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GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

SPEECH

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SPEECH

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| Speaker | Keenan, Michael, MP | Question No. | |

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (5.00 pm)—It is my pleasure to speak on this address-in-reply. I want to specifically thank my electorate, the people of Stirling, for putting their confidence in me for a third time. It is always good to be returned and to get that vote of confidence, and this time we had a very good electoral result in Stirling. For a swinging seat the margin now is better than it has been in many years, which I would like to think is a reasonably strong endorsement of the work we have done over the past six years.

It is always an honour to be re-endorsed by your electorate. I want to thank them for that, but also thank my campaign team who worked tirelessly to make sure we got the right outcome. My campaign team has been the same since I first won the seat off Labor in 2004—that is, John Franklyn, my campaign manager; Fay Duda, who manages the finances of the campaign and is always tireless in doing all of the things that a campaign requires and has boundless energy; my parents, who have always been very helpful and good political operators in their own right having worked on Liberal Party campaigns for many years before I was in parliament; my office, led by Sallyanne, who did an incredible job and worked very hard; and I also acknowledge Dan and Adam and Pauline and Amelia, my portfolio adviser. My office is an incredibly skilled team, and I do not think I have ever had a better office in the six years I have been in parliament. I thank them very much for their incredible efforts during the course of the campaign that saw us achieve such a wonderful result in Stirling.

In my third term in parliament my focus will be, as always, on my electorate and how we can serve my electorate of Stirling better. I believe that we would have been better served by the election of a Liberal government. In fact I am very confident we would have been better served by the election of a Liberal government. And during the election campaign I was very pleased to be able to make a number of announcements on behalf of the coalition that would have brought great benefits to my electorate. In some cases I have been campaigning for these things to happen for the whole six years I have been in parliament.

Sadly, as far as we are aware the Labor campaign in Stirling did not make one promise on behalf of the Labor Party on what they would do if the Labor government was returned. We thought that was curious, but it was also very disappointing. I am disappointed by the fact that the two Independents made the decision that they did, that the Labor Party was returned to office and, therefore, my electorate of Stirling will not be getting any benefits at all from that.

My No. 1 priority is crime prevention, and we have funded during the past six years some very important crime prevention programs. I was pleased to announce in this campaign that an elected Liberal government would have delivered \$1 million to expand crime prevention within the city of Stirling. It would have done that by expanding the closed-circuit television network across many parts of my electorate, and this would have been a massive blow to criminals in Stirling who, to date, have dodged the law. CCTVs are an effective way of assisting police to catch the culprits of crime. Importantly, they also act as a deterrent for criminals.

The \$1 million was to be delivered to the City Of Stirling, which is my sole local government authority, to go towards improving CCTV coverage across the city via the provision of CCTV cameras to be installed and deployed in crime hotspots. The City Of Stirling already works closely with the local police to address street level crime on private business premises and public areas throughout the City Of Stirling, and the network would have strengthened this already strong working relationship. The project would have had a huge impact on reducing the rate of crime, including at the Mirrabooka regional centre, Clarko Reserve, Trigg Beach and the Terry Tyzack Aquatic Centre. Unfortunately for the people of Stirling, Labor announced no funding for such a project. Just as Labor is soft on national security, so is it soft on local crime prevention. I will continue to support the city of Stirling in its work to make our local communities safer places to live, and I would like to think that the Labor government would do the same. But, sadly, we have had no indication of that to date.

Another of my top priorities is local roads, and that featured heavily again during the local election campaign. I announced that an elected Liberal government would deliver \$10 million to build an overpass at the dangerous

Mirrabooka Avenue and Reid Highway intersection. Hundreds of local families have raised this issue with me, as well as the need to improve this notorious black spot. That is why I have fought hard over the past six years to deliver funding to do those things. The intersection, which consistently ranks as the worst black spot in Perth, has been the cause of countless accidents, and therefore it has been a priority of mine since I was elected. Building the overpass would have saved lives. The Western Australian Labor Party said in 2004 and again in 2005 that Mirrabooka Avenue was the worst black spot in Western Australia and promised to do something about it, yet Julia Gillard's Labor has not committed even one dollar to the project. Once again the people of Stirling have been the ones to pay the price for the policies of an ignorant government whose interest has remained focused on the eastern states.

The local environment also received a double blow from the fallout of the Labor Party's retaining office. The future of Stirling's primary education centre for environmental prevention—the Henderson Environmental Centre—is in jeopardy since Labor failed to match the coalition's commitment to a \$100,000 upgrade. As the local member, I announced that the coalition would provide the funding to develop the centre into one of the premier environmental centres in Western Australia. The Henderson Centre has been the driving force behind the strong presence of environmental activism in Stirling, and my announcement was a proper acknowledgement of the role the centre plays in my community.

Despite a commitment of support from the local and state governments, this worthwhile project appeared to go unnoticed by Labor, and they refused to commit even one dollar to it. I have had to explain to the local environmental groups that use the facility why their Commonwealth government does not value the work that they are doing to promote the environmental message. The upgraded centre would have been used to educate schoolchildren from the northern suburbs on the importance of their local environment as well as to assist university students with research projects while delivering a broader environmental message across the community. It is a great facility that has a lot of potential, but this is a huge loss to the Sterling community and one of my greatest disappointments following the election campaign.

The other great blow delivered to the local environment was the scrapping of local green army projects. Under the coalition government, Stirling would have been the recipient of funding for three green army projects worth \$125,000 each. The projects earmarked for the green regional open space, Mettam's Pool and Trigg Bushland Reserve would have delivered significant training and practical experience in the vital area of environmental management in Stirling. The green army projects were to provide tens of young Australians with the opportunity to work on local community based projects for a six-month period as part of the Liberal program, but the environment as well as an emerging workforce will now miss out on the benefits of these projects.

Despite these projects no longer going ahead, I would like to make a special mention of the existing work being done by hardworking volunteers. It is their work that would have been buttressed by this extra green army funding. These volunteers put in an enormous amount of work to raise environmental awareness in the local community. I mention groups such as the Friends of Trigg Bushland and Stirling Natural Coastcare. They should be commended for their efforts to protect our local environment. I would like to acknowledge the army—literally—of volunteers that gives up a lot of time and effort to go out in their spare time to make the local environment better. I am very disappointed because the green army projects would have gone a long way to helping them in doing what they do so well.

Sporting clubs in Stirling have also been the victim of an absence of any commitments from the Labor campaign in Stirling. During the campaign I was proud to announce that a Liberal government would deliver \$95,000 to install a synthetic playing field at the Scarborough Bowls Club. Scarborough Bowls Club is a fantastic local sporting club with membership numbers now exceeding 1,400 people and rising at a rate of 20 new members a month. At present the club has to spend upwards of \$25,000 a year to maintain each of their playing surfaces. This cost would have been reduced to zero had the Labor government matched the coalition's commitment for funding for a new synthetic field. Instead, members will now likely go without the surface which would have lasted for up to 10 years and delivered environmental benefits by reducing the club's water consumption.

The announcement buoyed the club's confidence in their push to get their name on the map and it opened new avenues for them to be more competitive when bidding to host state and national championships. While, until the Liberal government is elected I cannot provide the funding that this club so desperately needs, I would like to note that they are a tireless club that continues to work hard in my local community.

Sports, crime prevention and the environment have all suffered in Stirling as a result of Labor's victory. But I would also like to add a couple of extras to that list. That particularly goes to Indigenous issues in my

electorate. These are complex and an ongoing source of concern for me and require more attention from the federal government.

One of the first announcements during the campaign, and one of my proudest, was a re-commitment of the coalition to the Reel Connections program which works in Mirrabooka to try and help the youth there. Mirrabooka is an incredibly multicultural area. It traditionally has been where new arrivals in Western Australia go. It has hosted waves of immigration from the postwar period when it hosted immigrants from southern Europe through to Vietnamese migrants during the wave of immigration after the Vietnam War. Currently it hosts the African arrivals and the Middle Eastern arrivals. Traditionally they would go out to Mirrabooka because it is an area in Perth that has an available pool of lower priced rental housing and also a host of services at the Mirrabooka town centre. That can lead to problems and there has been an ongoing problem out there with petty crime. There has been an ongoing problem with some of the new arrivals not getting on with some of the existing communities.

We wanted to do something to try and integrate some of those communities more fully into the local community. We did so by funding the Reel Connections program under one of the Howard government's existing programs. It was under the auspices of the City of Stirling and was very heavily supported by the local police. It was very successful in bringing some of those communities together and promoting cross-cultural understanding in a way that lessened some of those tensions.

Sadly, that funding ran out this year and we committed during the election campaign to refunding it to the tune of \$450,00, but that funding commitment was not matched by the local Labor campaign. We were very disappointed about that because they were asked to do so. Now, of course, that program has lapsed which means that my community will miss out on an incredibly important crime prevention and community building project.

I would like to be standing here today to announce that, if we had had a different election result, all of these worthwhile projects in Stirling would have been funded. But the sad reality is that, during the whole course of the election campaign, the Labor Party did not commit to do one thing within the Stirling community which I thought was relatively extraordinary.

We had the benefit of two prime ministerial visits yet there was not one announcement of anything positive for the community. Indeed, two weeks out from the election Prime Minister Julia Gillard visited my electorate and spent some 45 minutes with the local newspaper in an effort to garner support for the local Labor candidate. But she had not one positive thing to say about improving local roads, protecting the local environment, protecting local jobs or helping the hardworking local police to fight crime. Quite frankly the people of Stirling feel robbed—and rightly so.

Seats on the east coast in the states of Queensland and New South Wales became beneficiaries of Labor's election spending but seats in Western Australia, including in Stirling, were completely ignored. Indeed, the people of Western Australia are now much worse off as a result of the re-election of the Labor government, with the threat of the mining tax still hanging over our heads in a way that will wreck the local economy. I will continue to fight for the worthwhile projects that I have outlined today and I call on the Labor government to support them as well, because the people of Stirling deserve better.

I will move, in the remaining time I have, from issues in my own electorate to issues in my portfolio of justice, customs and border protection. It has certainly become quite apparent that a change in the Labor Party leadership did nothing to put a party that had allegedly lost its way back on track. One of the areas in which Labor has significantly let the country down is in the protection of Australia's borders. This crisis is becoming increasingly worse, with illegal boats now arriving at a rate which we have never seen before. In August of 2008 the then Rudd Labor government began the process of rolling back the strong border protection regime that they had inherited from the Howard government. Since that time 189 boats, carrying over 9,000 people have arrived in Australia illegally. This year, 2010, is the worst year on record for illegal boat arrivals. We are only in the middle of November, yet we have had 121 boats arrive. It has become readily apparent that the Gillard Labor government cannot cope with the influx of arrivals, and neither can the detention facilities that we have in Australia.

This year the coalition announced measures that will restore integrity to Australia's borders. The key principle that we outlined on this issue was to secure our borders. We will stamp out people smuggling and effectively deter illegal and unauthorised arrivals while at the same time treating refugees compassionately in accordance with our international obligations. We will move all processing off shore. We will ensure that unauthorised arrivals seeking asylum are intercepted and processed offshore—not on the Australian mainland as is increasingly the case under this government.

We will reintroduce a non-permanent visa for unauthorised arrivals. The coalition has successfully used this in the past as one of the very important planks to take away the ability of people smugglers to sell their product. We will continue to have compassion and provide for a fair refugee and humanitarian program but we will not skew that program to people who can afford to pay a people smuggler to bring them here illegally. In fact, we will skew it to people who are sitting in refugee camps, particularly in Africa—but also in other parts of the world—because there are people sitting in those refugee camps who would never have the wherewithal to pay a people smuggler to come to Australia illegally. That point has been consistently made to me by people who have arrived here legally, after significantly long waits in refugee camps in Africa, and who have now settled in my electorate. You will not find any greater opposition to illegal boat arrivals than from communities of people who have come here to Australia legally. That point has been made to me over and over again from people who have arrived here from the Sudan, the Congo and other very difficult places in western Africa. Their families still sit rotting in these refugee camps, with no hope of ever leaving those camps and being resettled in another country.

Of course, the very limited hope they might have to join their families here in Australia is being destroyed by the fact that our system of arrivals is now completely skewed towards people who come here illegally. I think this is something that should be better understood by those who are urging compassion for refugees. We believe that that compassion should extend to the fact that people who are sitting in refugee camps should have the possibility to come to Australia on what is a very generous program by international standards.

We believe in an uncompromising approach to protecting Australia's borders and keeping Australia safe. We are also committed to securing our borders against other threats such as illicit drugs, disease, illegal foreign fishing and, of course, people smuggling. The integrity of our borders can only be maintained with a properly resourced Australian Customs and Border Protection Service. Since coming to office, Labor has cut funding to the Customs service to the tune of \$58.1 million. This has, of course, made Australia's borders less secure and our nation more vulnerable. During the election campaign, we committed to restore that funding but also to allocate another \$30-odd million to make sure that we can improve our program of cargo screening to stop these threats from coming into Australia in the first place. (*Time expired*)