

RURAL AND REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA - FAILURE OF STATE GOVERNMENT

Motion

Resumed from 18 October on the following motion moved by Hon Tom Stephens (Leader of the Opposition) -

That this House -

- (1) Condemns the State Government for its failure to safeguard and improve the interests of rural and regional Western Australia and its misplaced priorities.
- (2) Calls on the Government to amend its policies and give priority to the delivery of core government services to all Western Australians, especially in the areas of health, education, community safety and public transport.

HON W.N. STRETCH (South West) [11.10 am]: I am, of course, speaking against this motion. It is not only unreasonable but also ill chosen and it creates a false impression of the remarkable achievements of this Government since it took office. The motion calls on the House to condemn the State Government “for its failure to safeguard and improve the interests of rural and regional Western Australia and its misplaced priorities”. That is strange wording but we understand its intention. It also calls on the Government to amend its policies and give priority to the delivery of core government services to all Western Australians, especially in the areas of health, education, community safety and public transport.

This motion, not to mention the daily barrage we hear about everything that is considered wrong with this Government’s policies, could lead unsuspecting listeners to be convinced that everything is wrong in regional, rural and metropolitan Western Australia. However, as we all know, we live in a marvellous country. Based on some of the events occurring in other parts of the world at this time, we thank God every morning that we live in Western Australia.

On the subject of thanking God every morning, it is unusual to admit to being a Christian these days because people sometimes attach the wrong connotations to it. I have not missed many sittings during the 18 years I have been in Parliament, and on each day, as the young people in the Public Gallery will have noticed, we begin with a prayer. It is not a sectarian prayer; it is a very general prayer. The important words in the first half of it are as follows -

... the Legislative Council now assembled to deliberate upon affairs affecting the well-being and good order of society in Western Australia, that all members give honour, wisdom and integrity to the role for which they have been chosen, and the decisions and decorum of this Council be always to the advancement of Thy glory, the honour of Her Majesty and the continued benefit of the people of this State.

The significant words are in the middle of that invocation. Sometimes when we listen to members opposite, we wonder whether they are giving the service to the Parliament and to the people of Western Australia for which they were elected and which they gave an oath to pursue.

That brings me to the role of Governments and the effect that motions such as this have on the wellbeing of the people of Western Australia. Every now and again it behoves us to listen to what is said in here and to gauge the effect of our deliberations and behaviour on the people in the community who do not always have the privilege of sitting in Parliament.

I am one of few people who believe that the televising of Parliaments, both Federal and State, is one of the worst things that has happened to democracy in Australia. It has turned Parliaments into theatre, which they are not meant to be, and into high school level debating Chambers where success is measured by the points scored from the opposing side. That does not promote the wellbeing, benefit and integrity of Western Australia.

I have been here long enough to know that not all wisdom resides exclusively among government members or on opposition benches. We tear our hair out over the low level of respect in which members of Parliament are held within the community. However, we know that is partly due to the constant whingeing and whining about the poor state we are in that is reported in our newspapers.

People know also that compared with what they read about events in the rest of the world, things are not that bad here, although they will never be perfect. We must accept that government coffers will never have sufficient money to meet the needs and aspirations of all citizens. A sensible, positive Opposition would acknowledge that.

Last night Hon Bob Thomas made some constructive comments when he outlined the problems Governments face with health care. In the 18 years I have been a member, Governments have always been short of money for

health care, roads, schools, etc. Nothing changes. Hon Bob Thomas rightly pointed out that we have an ageing population because now we are very good at keeping people alive. That very fact underlines the success of health care policies of successive Governments. The performance of this Government in health care has been extremely good. Many new hospitals have been built, and hospital care has been decentralised, but that has caused problems, particularly in teaching hospitals. Traditionally, top level “honoraries” have taught at major hospitals at their own cost and at a considerable sacrifice of their time. Initially, it was more convenient for them to teach in centralised hospitals such as Royal Perth Hospital and, later, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, which are the major teaching hospitals. It is difficult for those honoraries to teach at hospital campuses in the outer metropolitan areas.

Hon Bob Thomas is correct when he says that modern technology is very expensive. However, we all believe we are entitled to it, and so we should be. We all scream about the high cost of modern health technology and the difficulty of making it available to everybody. Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world with unlimited finance. However, by good management, Governments can achieve reasonable results by contributing as much as they can from scarce resources.

In the cold light of day and in giving honour and integrity to their role in opposition, members opposite can accept that this Government has given reasonably good service to the people of Western Australia. We have not had skyrocketing death rates nor skyrocketing levels of disease, other than a couple of unfortunate diseases over which we do not have much control. There will never be enough nurses.

Hon Bob Thomas: The Government has cut back the health care system to the point at which it cannot even cope with flu epidemics. We hear complaints from the Government that there is additional pressure on the system due to flu epidemics. You cannot say it is being well managed.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Hon Bob Thomas acknowledged that the population in this State is not only ageing but also increasing; yet he maintains that everyone is entitled to have access to the latest, extremely expensive hospital equipment.

As a close neighbour of Asia, Western Australia has become a popular tourist destination, bringing a huge influx of people through Perth which has exposed the people who live here to greater risk of increasingly severe flue epidemics. Huge amounts of money are being spent on research to combat these epidemics.

Nitpicking Oppositions can always criticise government policies. I emphasised the words in the invocation read by the President each morning to prompt members to think about their roles. I am genuinely concerned about how the Westminster system can withstand sensationalism caused by over-exposure through the modern media. Sadly, good government is not “sexy”. It does not catch the headlines. It is like the duck paddling under the water.

Hon Ken Travers: How would we know?

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Hon Ken Travers would not know. That is the kind of smart, fatuous remark to which I was referring. He can make snide comments and win a quick headline and maybe a few votes. It does not reflect the member's wisdom and his integrity - which is considerable; we have seen evidence of that - which he brings to the job he was elected to do.

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: The member is a big man; he can take it. He was elected to look after his people. In that role he must balance the positive and the negative. I accept that the role of opposition is to oppose. God help me! I had 10 years in opposition when I first came into Parliament.

Hon Bob Thomas: You'll get a few more too.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: That is a helpful remark! We probably shall, one day.

Hon Bob Thomas: You will.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: That is the member's judgment, and he is entitled to make it. The member can roll those comments off the cuff. I am trying to make a worthy contribution, and to make people think.

Hon Bob Thomas: The point I am making is that what the member is saying now is the reason he will go back into opposition. He is not listening to what the public is saying. He is trying to say that we have a good hospital system. We do not. We have adults in children's wards in Bunbury.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: How many of Hon Bob Thomas' friends have died in hospital lately?

Hon Bob Thomas: None.

Hon Tom Stephens: I can tell you that some of mine have.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Was that through bad health care or medicine?

Hon Tom Stephens: I told members the circumstances; a defibrillator would not work.

Hon Greg Smith: They said that would have made no difference.

Hon Tom Stephens: Nonetheless, she died on that hospital bed.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: That is tragic and regrettable.

Hon Greg Smith interjected.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I will not postulate on that, and I do not think Hon Tom Stephens would postulate that that could not happen if he were in government. We accept that life is tough and has always been tough. I will not give that famous quote from a former colleague. When members opposite criticise the Government for a lack of application to health issues - just for one - they must bear in mind the realities of life. As Hon Bob Thomas correctly pointed out, the realities of life are an ageing population, expensive health care, increasing population and improving medical technology, which will not keep everyone alive. Members opposite know my circumstances. When a member spoke about the care of diabetics in Albany it went close to my heart, and he knows why.

Hon Bob Thomas: You are focusing on only half of what I said. I said that, notwithstanding all of that, you guys are doing things to cut costs and corners and that is making people angry. It is your contracting out and privatisation that have increased costs for services for outpatients. That is what is making people angry.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: The member's comments are good politics. However, if he wanted to be reasonable - he will not be in the Parliament after the next election, regrettably - he would not say that he could guarantee that under a Labor Government this would never happen. He knows in his heart of hearts that he cannot. Things may be better. Members opposite may change the priorities, but they will not stop a defibrillator suddenly breaking down in the most tragic circumstances; they will not stop the doctor's car not starting or the flying doctor service not being able to land because of bad weather. Health systems can fail for hundreds of reasons.

I call on members opposite to be reasonable or lose their credibility as an Opposition. They criticise us for not listening. I suggest that they are very close to losing all credibility as an Opposition and an alternative Government because of their over-criticism and over-carping, and their negative attitude and speeches that go for the sensational headline. They know in their heart of hearts that life will go on, Governments will go on and only the faces will change. The question members opposite must consider is how far down into the gutter do they go to make those faces change. Members opposite have a responsibility and we have a responsibility. Despite Hon Bob Thomas' interjections, the Government is listening. Government members are out and about as much as members opposite. We hear the messages. We have the responsibility to make that hard-to-earn dollar go further. Despite claims from members opposite, we have reduced the overall tax rate on people. We have revenue, but it has come from good management -

Hon Bob Thomas: That is not correct, you have increased taxes.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Hon Clive Griffiths always said that there is nothing special about Parliament and members of Parliament. That is one of the difficulties members opposite have in assessing themselves, and I admit that some of our people may have had that difficulty too. This is a meeting place of the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker, as the former President used to say. We bring our collective wisdom from our life experiences, and we apply it for the good government of our fellow citizens. We in this place are in an immensely privileged position. That privileged position brings an equally immense responsibility to make sure that what we do is the best thing we can do and what we spend is spent in the best possible way. The priorities of members opposite are different; we know they are. We have a left and a right, a Liberal Party and a Labor Party. We must always balance these matters. The people are the ultimate judges, and that is fair enough. The Opposition must give them the evidence for the need to change a Government. However, if they are not fair, balanced and reasonable about giving that evidence, we will get an unfair decision in the ballot box and the people will pay the price. We put our point of view. We manage things our way. Members opposite manage things their way. The checks and balances of the political system we have will ensure that this will always be so. No Government governs forever. We know that, and members opposite know that. That is what gives one hope in opposition. As I said, I was there for 10 years. Sometimes it is hard to keep one's hope alive, but one manages.

The Government manages things so that it brings the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people. The sale of AlintaGas has hit the headlines. It has had the usual carping, negative criticism from members opposite. The sale is a huge benefit to the people of Western Australia. It is a massive positive for them.

Hon Ken Travers: For those who could afford to buy the shares.

Hon W.N. Stretch: How much were the shares?

Hon Ken Travers: \$2.25.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Is that an expensive share?

Hon Bob Thomas: For mums and dads it is.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: They do not have to buy them. No-one put a pipe vice on anyone's leg and said they must buy shares. Nobody insisted that mums and dads should buy the shares if they did not want to.

Hon Ken Travers: They have to be able to afford them.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: That is their judgment.

Hon Ken Travers: They do not have the money to do it in the first place.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Unless Hon Ken Travers has analysed people's budgets, he does not know their priorities. They might have gone down to the pub or the TAB and spent their \$2.50 share over the past couple of months. The prudent ones might have said, "I won't do that; I will put a bit aside because I want to buy them."

Hon Ken Travers: Those who can afford it got a windfall profit.

Hon Greg Smith: Members opposite hate to see people make money.

Hon Ken Travers: Because someone else is losing it.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: This is why I took issue with Hon Jim Scott last night. He said words to the effect that we had to squeeze things down to the last dollar. I said that he was so naive that he was dangerous, and that is true. I do not worship commerce; I have been down to the bones of my backside like most farmers and I know how the system works. However, if one does not understand how commerce works, one is not in a position to comment. The comment that Hon Ken Travers just made indicates he lacks a basic understanding of commerce. I do not believe that what he says is the case. If one is selling something and is floating shares, one must leave a margin of profit or no-one will buy.

Hon Ken Travers: If you had sold it at the price Deutsche Bank recommended to your Government, you would still have had the margin and the State would have got an extra \$29m. That is the bottom line.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: We may have. Hon Ken Travers can argue as long as he likes, but a very wealthy man once admitted to my father that he was a dreadful businessman. He was one of the wealthiest men I know. He said that he did not have the faintest idea of business, because he always sold too cheap and too early. If the member ponders that, he will understand why it is impossible in practical terms to wrench the last cent out of the stock market or anything else. We cannot sell a car to a person if we are selling it at a price that will send that person broke.

Hon Ken Travers: I take your point, but at \$2.65 there still would have been a 20¢ margin on the list price.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I will bow to the member's greater knowledge of the stock market.

Hon Ken Travers: It is not my knowledge. It is Deutsche Bank - the Government's own adviser.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: BankWest was too cheap, we were told; it should have been \$4. It has not gone to \$4 but has stayed under \$4. It is always a matter of judgment. That is life. We take the best advice available, and we make a decision on it.

Hon Ken Travers: I wish you had taken the best advice available.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Hindsight is a marvellous thing.

Hon Ken Travers: It is not hindsight. Deutsche Bank gave you the advice.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The interjection was from Hon Ken Travers to Hon Bill Stretch, and it was picked up. Not everyone can interject. If Hon Bill Stretch speaks through me, I will not interject.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: If we do not leave some fat in these deals, no-one will buy. We may sometimes go a little too low, but we can never afford to go too high. The member's judgment is that -

Hon Ken Travers: Not mine - Deutsche Bank.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I will come to that. The member's judgment is that the advice from Deutsche Bank was the best advice available. Hindsight might prove him correct, but I can tell him that the first two weeks is a very dangerous time in which to make a judgment, as we saw with the BankWest float and a lot of others.

Hon Murray Montgomery: AMP.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Do not talk AMP to me. The member should keep his judgment for two or three weeks, or a month, and he will then see whether the AlintaGas float was pitched correctly or incorrectly. The Government does not claim to have total wisdom, but it does apply collective wisdom and integrity to what it does. Before the member gets too excited, he should remember that the wheels can always fall off a system. There is no legislation that cannot be made better in time, and there are few actions that cannot be made better with the benefit of hindsight. The member thinks the Opposition will get into government. That is fine; it may. I do not think it will, and I do not think it is ready for government. It is just getting used to being in opposition. It is a good opposition; it is a bit unbalanced, but it does a reasonable job.

Hon Kim Chance: I am sure you will be a better Opposition than we are.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Being in opposition is awful, and I do not commend it to anyone. However, when members land in opposition, they are charged with being responsible. The Opposition has gone over the limit in recent times when, for political purposes alone, it has taken a stance which has brought the standing of the Parliament and the credibility of the Opposition to too low a level. I drop that in there for what it is worth. The Opposition can ignore it.

The Government has chosen to put \$40m from the sale of AlintaGas into the health system. A lot of that money will be used to purchase equipment for regional hospitals. That is an important need; and we have been listening, Hon Bob Thomas; we have heard; and we are trying to do what we can. The Government's philosophy is that it does not like to borrow more than is prudent. To borrow within those limits for capital is sensible and is sometimes a very good use of our biblical 10 talents. However, we cannot get to the situation that prevailed in the last days of the Lawrence Government - and I will not delve into history unless members opposite stir me up too much - where it had to borrow money to pay teachers and maintain schools. That is indefensible.

Hon Bob Thomas: That is what you are doing now.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: No it is not. The member had a good go last night, and I have given him credit where credit is due. He should open his mouth, think, and close it again before he says anything else.

Hon Bob Thomas interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Bob Thomas has had an opportunity to speak on this matter. Let us hear from Hon Bill Stretch.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: The Government has listened and has found ways of financing country, regional and general hospitals by the sale of assets which are best held in the private sector rather than the government sector. We need to consider what Governments should do and what their role should be. If Governments were sticking to their core activities, they would not run a gas utility, which is a distribution process that other people can run better. If a Government did choose to run such a utility, it would take on responsibilities and liabilities, and who would be the winner? The taxpayers would not be the winners, because it costs the taxpayers more if Governments deliver those services. It is very rare that Governments can run things like utilities better than anyone else.

When we talk to small businesses, as I believe the Opposition is doing, most say, "The best thing the Government can do to help us is to stay out of our way, cut the regulation, and not tie us up with red tape. God knows we get enough from the Commonwealth; don't you blokes start." That is a general message, and that is the core of what we are trying to do in government and of coalition philosophy.

Hon Ken Travers: How have you gone about meeting your promise to cut it by 50 per cent?

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I do not know what the member is referring to.

Hon Kim Chance: You gave a pre-election undertaking that you would cut red tape for small business by 50 per cent.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: We would love to do that, and we are working towards it.

Hon Kim Chance: I wonder how many small businesses currently engaged in filling out their business activity statement would agree that that has been achieved.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: One of the things I have learnt in my 18 years in Parliament is to never make a promise. I did make one promise in my first speech: That was that I would never make a political promise. That is the only promise I have ever made.

Hon Kim Chance: You are a wise man.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: If in the depth of our nightmare the Opposition were to win government, members on this side of the House would be very interested in looking at some of its promises. Promises and commitments are made according to the best wisdom available at the time. They are what people think they can do. We cannot anticipate things like export markets falling away, and severe cuts in commodity prices overseas that are beyond our control. A lot of budgetary and other situations, like natural disasters, impact on the commitments we make and believe we will be able to achieve. With the best will and integrity, that will always happen. I hesitate to use the words “give and take” in government, because the taxpayers will say that Governments always take and never give - which is not true. That expression is another piece of fatuousness that I have been admonishing other people for using, so I will not, but there is always a risk when we make commitments in our current wisdom and according to our future projections. We try to build in safeguards so that there will not be too much distortion of income streams and things like that, and we try to be conservative, because, believe it or not; that is in our nature.

Very early in my farming days, an economist by the name of Dr Henry Schapper copped a lot of flak from the rural community for some of the phrases attributed to him, such as “get big or get out”. What he actually meant by that phrase is that farmers need to ensure they match their investment to their capital base and that their overheads never outstrip their production capabilities. Another of his comments that impressed me was that the art of budgeting is always to make sure that one’s surprises are pleasant ones. That is what we try to do in government. Occasionally, because of those factors I have mentioned - the vagaries of international markets and seasonal conditions - we get it wrong. I will deal with seasonal conditions later on.

I have said enough on health. I believe that the Government is using the proceeds from the sale of AlintaGas very wisely to address some of the health needs of Western Australia. The Government is using integrity and wisdom in addressing those issues.

I refer now to education. In all the time I have been in Parliament - Hon Tom Stephens has been here longer than I have and he will know - there has never been enough money in the Education or Health budgets. As a result of our management of the economy, our encouragement of investment and the build-up of the strength of the economy, which is undeniable, we have managed to build a raft of new schools. This Government has an excellent record in school building. However, that can always cause distortions in priorities. Some people may say that we should not have built the new schools but should have put the money towards more teachers, better quality education and so on. The school I attended probably had some of the worst buildings in Australia, but the quality of education there was very good. Unfortunately, some Western Australian schools were run down when the Labor Party was in government, to a stage where they had to be rebuilt. We have undertaken a massive school rebuilding program, and I am sure that members opposite will agree that that has been a good investment in the future of our children. Again, it is never enough, but with good management and appropriate investments, I think we are making the right decisions.

Another thing the Leader of the Opposition criticises in his motion is the false priority in the area of community safety. All people would like a policeman on the corner of every street, if not outside their door. They would like an army of people on their railway platforms. Dr Geoff Gallop thinks that if we put enough people on those platforms, we will curb crime on public transport. It will certainly help, but the underlying core problem is a culture of lawlessness in the community, which has escalated in recent times because of many factors that again are outside the control of Governments or Oppositions. The Government is addressing this very strongly through early childhood programs that identify people with these criminal tendencies. That is where we must start.

Hon Mark Nevill and others have drawn attention to the overcrowding of jails and the undesirability of jailing people, and I totally agree. If there is a better way, the community must address it. This Government has been doing that - that is its priority. That is the cornerstone of building a better society. That is called putting the community first by building a better community - by identifying those children at an early age and identifying the families in which the children are not being taught the values that will result in their respecting other people’s property and rights. That is the tragedy of today. If one goes back 15 or 20 years, most kids respected the general belief that if something was not theirs, they left it where it was. If they asked for it often enough, people would sometimes say, “Okay, if you want it that badly you can have it”, but they did not just take it because it was not theirs. However, today, that lack of respect is evident in all levels of society.

Hon Kim Chance: From Peter Reith down.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Quite right. The wilful misuse of government property is stealing. It was reported to me that a kid came home from primary school and said that his pencil had been stolen. His father raced up to the teacher and said, "My child's pencil has been stolen and I want something done about it." The teacher said, "Well, it's hard. It's a pencil, and a pencil is a pencil." The father said, "I know. I get all the pencils I want from work. This is not about the cost of the pencil." That father was not issued with pencils. He believed it was all right for him to take his firm's pencils, but it was not all right for someone else to take his child's pencil. The rot in lawlessness starts with the child's family, and often families before that. That is why the Government has a high priority of trying to identify those children, because that is at present and will be in the future a very important part of community policing and education.

The Government has made a huge effort to identify the core problems in society. I am not talking about the really exciting ones, like 20 more policemen on the railway platforms and everything will be fixed. That is not the answer. I know it and members opposite know it. The Government is addressing the core problems in trying to achieve a commitment in the community.

Under the graffiti program, a massive effort has been made to improve the psyche of the people who go around defacing other people's property with graffiti. A huge amount has been spent on youth programs. The school cadets program has been a priority in diverting people's energy. Youth energy is fantastic; so much can be done with it. However, if it is not guided and is not given an outlet, kids get into mischief. That has always been the case with kids, and nothing will change that. However, the Government's program in that area is a very positive thing for the community, and people should be told about it. I know that in their heart of hearts opposition members support that. All those programs are positive.

I was at the Tambellup show last Saturday. Everyone turns up: The shire president, the show president and everyone else. We also have Jeff Farmer. Somebody asked when there would be a statue of Jeff Farmer at the Tambellup oval. Someone said that it would not have to be a very big one! However, the money given to community sport in the country is an enormous boost. It is not by accident that people such as the Krakouers, the Farmers, the Michaels from Kojonup and people like that rise to the very top because of their sporting achievements. The situation is similar in other sports. The Government has committed money to sporting facilities, youth programs and other positive things that often go unnoticed. Some of the community grants that members hand out on behalf of the Government are not for great amounts - they could be \$2 000, \$5 000 or \$9 000.

Hon Kim Chance: Or \$20m to Narrikup.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I do not have time to deal with Narrikup. Suffice to say that the revolution in meat processing brought about at Narrikup is remarkable.

Hon Kim Chance: Is that why mutton prices fell in the first 12 months of its operation?

Hon W.N. STRETCH: No, that is not the reason. However, the overall benefit from what happened at Narrikup will exist for a long time. It is now reflected in better work practices throughout the meat industry.

Hon Kim Chance: I hope you are right.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: People can criticise it, and we may not all be happy about some of the things that caused it to happen. However, one makes a judgment at the time on what one thinks will be of most benefit. If the Opposition wants to talk about meatworks, I will ask it why it kept open the Robb Jetty abattoir and closed the Midland abattoir. There were some reasons that had damn little to do with the meat industry. I know it and members opposite know it. There were many inquiries into that matter.

Hon Kim Chance: I was not in the Government at the time. I was a client of Robb Jetty, and I was a very satisfied client.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Absolutely, and Hon Kim Chance should be. When one considers subsidies and realises what it took to keep the Robb Jetty abattoir operating, in a totally unsuitable location, that puts the whole matter into perspective. Anyway, there have been enough inquiries, select committees and God knows what into that debacle, which was brought about for political reasons and not for the benefit of the meat industry.

We have covered a fair bit of ground, but we are still addressing the motion, which criticises the Government's priorities. The last matter specifically mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition is public transport. I get nothing but compliments from people about public transport.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: You should get out of your house more.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: As Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich was not here when I made my earlier remarks, I encapsulate them by reading the member the instruction in our prayer delivered each morning; namely, that members give honour, wisdom and integrity to their role.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: I heard it downstairs.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Good. The member should take some heed of what I say.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: What is special about you?

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Nothing is special about me. I said that nothing is special about members of Parliament no matter how good they think they are. I quoted the words of Hon Clive Griffiths that Parliaments are meetings of the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker and the lawyer, the teacher and any community person one cares to mention.

Hon Muriel Patterson: Don't forget the farmers.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Yes. Members are charged by their electorate to give honour and integrity to good government and the betterment of the people of Western Australia. If the member goes too far in her negativity and her whingeing and whining, she will destroy people's beliefs.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: You must have had a coalition workshop about knock, knock, knock.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: No.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: It is amazing how you weave it into every point.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: It is water on stone.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: You do not have an original thought in your head.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Is that right?

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! One at a time, members

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Obviously, it is no use repeating my earlier remarks to the member because she has no interest in the performance of her role in Parliament. She is here to score political points.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Says you, who is making his second speech in 10 years.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I make speeches when I need to and I have something worthwhile to say. The member can always leave the Chamber. If she will only make inane interjections, she may as well leave as we do not need her assistance and criticism.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Bill Stretch has indicated that he wants to get on with his speech.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Absolutely.

Hon Greg Smith: Would you like an extension?

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I will not impose on the House.

Hon Kim Chance commented last night on certain questions asked of the Minister for Primary Industry. I may have many shortcomings and failings, which Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich is happy to point out, but I remember quite a lot. I was shadow Minister for Agriculture when Hon Julian Grill was Minister for Agriculture in a Labor Government. Hon Julian Grill was very much one of the better Ministers for Agriculture. I found him to be courteous, decisive and very approachable, and he had a good grip of his portfolio. The way he handled the beef pesticide crisis in the south west was admirable. He analysed the program. Hon Julian Grill said that we obviously needed more facilities, better laboratory services and more veterinary doctors to get on top of the crisis, and we did. He also had a very sensible attitude to answering questions. If a question came to his office or him - I do not know his exact process - that was fatuous and the answering of the question would have absorbed taxpayers' money without any benefit, he would say that the member's question would be noted and that it would be replied to in writing at a later date. I am still waiting to have some questions answered from then. I do not want answers now as time has passed.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: I want my questions answered.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I do not think Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich questions matter any more than those other questions mattered. The member should bear in mind that she can whinge and whine, but she should evaluate the worth of her questions before she asks them. She probably gets the answers she deserves. Unfortunately, my time has expired.

HON MURRAY MONTGOMERY (South West) [11.55 am]: Hon Tom Stephens' motion refers to the interests of rural and regional Western Australia, and it is interesting that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich tried to move Hon Bill Stretch away from that subject. Hon Bill Stretch made some very interesting and commendable comments.

Hon Tom Stephens: Especially when he said that Hon Julian Grill was one of the best Ministers for Agriculture.

Hon MURRAY MONTGOMERY: I could also make comment on Hon Julian Grill. Having sat on various rural sector committees, and having listened to Hon Julian Grill, I could make complimentary comments.

Hon Tom Stephens must have had his tongue in his cheek in putting up this motion. In putting the various issues on paper for us to debate, he must have realised that it would place some of the Government's achievements on record. He may regret that those achievements appear on the record, as he has realised that the Government has achieved a heck of a lot over its eight years in office. They may not be the way he would like to see the achievements -

Hon Tom Stephens: We have the belltower.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Murray Montgomery is not taking interjections and is addressing the Chair.

Hon MURRAY MONTGOMERY: The motion refers to the interests of rural and regional Western Australia, yet Hon Tom Stephens interjected to talk about the metropolitan area. I am not interested in that.

Hon Tom Stephens: You will not be able to hear the bells in Paraburdoo.

Hon MURRAY MONTGOMERY: That is fine; I do not expect people will. We can talk about some of the achievements during the past eight years, and some proposed achievements. Some of these relate to the north west and the Mining and Pastoral Region, which Hon Tom Stephens -

Hon Barry House: Sometimes frequents.

Hon MURRAY MONTGOMERY: He sometimes frequents the area he represents. Achievements have been made in transport and travel and in airport upgrades. Hon Tom Stephens would be aware that three or four airports in the area have had upgrades that have increased capacity and enabled them to accept traffic in all weather and to have navigational equipment in place. I have the floor, not Hon Tom Stephens. He should not worry about interjections, as I will carry on with my speech.

Hon Tom Stephens: Tell us about air fares.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The problem is that Hon Murray Montgomery just invited an interjection. If members direct their comments to me, I will not interject. We end up losing the plot when members start to chit chat.

Hon MURRAY MONTGOMERY: I am talking about the upgrading of airports. A regional airport was built at Busselton. The Margaret River airport was upgraded; the airstrip was extended and navigational equipment was installed. Additional navigational equipment was installed at the Albany airport to allow larger aircraft to land there.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.