

MR CARPENTER (Willagee) [11.38 am]: The first thing I want to do as a member of Parliament is to thank the people who have granted me the privilege of being here, the electors of the seat of Willagee. I thank them for placing their faith and trust in me and, in return, I commit myself to doing my best to represent their interests in this Parliament for the next four years. I also thank the scores of people, more than 150, who helped me in my campaign; in particular my campaign director, Hon Cheryl Davenport, and my campaign manager, Ms Jo-Ann Whalley. Their tireless work and the efforts of everybody who helped in the campaign are greatly appreciated.

The seat of Willagee was formed after a redistribution of the boundaries of the seats of Melville and Cockburn. I pay tribute to the work done by the two members who previously represented those areas. They come from opposite sides of the Parliament - Hon Doug Shave, now the member for Alfred Cove, and Bill Thomas, still the member for Cockburn. Their hard work deserves recognition. Both received very high praise from many people who are now my constituents. I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election and hope that the reforms you have previously publicly advocated become a reality. I notice that although today you are wearing the wig, yesterday you were not wearing it. That is an important, although perhaps small, reform. It also provides me with a cue to briefly outline some of the structure and reform of our Government which I would like to see changed or affectionately folded up and put in the cupboard over the next four years.

If I am lucky enough to serve in the Parliament again, I would prefer not to have to swear allegiance to the Queen of England, much as I admire her. I was disappointed I had to do so this time. I would rather swear allegiance to my own country, its laws and people as new Australian citizens are now required to do at citizenship ceremonies. By the time this four year term has ended I would like to be living in a Western Australia which is part of the republic of Australia with our own Australian head of state. Most of us now recognise that the time for this is well overdue.

I would like to see that important national symbol, the Australian flag, remade into something as distinctively Australian as the Canadian flag is to Canada. I would like to see a similar change to the Western Australian flag. I believe Government itself must be refashioned in this State to make it more truly representative of, and accountable to, the people. Many recommendations along these lines have already been made by both the Royal Commission into Commercial Activities of Government and Other Matters and the subsequent Commission on Government. I broadly support those recommendations.

As a starting point the basis of our democracy should be equality of voting power. One-vote-one-value should be enshrined as an immutable principle of our system. Reforms to reflect that principle should be effected for elections to both Houses of this Parliament, in single member constituencies of equal voting numbers for the lower House and in proportional representation either statewide or zoned in the upper House. This is a basic fundamental reform which should be delayed no longer. The upper House might then be able to act as a House of review instead of the function it has so far performed, the utility of which is somewhat harder to define.

I believe our parliamentary terms should be fixed at four years with the terms for both Houses beginning and ending on the same day. The present system can be unwieldy, as is being demonstrated. I believe our Constitution should be rewritten in clear and simple terms to make it accessible to everybody in the State. The rights of our citizens should be laid out in an incorporated or accompanying Bill of Rights.

I believe the position of Aboriginal people should be formally recognised in this new Constitution either as a preamble or in an accompanying document. That recognition should include the basic principle of native title as determined by the High Court. The historical place of Aboriginal people should be accorded a formal respect which has never been offered to them. I am not naive enough to suggest a simple document as a solution to the problem of Aboriginal people, but I believe it would be an important step. This is an area to which I would like to return later if time permits.

None of these reforms should be forced on people and should be adopted only after a clear demonstration of support from the people of this State. With that in mind I look forward to the early establishment of the proposed People's Convention on Government recommended by the Commission on Government. I know that you, Mr Speaker, have supported at least some of these proposals in the past and that thousands of hours have been spent arguing the pros and cons in debates. I will therefore not waste this Parliament's time by repeating what has been said better by others. I mention them in my first speech in Parliament because I believe they are important and, in some cases, fundamental reforms. They are the responsibility of elected politicians to address. I am now one of those elected politicians.

In one sense, I am grateful to the people who frustrated and defeated attempts at proper reform in the past for leaving such important work still undone. It is personally exciting to think that at least some of the changes I hope for might come about while I am in a position to be involved in the process and not as a mere observer.

They are some of the structures and symbols of Government which I would like to see change. More importantly, I believe it is the content of Government - what Government does and does not do - which needs reform. We must,

and can, provide better Government. The people of Western Australian want better Government. My experience doorknocking the Willagee electorate indicated that people were overwhelmingly negative towards politics, politicians and political candidates in general. That negativity came from voters on all sides and was directed at politicians on all sides. It is instructive that despite the poor showing of the Labor Party, at the recent election the Liberal Party could not muster 40 per cent of the primary vote across the State. The National Party maintained its small but important regional vote. There is a message in that for all of us.

People feel alienated from Government and find it hard to believe that any major political party is really interested in what is best for the people. In fact they find it hard to distinguish between the parties. Constant themes that emerged from my doorknocking, questionnaires and responses at the many public meetings I held last year were that people felt politicians were self-interested; political parties inwardly focussed; and Governments, both state and federal, driven by economic rationalism to the extent that numbers matter more than people.

There is a rising sense of insecurity in the community to a much greater degree than I had anticipated. Far from feeling comfortable, as John Howard would have us believe, most people are feeling decidedly uncomfortable. They blame both sides of politics for this. The basic security of having a job seems a thing of the past for many people. For those in work, there is an increasing perception that security of employment is a year by year proposition. Downsizing, redundancies and workplace agreements have seen to that. Employment contracts are ubiquitous. Invariably they are short term and the terms are getting shorter.

While campaigning I met numerous people who had lost their jobs. In some cases this was after decades of employment with a single employer. Many of these people had worked in the public sector and in most cases the impact of suddenly finding themselves unemployed was quite devastating. The prospect of ever getting a job again was remote and they knew it. There seemed to have been no accounting for their dignity as human beings or the simple dignity of having a job. It is a concept that many people in political life do not seem to understand. The simplistic idea that those shed from the public sector payroll will seamlessly roll over and be employed in the private sector just does not equate with reality.

Many private sector employers have been very busy downsizing. We all know that unemployment is high. Increasingly, those in employment are working longer hours. They are being asked to run like Lynford Christie just to stand still. They are insecure about keeping their jobs. Those losing their jobs are devastated and those already out of work have never been more pessimistic about obtaining it. However, insecurity, dignity and even pessimism do not seem to figure in the reckoning of the current economic rationalist policy making. They are human qualities.

The policies of economic rationalism reduce people to single, economic units whose output can be bought and sold like any other commodity in the marketplace, ideally unencumbered by relationships with third parties such as unions. The call for further labour market reform can be seen in this light. At one level it may be regarded as the benign desire to remove restrictive work practices and improve productivity and competitiveness. Equally, it can be code for an end to any notion of permanency in employment and the removal of employee benefits such as sick pay, holiday pay and shift penalties; in other words a work force that is easier to hire, easier to fire and cheaper to maintain. We must guard against that. This is the American and British model which has seen the rise of huge numbers of lowly paid, insecure workers in those countries, many of whom do not earn enough to support themselves or their families and so resort to other methods of obtaining income. We, too, risk creating large numbers of working poor and extending far beyond that group the rise in the level of general insecurity I mentioned earlier. Already many people in my electorate are in that category.

At the same time people see other changes that fill them with disquiet, concern and anxiety. The embrace of economic rationalist policies is seeing the role of government shrink to that of mere funder and regulator rather than provider of goods and services. The amount of funding and regulation Governments provide is also being reduced to an absolute minimum. The current economic orthodoxy is that Governments need only remove impediments to the free exchange of goods and services, and the rational choice of consumers making decisions in their own self-interest will lead to an equilibrium in which everybody is better off. Adam Smith first articulated this theory in his 1776 publication *The Wealth of Nations*. In essence, the belief is that if market forces are allowed to prevail, prosperity must surely follow. That is the direction in which government policy, both nationally and at a state level, has been and is taking us. We have a right to ask as a society just how far we should proceed down that path.

The Productivity Commission, for example, recently recommended the elimination of the remaining tariffs protecting the Australian car industry, despite the fact that their removal is likely to mean the end of the industry and the loss of thousands of jobs. Of course, Governments must constantly review their function and policy settings. There are some areas that government has been right to get out of: The Commonwealth's decision to sell Qantas and the State's decision to sell BankWest are two instances. However, what people see now is the decline of their public institutions.

It was alarming to me as a political candidate to meet many people who said that they would do anything to avoid sending their children to a state government high school. I found that particularly alarming as the father of four young children, all of whom will attend state government schools. The view constantly conveyed to me was that the public education system was in decline. The same was said of the public health system and public transport system, and of virtually every other arm and function of government. The people who raised those matters with me - they were many - believed the quality of service traditionally delivered to them by the public sector in transport, hospitals, education and so on was being sacrificed for the sake of bottom line accounting. They believed that we had government by accountants. I agree with them.

Governments should ensure that our public institutions do not become the second-rate, last resort option for people who cannot afford anything better. Among the principal functions of government should be ensuring the best quality in the vital areas of public education, public health, public transport and community services. Governments must be prepared to invest money to enhance public infrastructure, both physical and social - and by that I mean human. Failure to do so for short term savings or ideological reasons will create huge costs in the long term. National Party members should be aware that that is creating huge costs in the country areas already. We have had this debate in Western Australia before in this Parliament; I have read the *Hansard*. It is illuminating over the closure of the Fremantle to Perth railway line. I invite people to read it and discover who was right in debate on that matter.

Short-termism and the mind set of the bottom line is not conducive to good government. The Federal Government plans to slash funding for legal aid. In the short term that will no doubt produce a budget saving, but how much will it cost society in the long term? What about some of the basic principles that transcend economics - principles such as justice? The same thing is happening in a raft of other federally funded services, most despicably in the area for which I have shadow portfolio responsibility - disability services. The explanation comes in Orwellian language. We are told that it is part of a national efficiency dividend. There must be more to government than the task of programming an adding machine. Although it must be businesslike and fiscally responsible, government is far more than a mere business and politicians are far more than mere businessmen. Adam Smith recognised that principle. He recognised that there were moral, ethical and service dimensions imperative to government. His disciples seem to have overlooked that. These dimensions take more skill and more imagination than that required to read a balance sheet. A Government must protect and foster the rights, opportunities and wellbeing of its citizens. That is what we should be about.

In pursuit of this end the importance of employment cannot be overstated. History tells us that long term high unemployment brings with it massive social problems and the history of Australia teaches that lesson starkly. Governments should not simply wash their hands of employment policy and leave the resolution of high unemployment to the mythical powers of the market and the simplistic notion of working for the dole. This is an area in which government should be strongly active and State and Federal Governments should cooperate in this as a principle function.

The current Federal Government's decision to slash labour market programs was wrong. Governments should set employment targets. With the strength of the economy in Western Australia this State should aim at unemployment of no more than 4 per cent. Recognition - perhaps even statutory recognition - should be given to a legal right to work so that if people are unemployed for a period of one year, they must be offered a job, or training or education, with Governments prepared to subsidise wages if necessary for employment placement in private enterprise for a set period. A model of this was provided in Paul Keating's Working Nation program. The revenue side of the fiscal equation would become an issue, but it is not an insurmountable issue. It might be time for another national tax summit.

The legitimate role of unions should be recognised and a cooperative tripartite relationship between unions, employers and government should be pursued. Security of employment, as I have indicated, is vital. Governments - and that includes this one - should stop sacking people. Governments should indicate, through policy, support for job security and encourage business to do the same. Governments should encourage a greater sense of morality and community responsibility among business. The low paid, the unemployed and the ordinary public see business leaders, the chief executives of public companies and corporations, paying themselves millions of dollars a year while thousands of ordinary working people with families to support are sacked. The head of Western Australia's biggest public company, Wesfarmers CSBP Limited, was paid \$1.2m last year. He had taken a pay cut of \$200 000. That is more than the average worker will earn in his or her entire life. To me there is something fundamentally wrong with that.

The public sees also politicians enacting policies or demanding standards from which they themselves seem excused. The State's public schoolteachers were told for two years that they had to demonstrate a rise in professional standards and productivity gains to be eligible for a pay rise, only to see the politicians of this place accept a 9 per cent increase with no discernible change in work habits. While insecurity and uncertainty is increasingly a fact of life for many

politicians who are seen by many as responsible for creating it, they are also seen to be cocooned from its ravages. Members of Parliament who are defeated after just two terms - eight years - or who retire after three terms, or 12 years, can claim a pension of at least \$40 000, indexed for the rest of their lives. That amount is far in excess of the income most of my constituents would earn in a year of hard work. Politicians elected in their thirties can move on to other careers in their forties with lifetime indexed so-called pensions, or take massive lump sum payments, which in some cases now push upwards to \$1m. How can I justify that to my electorate? It is not hard to understand why people are so cynical about the motives of politicians.

The parliamentary superannuation scheme should be abolished and the superannuation entitlements for politicians should be brought into line with community standards by making them part of the general government employees' superannuation scheme. As a matter of justice or fairness, the accrued benefits of current members should not be affected. In other words, the current scheme would have to be phased out. I do not believe we can continue with the current arrangements because sooner or later community pressure will force change. I do not mean to cast aspersions on current or former members. The parliamentary superannuation scheme was created for a particular time. The time has changed and we must change with it.

The old justification for the generous superannuation scheme for politicians - that they had given up other careers and risked uncertain futures in a precarious occupation - is no longer acceptable. These days everyone's employment is insecure. A virtually unbreakable four-year contract would be considered long-term job security for most of the people I know. As a journalist I was employed on an annual contract throughout my career, and was reminded of it on more than one occasion.

Politicians are probably better placed than most to find other work if they should be unfortunate enough to lose their seat - certainly better placed than many of those whom they have been happily sacking. In any event, special provisions could be made for former politicians who fall on genuinely hard times. Other post-parliamentary benefits or perks should be abolished or phased out for everyone except former Premiers. Members of Parliament should be properly funded and resourced while they are serving the public rather than in later life. Measures like this may or may not go some way towards restoring the balance of credibility for those of us in political life. I have been assured by some that it will not make one iota of difference, but it should be done because it is right. I have also been told that I will think differently after I have been here for a while - which is why I thought I had better say it now so I can remind myself.

It is not healthy for our society that so many people are contemptuously dismissive of their elected representatives and cynical and disillusioned about the political process. That is one of the factors that made me decide to give up journalism, join the Labor Party and seek preselection. I believed the Labor Party in Western Australia faced the very real possibility of major electoral demolition last year. Thankfully total collapse was avoided. For people like myself, my immediate and wider family and my friends - who are broadly representative of the ordinary working people of this State - that would have been a disaster. We have traditionally relied on the Australian Labor Party to represent our interests in the wider political world.

I grew up in the old State Housing Commission area of Lockyer in Albany. The people who made up the neighbourhood were blue-collar workers, their families, migrants, Aborigines, single parent families and pensioners. It was the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972 that made available for kids of my background a whole range of opportunities that had never been available to our parents, or even to our older brothers and sisters. I owe a debt of gratitude to the Whitlam Government.

The ordinary people of the State - the people who will not be the privileged beneficiaries of the policies of economic rationalism - still need the Labor Party as the party of social democracy to represent their interests as we move into the next century. A healthy political system needs such a party.

There are many Aboriginal people in my electorate and before I conclude my speech I would like to return to an issue I raised earlier; that is, Aboriginal affairs. On 17 May last year, I stood with about 2 000 other people, mainly Aboriginal, in the cemetery at Pingelly while the body of Rob Riley was laid in the ground. It was an overwhelmingly sad time. His passing on 1 May last year was a great tragedy for this State. The story of his life and death said a lot about the story of Aboriginal people in our society. For too much of our history since colonisation official policy and energy has been aimed at minimising, even eliminating, aboriginality from this State. Thankfully, such efforts have failed, but too often the results have been tragic and too often Governments have adopted new forms of the old mind-sets. We should be grateful for the resilience of Aboriginal people and indigenous culture in the face of what has happened over the past 170 years. Instead of regarding aboriginality as a burden to carry we should see it as an asset of great potential.

We should support the reconciliation process, first, by recognising and respecting the rights of Aboriginal people; that is, through native title. The symbolic importance aside, for many Aboriginal people native title provides the

opportunity to develop an economic independence that has long been denied them. Native title does present problems for other sectors. Once again, they should not be resolved at the expense of the rights of Aboriginal people. Other countries have managed this issue; we can do it too. We are lucky in Western Australia that we have Aboriginal life, so rich in art, music, dance, storytelling, literature and drama. This is a unique vein of our culture that we should celebrate and promote internationally so that Western Australia can become known as the best place in the world to experience Aboriginal culture, both contemporary and traditional.

I have already mentioned that I grew up and went to school with Aboriginal children in Albany. However, it was not until a few years ago, when I went as a journalist to a back to Mogumber day at the old Moore River mission north of Perth, that I was surrounded by people from Albany and learned the stories of what had happened to their families under the old policies of separation and assimilation. I was disappointed to say the least that an important part of the history of my own community had been denied to me and that that history as I knew it was so incomplete and sanitised.

The history of the post-colonial experience of Aboriginal people should be taught to all students in our schools, not as some elective option chosen by two or three students. This is not a matter of guilt; it is a matter of knowledge. Through knowledge we can overcome ignorance. We should try to overcome that ignorance because it fosters misunderstanding and intolerance, and we can no longer afford that. We have seen too much of the ugly face of Australian life since that now infamous speech in Federal Parliament last year. That issue was thrown at me as a candidate and my wife and I decided to confront it. We did so and defeated it.

Many things are easier said than done, I know. However, this is one of the great areas of challenge for our Parliament and State Government, and it is one that we must continually strive to meet. Despite the fact that every effort still seems to meet with great resistance from some quarters for some reason, as a society we should understand that the cost of failure in Aboriginal affairs would be massive - it already has been. Old prejudices are hard to change and easy to encourage. Part of our role in this Parliament is to ensure justice, freedom from oppression and equality of opportunity for all people, including Aborigines. With effort and goodwill on all sides, such a thing is possible. The motto for the reconciliation movement has been "walking together". The walk will be long and difficult, but it must be undertaken. Rob Riley's own words were repeated by the priest at his grave side -

You do not stop fighting for justice simply because those around you do not like it. You keep on fighting.

Finally, I disagree with many of the policies of the present Government. That should be obvious; if I did not, I would not be on this side of Parliament. It is possible to respect, like or perhaps even to love a person with whom one disagrees politically. Through my work as a journalist, I developed a respect, friendship and fondness for many members of the opposite side of politics. I have yet to fall in love with any of them, but that might come in time - the member for Albany might be a candidate! I have learnt that quite contrary points of view and beliefs can be held with equally good intent and sincerity, and I have learnt to respect that fact.

The Speaker made the point in his acceptance speech that this Parliament will take us into the next century and millennium; like he, I find that an exciting prospect. I look forward to working with you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and all members to make the experience fruitful and enjoyable.

[Applause.]