The role of a Senator can be as limited or as varied as you choose. For me, I have identified a number of issues that I believe deserve more attention. As a Senator for Western Australia I will draw to the attention of the Parliament and my colleagues issues that are having a real impact on our local communities, but which might not always be top-of-mind for politicians.

My passions for Australian federalism and Australia’s constitutional monarchy are long held and well known to many.

Over coming months you will hear more about my ideas to improve our federal system of government, and in particular ideas that I have to reverse the erosion of State sovereignty by the Federal Government.

Specifically, I propose to advance two new constitutional proposals. First, the idea that States should have the ability to appoint judges to High Court seats following the allocation of existing High Court seats to each State and one to the Commonwealth. This is not a new idea. Professor Gabriel Moors has suggested that “appointment of judges to its highest constitutional court cannot be the exclusive province of one level of government”.

Secondly, a proposal to give State Parliaments the ability to raise amendments to the Constitution in addition to the Commonwealth.

In my First Speech to the Senate on 18th June 2012, I said that those who framed Australia’s Constitution did so with a deliberate purpose. Our founding fathers created one chamber within our Commonwealth Parliament – the Senate – that was to consist of representatives chosen to represent and defend, first and foremost, the interests of their States. I pledged that in all my deliberations, I would honour this fact.

During my first year as a Senator, I have strived at all times to remain true to my word. In all my deliberations, I have put the consideration of WA and Western Australians first.

I did not appreciate how early in my life as a Senator this pledge would be put to the test.

In late 2012, the Parliament dealt with legislation to fully deregulate Australia’s wheat export markets. WA is Australia’s largest wheat exporter, and WA farmers had the most to benefit from less regulation and reduced taxes.

I did not appreciate how early in my life as a Senator this pledge would be put to the test.

In late 2012, the Parliament dealt with legislation to fully deregulate Australia’s wheat export markets. WA is Australia’s largest wheat exporter, and WA farmers had the most to benefit from less regulation and reduced taxes.

As a Liberal, I was bound to pursue those policies that lead to smaller government, remove unnecessary bureaucracy and reduce taxes and charges.

In the Senate I was quick to support WA and its farming communities by acting to abolish the wheat export charge and wind up Wheat Exports Australia. It was a logical next-step along the path to full deregulation. This view had long been supported by the WA Liberal Party and on this occasion enjoyed the overwhelming support of WA farmers and their farming communities.

This decision to reduce the cost of doing business has become especially important as we learn more and more about the financial challenges facing WA farmers and their families.

Likewise, I was pleased recently to speak about the ongoing challenge of obtaining a better deal for WA on the distribution of GST revenue. The fact that WA is due to receive just 45 cents for every dollar contributed in 2013/14 clearly shows the present model is broken.

My view is a simple one – anything that we can do to support the growth of WA’s economy has a direct benefit to Australia’s ongoing prosperity. A cooperative approach by Liberal Leaders in this matter will always stand in marked contrast with Julia Gillard’s contemptuous attitude towards Western Australia.

The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is something that all sides of politics support but presents another unique challenge to WA. In introducing a national scheme, I strongly feel it is critical that those successful innovations in providing disability support services in Western Australia aren’t ‘crowded-out’ by a large, eastern states-based bureaucracy.
In my first twelve months I have been an active member on a number of parliamentary committees, and have consistently used these to highlight areas where the Gillard Government is letting Western Australia down. At all times my Committee focus is to fight to get a better deal for WA.

The Gillard Government’s decision last year to slash $500 million from aged care services was keenly felt by many aged care providers in WA, most particularly those providing services in regional areas. I was able to draw their situation to the attention of the Senate, pointing out that many rural and regional aged care providers simply do not have financial reserves to meet the increasing costs being imposed by the Labor Government.

As a result, Labor’s cuts are forcing immediate reductions to existing services, leaving elderly residents and their families across regional WA in the lurch, and with growing concerns about how they will meet the care needs of older Australians living in rural and regional areas.

The Coalition’s approach of fibre to the node will mean these small communities with under 1000 premises will miss out on services.

I also spoke about the reforms in the Senate, and noted their many disturbing Orwellian overtones. While it is pleasing that Labor is willing to withdraw its legislation, we must remain vigilant and work to defeat any Labor/Greens proposals that seek to limit people’s legitimate right to express their political opinions.

My other work on the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties and the Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audit is largely technical but has been a great place to observe and challenge the growing influence of international treaties over our domestic law making and to scrutinise Labor’s wasteful spending habits.

Aged care funding cuts and the challenges being faced by aged care homes across Australia is the current focus of the work I am doing as a member of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs.

Labor’s woeful ignorance of the needs of regional communities has likewise been on display when it comes to the issue of broadband. As a member of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network, I have heard a great many promises from Labor, but very little in the way of delivery. What has become clear is that under Labor’s plan, many rural and regional aged care providers simply do not have financial reserves to meet the increasing costs being imposed by the Government.

The Coalition’s approach of fibre to the node will mean these small communities will miss out on services, leaving elderly residents and their families across regional WA in the lurch, and with growing concerns about how they will meet the care needs of older Australians living in rural and regional areas.

I also spoke about the reforms in the Senate, and noted their many disturbing Orwellian overtones. While it is pleasing that Labor is willing to withdraw its legislation, we must remain vigilant and work to defeat any Labor/Greens proposals that seek to limit people’s legitimate right to express their political opinions.

The Coalition’s approach of fibre to the node will mean these small communities will miss out on services, leaving elderly residents and their families across regional WA in the lurch, and with growing concerns about how they will meet the care needs of older Australians living in rural and regional areas.

When I entered the Senate in May last year, I undertook to build on the work of my predecessor and make my particular focus WA’s Great Southern Region. This area falls within the electorate of O’Connor and is home for around 54,000 people.

As well as maintaining a regional office in Albany, I have spent a great deal of time travelling throughout the various towns that make up the region, among them Narrogin, Manjimup, Mt Barker, Kojonup, Wagin and Denmark.

It has been a pleasure to meet with so many hard-working local people across a variety of industries and areas, to learn more about their activities and develop a better understanding of how the Federal Government can assist – or get out of the way – so that communities and local businesses can get on with making the Great Southern Region an even better place for local residents through investment, job creation and building community organisations.

A key element of this has been to encourage many of my senior parliamentary colleagues to visit the region to see first-hand the work of local communities. We have held public forums and roundtable meetings across the region over the last year, dealing with a wide variety of policy issues including immigration, the Carbon Tax, school education, seniors, disability services, agriculture, veteran’s affairs, access to GPs and health facilities and tourism, among others.

As a new Senator, I am extremely grateful to the many colleagues who have been willing to accompany me across the Great Southern Region over the last 12 months. To date, I have had the pleasure of Shadow Ministerial visits, among them Senator Michael Ronaldson talking Veterans and Anzac, Scott Morrison talking border protection, Bronwyn Bishop talking seniors, Peter Dutton talking rural health and aged care, Kevin Andrews talking about families and not-for-profit issues, Senator Mitch Fifield on carers and disability services and Christopher Pyne talking education.

We’ve had the opportunity to meet with people from all walks of life – from local business owners, farmers, students, small business owners, and more. It has been a privilege to hear firsthand about the challenges they face and to discuss potential solutions.

I have spoken at a number of events across the region, including the Anzac Day services in Albany, Great Southern and Denmark.

Just last week, I had the honour of attending my first Anzac Day commemorations as a Senator. This included a deeply moving service commemorating the Battle of Kaguyon, an often overlooked battle during the Korean War that occurred on the eve of Anzac Day, 1951. The valiant efforts of the Australians who fought and died there are now recognised as a turning point in that war.

Anzac Day commemorations in Albany are made all the more poignant by the central role that Albany played in the Anzac story, being the departure point of the first and second Anzac convoys. For the thousands of Australians who died at Gallipoli, the view of Albany as they sailed out to the Gallipoli Peninsula was a defining moment.

My focus in the coming year will be to ensure we give all the support that is needed to ensure the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Anzac is a successful and moving occasion for all those in the Great Southern Region, as we highlight the pivotal role this part of Western Australia played in one of our nation’s defining moments.