

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 7 April.

HON MURRAY CRIDDLE (Agricultural) [4.36 pm]: I welcome the opportunity to make some remarks on the Address-in-Reply and on the speech of the Governor, John Sanderson, on the opening of the first session of the 37th Parliament. I also recognise the former members of Parliament who have passed away since January 2003 and the two Governors who have passed on. I also mention that Don Maisey, one of our colleagues, passed away recently. We send the family our condolences. I obviously know the family very well. He worked very hard for us. I will make some remarks about that at a later time.

I also recognise the government's return to the Treasury bench. There were a lot of reasons for that. It is incumbent upon the government to take note of the following sentence in the Governor's speech -

The Government is committed to the provision of quality and affordable services for all Western Australians, wherever they live.

In carrying out its duties over this next term of government, I hope that it realises that that is a very important commitment and one that should be well and truly exercised. My fear over the last term of government was that there was an imbalance in expenditure between the country and city and some of the major regional centres. I will make some more remarks about that a little later, particularly with regard to roads and the like. There has been a tendency for the government to go more towards population-based funding. The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure recently spoke about population-based funding for some future road funding. I well remember having a discussion with the Under Treasurer when I was first elected to this place about making sure that the people at the end of the line received services. Incidentally, I live at the end of some of those lines - the end of powerlines, phone lines and the like. For the information of those who cannot get me on the mobile phone when I am at home, I still cannot access a mobile phone service. Those services are absolutely essential to people in the country, just as they are to people in the city. It is an inconvenience and a safety issue for people in regional areas, which needs to be recognised by all the people of Western Australia.

I would like to recognise a couple of my colleagues who were recently elected. Grant Woodhams will do a very good job in the Greenough electorate. He has a wide understanding of that region and has travelled extensively. He worked very hard to get elected at the last election. It was one of those surprising things. He beat one of our coalition colleagues, which is an extraordinary effort once a party becomes entrenched in an area, although we lost in the Roe electorate, which was a bit of tit for tat. That is how life is. However, he worked very hard in that area, and he will be a very good member. Of course, Terry Redman was elected to the seat of Stirling. He has business experience. He was an agricultural college principal there. Therefore, he has a keen understanding of the area as well. He has replaced my long-term colleague Hon Monty House. I would like to congratulate Monty on his efforts over 19 years in Parliament. He came in at a very young age. He was a shire president in his area, and was Minister for Primary Industry and for Fisheries for eight years. I believe that one of his great achievements was the community leaders program that he put in place throughout the agricultural area. It has led to quite a few people advancing their skills in community leadership. That is one of the things that we need to maintain and in fact enhance, because leadership in the community is absolutely paramount. When we get to leadership, we also talk about volunteers in the various clubs and in other areas in regional Western Australia. It is absolutely essential that those people come through and promote their areas and opportunities in those areas.

In taking a quick look at the address by the Governor, I see the headings of "Education and Training" and "Health". It is interesting to note that the Royal Perth Hospital will to some extent be downgraded as a teaching hospital, and the whole lot will go to what will be known as the Fiona Stanley development to the south of Perth. We hope that that will become a great teaching hospital and that we get some benefits from it. There is also the opportunity to rationalise some of the commitments in the education field. I feel that we need to make sure that the health budget is well and truly contained. It was one of the issues when we were in government. It seems to blow out every year. I notice that the government will forge ahead with the \$2.7 billion Reid report plan. That is an enormous commitment.

Hon Peter Foss: It didn't increase when I was the minister.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Hon Peter Foss had very tight budgetary constraints on his portfolio, and he certainly had a clear understanding of the requirements for health in Western Australia. I believe Hon Peter Foss did a very good job. While I am speaking about Hon Peter Foss and the fact that he will leave Parliament in the near future, I should say that I believe we will have a great hole to fill. However, "hole" is the wrong word. What would Hon Peter Foss like to say?

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: We will have a great hole.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: A great hole to fill.

Hon Ray Halligan: A chasm.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: It will also be the case with Hon Derrick Tomlinson -

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: An even greater hole.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: - and Hon Bill Stretch. I am sure that their keen understanding of the political process and their ability to represent people will be sadly missed in this place. Of course, other people will lose the opportunity to represent the people of their regions in the Parliament in Western Australia, such as those from what was known as the One Nation party and is now called the New Country Party, I think, and Independent members. Three of the Greens (WA) members will also go. Whatever we think of those people, at least they made a contribution to reflect their point of view, and that led to some interesting debate around the place. From that point of view, they have made a contribution, and one that they believe was absolutely necessary in the interests of their areas of Western Australia. We should recognise that. Maybe some of the debate will not be quite as interesting in the future as it has been in the past few years. However, I certainly welcome the fact that they have been with us in that time.

I will now deal with the police. One issue in the community in the area of policing, and law and order in particular, is really starting to concern me. This matter is of grave concern. In recent times in Mullewa and Geraldton, there have been incidents in which ordinary citizens have been attacked without provocation. That is absolutely and totally unacceptable. I see that it happens in some areas of Perth. Something must be put in place to stamp that out. In the streets I see young people in their early teens, or maybe even younger, who have behavioural problems. Their problems certainly should be seen to. I am quite sure that we must address those issues. In some cases we need to make extreme efforts to get on top of them. It seems to me that in some of those cases, police horses or dogs could be used to bring some of those uncivil situations under control. That may sound extreme. However, those sorts of initiatives may well need to be put in place, because it is just not right that older people, and sometimes average citizens, are attacked. That is just not acceptable. I notice that the government intends to recruit an additional 350 police officers and 160 civilian officers. I hope that some of those resources will go towards stamping out the problems that we have.

In the public transport area, the southern railway has been an interesting development. All of the additional expense seems to be going into the area from Murdoch into the city. I do not think that represents the carriage of any new passengers or picking up of passengers who are delivered there by bus. Very few passengers will walk to terminals from that point and come into the city. Therefore, I still have grave concerns about that expenditure. The Governor's speech states that the railway will service 400 000 passengers a year and take 25 000 cars off our freeway. I can assure members that the spine of that freeway through the centre of Perth will come under more and more pressure. People must realise that the growth in vehicular traffic in metropolitan Western Australia will not die. The roads will be required regardless of what people say, and particularly in the transference of people from north to south. When we get the extension from Cervantes to Lancelin - heaven help us, we need it, and we need it to go through pretty quickly - it will add further pressure -

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: It should have gone through two years ago.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I say to Hon Derrick Tomlinson that it would have been finished in 2003 if I had still been the minister and we had still been in government. Hon Derrick Tomlinson is absolutely right.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: I know. We were a government that got things done.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: That is right. The other point about that extension is that the latest cost is \$59 million, and we were going to do it for something like \$35 million. The blow-out in those years is an enormous impost on the Western Australian budget. Members will know that some of the road construction that we did was done ahead of its time. However, the saving on the actual construction cost more than covered the cost of the interest. As far as I am concerned, and, I am sure, as far as many of the people who drive on those roads in Western Australia are concerned, that was one of the better initiatives that we put in place. Certainly, we currently have major problems in that area.

I am very keen to see the result of the railway. Last year an issue arose concerning the environmental management of it. The minister said that there was no wrongdoing in the fact that an environmental management plan had not been put in place while the construction was going ahead. I will be very interested to find out whether that environmental management plan is in place at present. I thought that the machine to bore the tunnels would have arrived by now. However, I understand it will be on the way shortly.

Hon Peter Foss interjected.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I am getting to that, Hon Peter Foss. I am told that something like 5 000 working days, or 45 000 working hours, have been lost because of industrial strife. That is absolutely unacceptable. All

that sort of thing continues to cost money. I believe the company faces a penalty of some \$50 000 a day if it does not finish the job on time. That is an extraordinary penalty anyway. To have that impost on a company when people go out on lightning strikes - there is a word for that -

Hon Peter Foss: Wildcat strikes.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: When people go out on a wildcat strike, I believe it is totally unacceptable and unfair that the responsibility should fall back onto the company that is carrying out the construction.

The energy issue is enormous. I have had discussions on this matter with Hon Kim Chance, and I know he has said that it cannot be fixed overnight. However, our lights still go out, minister. The conductors are just not up to scratch, and the poles still fall over. I give the minister this bit of credit: after the protest meetings held in Koorda and Jerramungup in 2002, some improvements occurred in those areas because some of the necessary work was done.

Hon Kim Chance: And in Bremer Bay, and a number of other areas.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Bremer Bay is a totally different issue, as the minister knows. There is now a local power plant that has overcome the problem there - I grant the minister that point. However, the poles and conductors are another matter. The Bremer Bay problem was a lack of power; the other issue is getting power to certain areas.

There is an extreme requirement to upgrade those facilities. The \$1.8 billion allocation for upgrades has been quoted many times. I hope one day that we will find out exactly where the money has been expended. I would like a briefing on exactly where that money has been expended. The National Party has indicated that \$500 million is required to be spent on conductors and poles to overcome the problem; in fact, that was also coalition policy at the recent state election. I will be interested to know whether the \$1.8 billion will cover the issues I raise. I would more than welcome a briefing on that matter, minister.

Everybody knows the water issues raised during the election campaign. We must understand that a vision for water must provide solutions into the long term, not only the short term. A blow-out has occurred, as has occurred with road funding, in funding for the desalination plant - it is something like \$47 million in construction costs already, which is an enormous blow-out. I note that the Premier has said that if a wind farm is built up the road for that desalination plant, something can be saved on the delivery of power for the project. If a power plant is to be built, the power generated by that plant could be used elsewhere. The Premier's plan will not represent a saving as power that could be used elsewhere will be used by the desalination facility. Savings are not made unless power is received without cost, and that does not happen.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: Does that mean there will be a blow-out in the cost of producing the desalinated water?

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: The word I hear is that this power will come from renewable energy, which is the phrase to describe the wind farm, but -

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: If the Premier's statement was that the wind farm will produce electricity, and therefore reduce costs, is he anticipating some increase in the cost?

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I would not speak for the Premier, as Hon Derrick Tomlinson would know.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: No.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: That is a question that perhaps the Premier could answer.

Perth has a lot of waste water - namely, 98 gigalitres - that could be put to very good use. As was announced as National Party policy during the election campaign, there is enormous opportunity to put that waste water back into use through industry. If that were done, one might be able to work on that water at a later stage for other uses, such as domestic use. I realise that such use is probably not currently acceptable in Western Australia, but it is done overseas; in fact, water is recycled many times in some places.

The other matter that should be looked at is the Agritech Smartwater project at the Wellington Dam, which uses gravitation to filter water from 1 500 salt parts a million in the Wellington Dam to 50 or 60 parts a million after treatment, which is well and truly acceptable for domestic water. That would represent an enormous benefit. The other source is the Yarragadee aquifer, which holds an enormous amount of water underground. If assurances about using that aquifer water were given, it may provide an opportunity for sufficient water supply while some other schemes are developed. However, the Yarragadee water source should be used in the south of the state rather than in the Perth metropolitan area.

Another program that could be put in place is the removal of the pines on the Gnangara mound. The other proposal is the upgrading of the catchment area by removing some of the recent undergrowth that has occurred

in the area since 1975, when we started to lose run-off - it has now reduced to about 50 per cent of original levels. If all the undergrowth were removed, we would have far more efficient catchment areas, which would reduce the pressure on current water supplies. These are a couple of opportunities that could be well and truly used in dealing with the water issue. I note that the government is leaning towards desalination and the very good Harvey Water project, which will cost a great deal of money; in fact, I understand that \$240 million will be needed for the Harvey Water program. If the first desalination plant is not enough to meet demand, how many desalination plants will be needed over the coming years? I come back to the idea of a vision. I understand that we will need another desalination plant in five years, and so on. We just cannot afford that cost. We must remember, of course, the environmental problems that might well be produced in Cockburn Sound. Some reports from people I talk to are of great concern, particularly about whether the salt sludge to be generated in Cockburn Sound could be flushed out to sea.

This is a totally different set of scenarios from United Utilities Australia's plan for the Esperance area, where the sea water is disturbed to a great extent and salt is readily dispersed. The United Utilities project could be used in the south of the state to assist the Kalgoorlie water supply. That project should be looked at. It is a private project, and I hope that that does not put off the current government. From my point of view, as I will refer to later in my speech, the opportunity to utilise private funding for infrastructure provision in Western Australia could be the way to lead forward. That issue relates to other areas I would like to touch on later in this speech.

The United Utilities project at Esperance needs to be looked at from the point of view of not only Kalgoorlie, but also Ravensthorpe, and the nickel mine in that area. Farmers in Ravensthorpe had an enormous problem this year with their water source, and they carted water in. I was in Ravensthorpe not long ago, and the number of trucks pouring into town carting water was totally unacceptable. It poses an enormous expense in dead money: once the water is carted, it is necessary to go back and get another lot. There is no long-term solution with that kind of proposal. I encourage the government to take on board the opportunities that arise from that private United Utilities venture.

I notice also in the economic profile outlined in the Governor's speech that "the government has worked hard to strengthen the state's finances". Sure, if the government receives a billion dollars extra a year, it has a great opportunity to strengthen the state's finances. I note also a blow-out in state debt; I think we are getting up around \$6 billion-plus. Debt has blown out substantially, and will blow out further in the future, and some of the developments to be put in place will not make a substantial return to the state. I do not mind debt if it will generate further income, but this debt is basically wrapped around the Perth-Mandurah rail project. Through my reading of the budget, not too much will come back to the state from that debt. In fact, it will cost \$160 million a year in interest and running costs to add that rail system to Perth's current infrastructure. An enormous cost is involved. The government is talking about further development in the centre of Perth; therefore, further costs might be involved.

The government's economic profile has been added to by the Premier's promise not to increase taxes. For three years it did increase taxes. It is probably one of the things we should have focused on more during the election campaign. To some extent the government got away with that. The National Party could have focused on a number of other issues during the election campaign.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 603.]