

**NORTH WEST CENTRAL ELECTORATE — BY-ELECTION — AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY**

*Statement*

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral)** [5.37 pm]: I am going to speak briefly on the issue of the North West Central by-election because I am very disappointed that the Labor Party has chosen not to run a candidate.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** People in the region feel snubbed and ignored. They feel left out and I must say that my concern —

**Hon Pierre Yang** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Keep going, Hon Neil Thomson.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** My concern is that it is the largest seat in Western Australia, with 820 000 square kilometres. It is a massive area. I do not know the criteria the WA Electoral Commission used to determine the election day of 17 September. I will stand corrected if I am wrong, but, by my calculations, that Saturday is the earliest possible date on which an election can be held from the time of the resignation of Vince Catania. My concern is that it sends the wrong message. This is an electorate that, at the last election, had just over 10 993 electors. I am sure that many more people in that community are eligible to vote. I saw the notice that the Shire of Carnarvon put out today that a person must be registered on the roll by next Friday. Talk about pushing the envelope! That might not be such a bad thing, but my concern is that a lot of people in that region will not enrol. It has one of the lowest participation rates of any electorate in Australia. At the last election, only 73 per cent actually voted. We are sending the wrong message. If we were serious about democracy, we would be looking at fielding enough candidates to provide a proper choice of ideals and ideas. Members on the other side constantly praise the McGowan government for how great it is, but no-one is prepared to stand up and be counted at the election—not a single one. Hon Alannah MacTiernan got shut down at the recent love-in in the Pilbara and was told off for putting up an idea. I commend her for that. That is something that I do commend her for. I commend Hon Alannah MacTiernan for standing up for democracy.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** She is a paragon of virtue when it comes to democracy.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Three orders in a row; no way to go.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** My apologies, President. Sometimes it is very hard to hear you over the noise.

**The PRESIDENT:** Perhaps, honourable member, if you direct your comments through the chair and focus on that alone, you might have a little bit more success.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you. I take on your advice, President, as always.

On a serious note, we have communities that are very dispersed. I commend all the candidates who have put up their hand and who are getting about. We have “Mem” Beard from the Nationals WA who is getting around the whole region, and I know that Will Baston is getting around and talking to people. They are putting themselves and their ideas forward. We on this side of the house are comfortable with that. We are totally comfortable with the idea of people presenting themselves for who they are and how they can represent the people of that electorate, thereby enabling the people of that great electorate to have a choice. I wish the holders of all the good ideas on the other side who constantly keep congratulating themselves for how great they are would have the courage to put it to the test. I know what the outcome would be. The outcome would see a massive swing against the government, because that is what is happening in the bush at the moment. People feel ignored and shut down. The challenge is for candidates to get out to places like Warburton. It is a long way away. I drove there during the election campaign. My car still has scratches and dents across it from that long drive. It is a huge challenge. It takes a whole day’s driving to get there to meet with the community. I feel terrible that I still have not got to Jameson, for one reason or another.

Several members interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I feel terrible because —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! The member is probably not helped by his own leader mumbling over the top of his contribution.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I hope that sitting members take up this opportunity, because it is an opportunity, to go out and articulate the case. Certainly, the four Labor members in my region could be wandering around. They could utilise the government jet and get out there, as they did in the last state election when they were running around with the candidates who were not yet elected to Parliament. We could see a bit of that happening and see them actually talking to people. That would be a good idea. I plan to get out and about and talk to as many people as I can. I have been to Warburton. I know they have challenges out there with their water supply, with overcrowding and lack of housing. This is a huge area and it takes a long time to get around and talk to people. I am disappointed. I want to lodge my disappointment. I hope that the Western Australian Electoral Commission has made this decision without any sort of direction from the minister. I hope that it made the decision based on criteria including the fact that it is such a difficult seat to get around, instead of rushing it through, because this government does not care about the outcome. It does not give a toss. It does not care, and it does not care about the people. I hope that next time there is a by-election —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Order! Calm your jets. Hon Neil Thomson.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you, President. I hope that there is some consideration of how widespread this electorate is. We have seen the commentary from members opposite. We have seen the commentary in the newspaper, “The seat might be abolished, so it doesn’t really matter. What’s the point?” I mean, seriously—what kind of message does that send to the 26 per cent of people who have not voted? It does not send a message of participatory democracy. We need to start working on that and encouraging people to get involved in leadership and in their representation in those remote places. We need to make sure —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Hon Neil Thomson.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** We need to make sure that our democracy is strong. We need to make sure that people have a choice and we need to show that we respect the people of Western Australia.