt at what has happened in Timor and why we are anxious to give all the assistance we can to the Timorese. I was pleased to hear in speeches in this House the other day of assistance being given. I extend my sincere sympathy to Harold's wife and family. They have been great citizens. He was a life member of the agricultural society in Bridgetown and a tireless worker for the community. If ever a job needed doing in the town, from building seats to anything else, Harold was the guy who did it. Even in his later years he spent a considerable amount of time serving the community.

I note the passing the other day of Claude Weller, an old pioneer of the town of Cranbrook. Claude was one of the tough pioneers of the day who ploughed his fields with nine horses abreast. Although he had a tractor in the early days, he often preferred to use the horses. Given the vagaries of machinery sometimes, I can understand that; not that horses are without their own vagaries! Claude's contribution to the community and his surrounding district was considerable and I extend my sympathy to his family. These people put in an enormous contribution to the area. They helped tame the wilderness, if one can call Cranbrook and Kojonup wilderness, and made major contributions also to the economic wellbeing of their districts.

A health issue of great concern in my electorate and further out is the general wellbeing of country people. The suicide rate in country towns and districts is alarming. We are grappling with it as best we can but, again, it is the role of Parliaments to do what they can to alleviate the economic pressure that in many cases can exacerbate that hardship.

Another health issue is women's health and the mammography screening clinics that move around the country. A woman in her mid-thirties told me of her concern that people of her age could not use the mammography clinics that are parked around country towns at various times. I understand there are good anatomical reasons for

that. However, the rule is that women over 50 are encouraged to attend these clinics but those under 50 are discouraged from attending. That age barrier has recently been changed so that now those who are over 40 are welcome but are not encouraged to attend.

What scares me is that more younger people in their thirties are presenting with breast cancer. That they are presenting for treatment is a good sign. My concern is that many people in their thirties are worried about lumps and so on and they see a mammography unit standing in one place often unused for a week or 10 days at a time. Many of these people could use that facility and although the X-ray units are not terribly effective in detecting lumps in breasts of younger people, we should consider the fact that trained people are in attendance who could give advice if younger people were allowed to attend. I ask the minister to suggest to the Minister for Health that if these clinics sitting in country towns have surplus capacity, the cost of seeing more people is probably minimal compared with the ultimate cost of undetected breast cancer in country women.

Hon Tom Stephens: By way of interjection, I say that when your speech on this issue appears in *Hansard* I shall refer your specific suggestion to the Minister for Health and ask him to respond. I hope that my making a long interjection will ensure I get a copy of the *Hansard* so that I can do that earlier rather than later.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Yes, I would like the minister to do that because in this week's *The West Australian* there was a reference to the high incidence of cancer in Aboriginal people. That also is a problem that the Parliament could address in this way. I realise there are cultural difficulties and so on in that suggestion. However, there are many people, not just Aboriginal people, who will not attend X-ray facilities in regional centres. They just drive past the van, which in my area was parked in Boyup Brook for many days. As the minister can imagine, there is not an endless stream of people going into the van. I do not know how often it is attended or whether it was just parked there because it was not ready to go to the next town; however, many people could have attended it there because it was available. Even if people attended one of those units and the radiographer, or whoever is in charge, told them it was not effective to X-ray them because of tissue density and other good reasons, at least they could talk about it. A trained person could tell them whether there was a problem, whether they should attend their GP or whether they should go to the proper facility in Bunbury. Some of those units do not have the most up-to-date technology. However, I make that practical suggestion because the service is there and I know of the problem and cost of undetected cancers and the benefit of early detection. I thank the minister for that interjection. It is a sensible suggestion to fully utilise those facilities. Even if an extra three or four X-ray plates a day were used, the cost would be minimal compared with the cost of keeping the machinery and paying the wages of the people there. The cost of the extra hardware is minimal and should be looked at in view of the value of early diagnosis.

I will comment on the Bendigo Bank. The move towards bank closures in country areas had the unforeseen consequence of making it very difficult for smaller businesses to access a cash facility in many country towns, which also brought with it the difficulty of keeping their cash secure. In the early stages, there were more break-ins to service stations, cafes, delicatessens and so on, which had no facility to keep reasonably large amounts of cash on their premises.

I pay tribute to Max Trenorden's efforts. He was a member of the coalition Government at the time, and he raised this matter in the party room. Everybody's immediate reaction was, "My God! This is definitely David taking on Goliath. We cannot win this battle." However, to the National Party's and Max's credit, and with the support of the Liberal Party, we took that on. Max's efforts in attracting the Bendigo Bank into the rural areas of Western Australia are to be commended. I want it on record in this House that that was a major step forward. It also engendered a large amount of community spirit among the people in Tambellup, Cranbrook and such places further out in the wheatbelt, where more facilities were disappearing. It is an interesting concept. People are putting their own money up front to establish the facility. I wish them well. The bank will meet great competition but it has already had an effect. I was interested to hear the other day that BankWest announced that it was reassessing branch closures and considering the long-term effects and potential loss of customers. I hope that it will consider this matter carefully, and I hope that all other existing banks will look carefully at the effect on their customer base and whether the loyalty factor is still big enough for them to keep open those branches. It is a big problem for rural Australia.

The fact that people are not able to go to a bank manager locally for a major loan is no longer terribly important, because most of the decisions on loan applications must be made at a bank's head office. However, it is vital to the survival of many of the smaller towns that people have access to a cash management facility and reasonably small withdrawal facilities. I am roving around a little, as I said I would, because I think we should also look at the impact on country towns of taxation. I know that is predominantly a federal issue, but we need to raise these matters from time to time. Taxation, in itself, is a very blunt instrument. Unless people understand the nature of rural credit and rural debt, it is very difficult to tailor a tax system that is not only fair and equitable, but also cost effective for the Government itself. Speaking as a farmer, and I declare a vested interest, obviously, it is

important that the nature of rural debt be understood. It is a long-term cyclical thing. It does not fit the guidelines of Sydney and Melbourne corporate concepts. If the Government, through the reduction of taxation concessions, takes away the ability of operators in the country - not only farmers but also small businesses - to set aside their own resources and reserves for the future, it will result in a mendicant industry continually going to the Government for help later. That does not seem to be very smart. Over the years, various Governments have tried to address that issue through income equalisation deposits etc. That is fine if people have a cash surplus. However, many farmers can build in those same reserves by the use of intelligent infrastructure on their farms, if they have the taxation incentives to do so.

One can trace back the decline in rural viability to the changes in taxation, when many concessions were taken away. There is always a scream from the social lobby etc that concessions are being given to the "haves", and that must automatically be paid by the "have-nots". In a way, that is flawed thinking. More "have-nots" have been created, because part of the facility of the "haves" has been taken away. We should also protect the "haves", who will then continue to employ those who have less. The general level of prosperity surrounding that industry is currently being lowered. I will leave the matter at that point. However, we should discuss this issue in forums with our federal members and with our communities, and adopt an intelligent approach to allow more flexibility for people to look after themselves and to preserve their ability to sustain themselves and their businesses in bad times.

This applies equally to families. Governments should stand back for a minute and look at the ultimate effect of what is popularly called the nanny state, wherein the Government collects all the wealth from whomever it can and redistributes it. Is that the smartest way to go? Again, how many people are Governments grinding down in the administrative process, and how much are they helping the real people? I have difficulty with the philosophy of getting stuck into the internationals, big business and corporations. That philosophy is all very well, but it affects people in middle business. I am in that category. All businesses are pyramid businesses. At the top are the mighty corporations and all the way down the line and feeding off that investment and that structure are the smaller businesses. That goes down to the smaller family outfits, the technicians, the teachers, the instructors and all sorts of people. People think that by attacking the big corporations at the top, they are doing themselves a favour. Very often they are not. They are destroying the ability of those people to create the jobs and opportunities, and to foster the expertise and research that can come only from a successful operation. Very often, those operations succeed only because of economies of scale.

As a farmer, it was interesting to listen the other morning to a couple of radio talks on the growth of Brazilian agriculture. Brazil is now clearing one million acres a year - do not get excited, it is not rainforest - of moderately low-level growth. It is semi-tropical country and the vegetation is lush, but it is not rainforest per se. The Americans are now worried, because the cost of production in Brazil is way below that in America. That has ramifications for Australia in the long term, because if America loses its markets, it will start looking harder at Australia's. We have survived in the past by being smarter. In the past day or so, Hon Murray Criddle outlined the impact of no-till agriculture and its beneficial effect on the environment and the ability to grow more with less. That is having an impact in Australia. As those operations get bigger, a new type of structure will develop with the surrounding service industries and specialist contracting services. It goes right down the line. I was at the dentist's the other day, which is never a pleasant experience despite the charm of my dentist. I was amazed at how much of modern dentistry is let out to other people. There are the instrument makers, the technicians and the various mould makers. Probably a dozen other minor sub-industries exist off a dental practice. It is not farming, it is not business, and it is not just BHP; everyone right down the line is reliant on spreading work throughout the community. We do ourselves a disservice if we attack the tall poppy. It is something that Australia must grow out of. I spoke earlier about the competitiveness of the human race, and that is fine. However, we must also keep that competitiveness in check, and when we decide to attack something, we must look at the ultimate costs and benefits and try to balance the two.

I was privileged to sit on a committee of this place looking into DNA research, which committee was chaired by Hon Bruce Donaldson. The acceptance of the use of DNA in forensics, finding missing persons and proving identity is growing in the community. It is being appreciated more. I commend to new members a quick browse of that report to Parliament. It delved quite a long way into the future. It was regarded as a somewhat futuristic study - as something that was maybe a bit before its time. However, its acceptance is spreading into the community. Obviously, the question of infringement of personal rights concerns some people. However, after looking at the overall benefits and the development of that technology, I say to the Government that it should take a hard look at the issue and press on with it. The results in solving moderate-level crimes in the United Kingdom have been outstanding, and the minister has acknowledged that. It is important that we adopt that measure as quickly as possible, because crime is still a major worry in the community. People are even moving house because they no longer feel safe in a particular house in a particular area. That is an indictment of Governments of all levels, and members should take the issue seriously.

Another matter related to genetics is the research into genetically modified food. I was delighted to hear the statement presented to the House by Hon Kim Chance the other day. It suggests a modification in the Government's view of GM research and the growing of GM crops in Western Australia. The over-emotional reaction of Hon Jim Scott to the issue of GM research and genetically modified crops in his suggestion of a five-year ban on all research was reminiscent of the people who insisted that a man with a red flag walk in front of cars at all times and that those cars could not under any circumstances exceed eight miles an hour. We have moved past that a little. People involved in this sort of research say that a five-year moratorium would be the kiss of death for that research. We know that the world will not stand still for five years; it moves on. All we would do is export our research and our best research brains to places overseas that have a less pedestrian attitude to scientific research and progress. I welcome the statement by the Minister for Agriculture. I look forward to an intelligent debate on that important subject at some stage during this Parliament. The world does not stand still for people who place five-year moratoriums on matters. Those people are overtaken and forgotten. Again, I stress that, by doing so, we would lose our impetus for research and we would lose our best people. Their career paths cannot stand still for that length of time.

It is hard to know what to say about electoral reform. It has always been on the cards. It has been a dear goal of the Labor Party for a long time to have one vote, one value. Brian Burke put forward the suggestion in 1994, not long after coming to government, and it was thrown out by the upper House. The former Premier was heard to say, "Thank God for the upper House", because he could see then that the dangers of one vote, one value were nearly as great for the Labor Party as they were for the Liberal Party. The same thing happened with the land rights Bill that was debated a year later; the same sentiments were expressed by the then Premier: "Thank God the upper House threw it out; it saved us from having to grapple with those problems." Now we have those problems and I will leave it to my colleagues in other parts of the State to argue that point.

Electoral reform does not sit terribly well in my place of abode or with my electors. It does not sit well with the Labor Party's policy of increasing services to the regions. People generally appreciate the service provided by their members of Parliament; that is, the attention they receive from those members and their accessibility to them. I have heard all the arguments about increased technology and how people in those areas have phones, faxes, e-mail and every other service. As most people know, there is no substitute for a face-to-face conversation with a person with a problem. If we take away the physical presence of those people, we will diminish the service. We can put in as many government departments as we like, but, generally speaking, most people feel more empathy with a member of Parliament than they do with a junior departmental bureaucrat. I am not knocking the bureaucracy; it has some wonderful people. However, people want to be able to go to a person they feel will listen to their problems and take it to a higher level. That is why they appreciate their members of Parliament being around. If the Government reduces the number of members representing the country, where, God knows, myriad problems need a face-to-face approach, it will further cut those services provided to country people. It will take away the viability and attractiveness of living in those areas.

We should think carefully about what we are considering. Are we doing it for the good of the people, or are we doing it for political gain? Are we moving chess pieces around on the board and saying to the people at the coalface that we can walk all over them and they can make other arrangements? Members should look into their hearts and see what they are doing to those people. We are their representatives. We belong out there. I believe those people want us out there. If other members think those people do not want us out there, members should go out and convince them. Many people outside the metropolitan area will be hard-pressed to believe it.

Rumours abound in Mt Barker that the research station will be closed or at least there will be severe staff reductions. That uncertainty is very destructive of community morale and wellbeing; yet members wonder why people commit suicide and why pressures build-up on people. Uncertainty causes such damage. The Government needs to clarify its intentions.

My colleague Hon Barry House raised the issue of planning. I chaired one of the regional planning study groups. The minute a forward plan is created and a proposed line is drawn on a map, people are put under pressure. People are on either one side or the other of that line. If they are on the favoured side, they stand to make a profit. However, if they are on the wrong side, a lifetime of investment and opportunity can be struck out, not by a law of Parliament, but by nothing more than a study, usually made at a departmental level by somebody who thought it was a good idea and suggested to the minister that planning in, for example, the Murray River basin in Pinjarra should be looked at. The community then suffers enormous hurt, loss and disturbance, and all for what? Again, do we really understand what we are doing?

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

The PRESIDENT: I acknowledge a guest in the President's gallery, Hon Bob McMullan, former Senator and current House of Representatives member for the Australian Capital Territory.

Debate adjourned until a later stage of the sitting, on motion by Hon E.R.J. Dermer.

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