

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**INQUIRY INTO THE REMOVAL OF SENIOR SCHOOL
ALLOCATION FUNDING FOR YEAR 11 AND 12 COURSES
AT DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT GINGIN
FRIDAY, 21 MAY 2010**

SESSION FOUR

Members

**Hon Giz Watson (Chair)
Hon Philip Gardiner (Deputy Chair)
Hon Liz Behjat
Hon Ken Travers
Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich**

Hearing commenced at 4.28 pm

GIFFORD, MR GEORGE
Shire President, Shire of Gingin,
sworn and examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome you to the meeting this afternoon. Before we begin, I am required to ask you to take either an oath or an affirmation. If you would like access to a bible, Renae has a copy if you would like to make use of that.

[Witness took the oath.]

The CHAIR: You will have signed a document entitled “Information for Witnesses”. Have you read and understood this document?

Mr Gifford: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you. These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you may refer to during the course of the hearing. Please also be aware of the microphones and try to speak directly into them. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today’s proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. This prohibition does not however prevent you from discussing your public evidence generally once you leave this hearing.

Again, thank you for coming this afternoon. As you are aware, the committee is inquiring into the government’s decision to cease to provide senior school allocation funding for years 11 and 12 at 21 district high schools across WA, including Gingin District High School. We welcome your input. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Gifford: First of all, thank you for allowing me to come and talk to you, if you like. I apologise for not being here at 3.00 pm, but Senator Conroy has now started to lay the cable between here and Geraldton, and we can expect better communications in the future!

The CHAIR: He will be at it for a while I imagine!

Mr Gifford: I think he has done the first 10 yards, and he has now flown back to Victoria, probably. But yes, thank you. I am not, obviously, as you can see, involved in education these days. My children are not in education. But I have lived in Gingin for 20 years. Over that time, certainly when we first arrived, it became apparent to me that we lost population at two stages. One was at the school stage, and one was when people began to feel, like me, a bit infirm, and they decided that they needed to be closer to a hospital or a better service medically, so they moved to Perth. What happened with schools in those days was that I think all the sixth form were being bussed to Bullsbrook—all those that elected to go, of course. It was only those that elected to go in those days. But parents wanted more than that. What would happen was that mother would move to Perth, and the child would go with mother to Perth to go school if mother wanted senior education for her child. Father would elect to stay here. He was probably an electrician or a plumber or something like that. Within six months, it became apparent that that was not working, so the whole family moved. So we were continually losing families.

Since the SIDE program has come in, that has been reversed. We are a growing shire. We thought—we hoped—that it was a move forward. We had years 11 and 12 in Gingin, which kept people in the town, we educated them here, and they stayed and they got jobs here. As the town grew, we would need more and more people here. It is fairly obvious, really. Socially, a lot of people perhaps dropped out of school at that stage. Now they are beginning to stay in school. You only have to look at the figures from Gingin District High School. They have grown every year, and they are still continuing to grow. I have been actually quite impressed with what some of these children have achieved during that program. One student—I am sure you have been told on more than one occasion—received the Prime Minister's award. She now works for us at the shire. I can assure you it certainly was not wasted with her. I suppose the fact that she could have all her education in Gingin meant that she was happy to stay. She had not gone away and lost her roots, and her parents have not lost her. To me, it was very disappointing. It felt as though we were trying hard to grow the shire, and to keep people here and give people the services that they want; and they need services. To take it away was a step backwards. I felt that we are beginning to go downhill again, if you like. Of course we are not, but that is how it felt. So that is probably all that I have to say in that respect at the moment.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Are you hearing from within the community at the local government level those same concerns as the former mayor is hearing in Jurien?

Mr Gifford: Absolutely, yes.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Can you tell the committee what you are hearing on the ground?

Mr Gifford: There is concern that the education is being lost. As I said before, we will begin to lose one or two of our crucial workforce in the town, because they will move. They will move to Perth with their children if they do not get the education that they require here.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: If they move to Perth, what is the likely economic impact on the community—in other words, the small businesses?

Mr Gifford: Well the business is gone of course. I can cite several from the past that have gone. Somebody else moves in and starts again; and if their children are of school age, it probably will happen again—we will lose them. We have begun to hold onto them since the SIDE program has been in operation. Another social part of that, of course, is that we have less trouble around town. If people stayed in education, there would be less trouble, I would say, in town now—I have no doubt—than there was seven or eight years ago. I am a great fan of it.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I was going to give you a chance to give a rap to your local teachers. One of my experiences in education is also the quality of your principals and your staff. They are big drivers in education.

Mr Gifford: I agree with that.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It just strikes me from listening today and watching the parents that there is a good dynamic in the community around that.

Mr Gifford: Yes, there is; no doubt at all.

The CHAIR: Mr Gifford, do you have a sense of any concerns from local businesses?

Mr Gifford: There is always concern if you are losing the best of your children to somewhere else. Once they start to go at that stage, then they probably do not come back to get a job, because the peer pressure is from somewhere further away; and peer pressure is very important when you are at that age.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I noticed as we were coming in a subdivision on the outskirts of the town. How is that going? Is that moving reasonably quickly in terms of sales?

Mr Gifford: Yes. There is a lot of subdivision beginning to happen up here now. There is another one that has just opened on that side of the town. The first house is being built there.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Would you have the population projections for the Shire of Gingin based on the lands subdivisions and the other developments that are going ahead?

Mr Gifford: I do not have them with me, but I can certainly give them to you.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Could you send them through to the committee? That is the subdivisions that are currently being done, together with any future subdivisions that are being looked at being done; and if you can specify also within what time frame they will occur, and also your associated population projections to go with that.

Mr Gifford: Yes. Fine. I will do that. I can tell you now there is a 1 000-lot subdivision at Lancelin that is going to happen within the next—they are hoping to build the first house within a year. I think that might be a bit optimistic, but it is not the very far away. It is sitting now before the commission for final clearance. There is so much work being done. I think it will be a matter of course rather than argument, if you know what I mean. There is a lot beginning to happen.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: How many residential blocks are there in that?

Mr Gifford: In that subdivision, 1 000.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Is it generally families that are moving into those blocks or is it retirees, or is it right across the spectrum?

Mr Gifford: On the coast, the dynamics of Gingin are probably a bit different from your average wheatbelt shire. All the coastal towns—I mean the ones right on the coast—over the last five, 10 years probably had a declining population, because the second home buyer has been the best market. People saw an opportunity perhaps to move there, make a bit of money and move out. The interesting thing is that if you move back off the coast, you have got Sovereign Hill, Redfield Park and Woodridge, and the rural subdivisions. They are all residents. We have a rising residential population there.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: So in the coastal ones, although there is development going on, you are losing population?

Mr Gifford: In the coastal towns, in which you would think there is a huge amount going on, we have actually had a declining population. It is all second home buyers. That changes the dynamics, actually, of a shire quite dramatically, because you lose all your volunteers and all this sort of thing. We have a saying here—I probably should not go there—that the second home buyer moves into Gingin, and all he really contributes is his rubbish which he leaves behind every Monday morning!

The CHAIR: Probably some rates, though!

Mr Gifford: I suppose you have all got a second home in Gingin!

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I did own a block in Gingin once! It was my brother's house.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Gifford.

Mr Gifford: I will get the projected figures for you. For how far ahead do you want the figures? Do you want the figures for now—the immediate figures?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes, the immediate figures, and for the next five to 10 years, because it would be good to try to ascertain some population growth trends, development trends and likely school outcome trends.

Mr Gifford: Fine. I will do that.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for making yourself available this afternoon

Hearing concluded at 4.41 pm