

PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM, GOVERNMENT'S PRE-ELECTION CLAIMS

Motion

Resumed from 15 May on the following motion moved by Hon Simon O'Brien -

That this House recalls the Labor Party's pre-election claims that it "understood the public health system" and "would fix the health system" and calls on the Government to explain -

- (a) why the State's health system is under more pressure now than it was in February 2001, especially in relation to staffing;
- (b) why it has cut back rural health services;
- (c) why the Minister for Health will not support an MRI scanner for the southern metropolitan area;
- (d) the failure to obtain a PET scanner;
- (e) why it has halved funding for the Central Wait List Bureau;
- (f) why it has sacked country hospital boards;
- (g) the inadequacy of emergency services to outer suburban areas; and
- (h) the inadequacy of funding for health services generally.

HON PETER FOSS (East Metropolitan) [10.07 am]: Members might wonder why I particularly mentioned aged care facilities in a debate on health. The reason I did so is that that is the Government's solution. It is not my idea of the solution. One would think that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich would have referred to the Labor Party policy. I will read out the Labor Party's solution to the situation in health.

Point of Order

Hon JOHN FISCHER: Has there been a change in the program? I thought Bills for introduction would have been called on now.

The PRESIDENT: Bills for introduction can be taken at any time. My understanding is that motions take precedence, but the call can certainly be given to the member as soon as motions, the first item of orders of the day, are finished.

Debate Resumed

Hon PETER FOSS: This is the solution; this is the touchstone. Page 4 of the Labor Party policy states -

To meet these goals, over the four years of a Gallop Labor Government, Labor will:

- increase recurrent funding for the public hospital system by \$179 million in addition to the provision made in the current forward estimates.

It will add that. It continues -

This additional \$179 million will go towards:

- improving patient care in public hospitals, particularly emergency and other acute services;
- tackling waiting lists and waiting times for patients with urgent and semi-urgent needs;
- providing extra funding towards a comprehensive salary and professional development package for nurses;
- better after hospital care; and
- implementing a strategy to place patients waiting for nursing-home placement into more appropriate care.

That is Labor's solution. It is not my solution or my idea. They are Labor's major points. This was emphasised in that press release I read out yesterday, headed "Labor - \$24 Million to Ease Hospital Bed Crisis and Fund New Aged Care Facilities". As I said, I asked about that. This was all to be done in the first three months. In the main, what has been done was done by the previous Government anyway. Government members cannot even believe their own policies. The press release states -

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Labor will set-up a working party - to include Health Department officials and aged care industry stakeholders - to establish guidelines and address issues relating to standards of care, staffing, funding and accountability requirements for the interim aged care facilities.

The Government said that it would set up a working party within three months. I asked a question in December last year about the number of beds that were available. The answer was that there were 82, not 42. Those beds were mainly provided by the previous Government. I asked another really interesting question in December. Question without notice 961 states -

- (1) Has the Government established a working party on issues associated with interim aged care facilities?

The answer to my question, which concerned one of the primary things that Labor was going to do -

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: When did you ask that question?

Hon PETER FOSS: In December. The Labor Party had been in government for quite a long time - longer than the three months that it said it would take to solve the problem of aged care.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: No-one said that we were going to solve the problem of aged care.

Hon PETER FOSS: We were told that the Government was going to do that within three months.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The parliamentary secretary will come to order. There will be no further interruptions to the debate.

Hon PETER FOSS: It is clear that not only did the Labor Party not mean anything that it said - all it wanted was to be in government - but also, as soon as it got into government, it forgot what it had said in its policy and press releases. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health does not even know what has been said. I thought that she would at least find out so that she could apologise for it.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Peter Foss, we can all hear you without you having to yell.

Hon PETER FOSS: I was anticipating more noise from the parliamentary secretary. Thank you, Mr President. I obviously do not need to shout any more.

Members should keep in mind this point from the press release, which states -

Dr Gallop said that Labor's first priority was to fix the hospital crisis but he would be seeking commonwealth funds for this initiative as aged care was a Federal responsibility.

That was the Government's first priority. I would not have thought that it would be all that difficult to set up a working group. I do not think that too many excuses would have been needed for the creation of such a working party. I asked in December whether the Government had set up that working party and was told that it had not. In his answer, Hon Kim Chance stated -

However, the formation of an aged care sector industry council will be announced early in the new year.

That was not the working party that was promised. The Government said that it would announce something in the new year. His answer continued -

One of its tasks will be to consider issues associated with interim aged care facilities.

The Government made a wonderful promise to the people of Western Australia. However, the parliamentary secretary is not even aware of that promise. All she need do is read the policy; it is only 14 and a quarter pages long. She should have been able to manage that after so many months. She could have read less than a page a month in order to manage that. If she had read that policy, she might have known what it provided. She could have read the press releases. I told her about the press release yesterday. A diligent parliamentary secretary would have gone straight back to her office and asked, "How did I miss that one? Why was I so foolish as to stand in the Parliament without knowing one of the important planks of health policy? I looked like an idiot!"

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: I know that I don't look like an idiot.

Hon PETER FOSS: To be in Parliament for more than 14 months and not know what is in the Government's policy or its press releases is to be abysmally shown up as someone who has been doing nothing for that period. No wonder she must shout to cover up her embarrassment. The moaner knows only one thing; the moaner knows only how to criticise. She is incapable of doing something positive. No wonder our health system has got worse and not better! This wonderful undertaking to set up a working party could have been given to the parliamentary secretary to carry out. She could have done that. It would have given her something to do, so that she could look like she was performing some useful function. Did she stand up yesterday and announce that the Government had set up an aged care council? I have not yet been able to find any such announcement. I am not

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saying that it does not exist; however, it certainly has not been trumpeted as the Government carrying out its first priority. This was the first priority of the Government. It is so much in its mind that it has not even told us about it.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: What are you on about?

Hon PETER FOSS: The fact that government members are a useless mob who should never have been in government. All that its members know how to do is moan and criticise. While I am on the topic of moaning and criticising, I should deal with another thing that gets up this parliamentary secretary's nose. She hates the private sector. She hates anything being done by the private sector that she thinks should be done by government. I would love to hear the conversations between her and the Treasurer when it comes to questions of lovely little partnerships. They got this idea from Tony Blair. It is a partnership between the private sector and government but under another, more socialist-sounding name. I would love to hear the private conversations of Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich and the Treasurer on that point.

One thing the parliamentary secretary really did not like was the Joondalup Health Campus. She loathed the Joondalup Health Campus. Much of the crisis in health has been created by the Labor Party's union members' stirring in hospitals. The Joondalup Health Campus has been constantly criticised by the honourable member. The fascinating thing is that Joondalup Health Campus has been successful. There used to be an 84-bed hospital at Wanneroo. We now have a new, modern and excellent 335-bed hospital. Seventy of those beds are private beds. There is a contract-guaranteed minimum level of service. What is really interesting is that in 1998, Joondalup Hospital introduced a higher acuity level intensive care coronary unit, which has been delivering services comparable with but much cheaper than the teaching hospitals. Tertiary care is incredibly expensive. This has alleviated pressure on the major teaching hospitals. That can be seen in the number of people who have been transferred in a critical condition to the Joondalup Health Campus from Royal Perth and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospitals. That has taken a lot of pressure off emergency departments in the teaching hospitals. A summary of the Auditor General's report on the Joondalup Health Campus contract states -

Emergency services were double the indicative levels originally negotiated and in 1998/99, there were 3,000 more emergency attendances than planned for Joondalup.

The hospital has been a great success. People have been voting with their feet. The summary further states -

An analysis showed that the number of emergency patients from the Joondalup region fronting up to emergency at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital fell by 30.5% between 1996/97 and 1998/99.

In 1998/99, 1728 babies were born in the Joondalup Hospital, making it second only to King Edward for the number of deliveries.

Joondalup Hospital's expansion of services included the capacity to carry out procedures such as hip replacements that were previously only done at teaching hospitals.

It is going well. This little lot was appointed to government after having smeared Joondalup Health Campus for years. It will come as no surprise to members that one of the loudest voices was the moaner herself. She headed up a committee to review the contracting arrangement of the Joondalup and Peel hospitals. To show how diligent this member is, I will further quote from the summary, which states -

... her committee was able to give the Health Minister a verbal report and written recommendations but no report was prepared.

The parliamentary secretary was in charge of the committee. She had nothing else to do; she is not a minister. All she need do to keep busy is be a parliamentary secretary. The Government gave her a job. All she could come up with was a verbal report. To put it mildly, it looks slack that she was able to come up with only a verbal report and written recommendations. This following point is interesting. The summary continues -

On the basis of the verbal briefing, the Health Minister made a statement in which he said: -

Points of Order

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: I am having difficulty hearing over the interjections on the other side of the House.

Hon PETER FOSS: I am having trouble talking.

The PRESIDENT: We thank Hon Derrick Tomlinson for his contribution.

Debate Resumed

Hon PETER FOSS: Mr President, I am having trouble talking.

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Hon N.D. Griffiths: Hon Derrick Tomlinson is the only member who does not recognise the fact that Hon Peter Foss is shouting.

Hon PETER FOSS: Mr President, I will have to raise my voice again because I am getting a lot of interjections, even from ministers, who should know better. The minister's statement continues -

For example -

Hon N.D. Griffiths interjected.

Hon PETER FOSS: I am sorry, Mr President, but I am having problems.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: You are; you can't sustain an argument.

Hon PETER FOSS: This is the third time I have tried to read this sentence and I have been interrupted every time by the minister. The statement continues -

For example, the State cannot direct the operator to conform to government policies or ethical standards in the provision of public hospital services, despite the fact that the State is paying for the services, and is ultimately accountable for them.

The minister repeated that same line about ethical standards in the media. That was clearly intended to continue the smear and slur on private operators that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has always been on about. The Government was trying to undermine confidence in private operators. Hon Norman Moore asked the minister to table all the briefings on the performance of the Joondalup and Peel Health Campuses. The answer he got reads -

The tabling of any information of this nature is inconsistent with the treatment of Ministerial briefing material under Freedom of Information legislation.

The Government would not tell us what its material was because it would not look too good for its smear campaign. Hon Norman Moore then asked the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Health in this House -

Does the minister have any evidence to indicate that the ethical standards of staff at Peel and Joondalup Hospitals are lower than the standards at public hospitals . . .

The answer was no. Why then was that line included in the statement by the minister and why does the Government continue to undermine private operators? The reason is that all Government members can do is smear. They are not capable of even the most simple thing.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.

Hon PETER FOSS: Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich should write something for a change because she is obviously incapable of writing; she should practise it.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Calm down.

Hon PETER FOSS: Her mouth is running away with her because that is all she can do. If she as a parliamentary secretary cannot even give a written report to a minister, she is either bone lazy or illiterate.

Hon Alan Cadby: Or both.

Hon PETER FOSS: Yes, she is a bone lazy illiterate.

Probably the best example of how this Government does not do anything is the magnetic resonance imaging issue. We received a leak today that an MRI will now be bought. However, the fascinating aspect about this issue is that when we were in government we put some money in the budget for an MRI. It was actually for the Fremantle Hospital but at any time it could have been moved across into the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children. If that was so important did the Government do it? The money was in the budget to be expended; it was not tied to getting a licence from the federal Government. It could have been done. If Sergeant Bob was concerned in the slightest amount for the children of this State, he could have done it immediately.

Point of Order

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Mr President, this is about the fourth time that the honourable member has referred to the right honourable Bob Kucera, the Minister for Health, as Sergeant Bob. He is not known as Sergeant Bob; he is known as either the Minister for Health or the right honourable Bob Kucera.

Hon Peter Foss: It is honourable; there is no right honourable.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Hon Bob Kucera, Minister for Health. I ask that the member refer to him as such. I will cop the mud but I will not cop Bob -

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The PRESIDENT: Order! There is no debate about what the parliamentary secretary will or will not cop. However, Hon Peter Foss would know that he should correctly refer to honourable members - not right honourable members - of the other Chamber.

Hon PETER FOSS: Thank you, Mr President; I accept that.

Debate Resumed

Hon PETER FOSS: I hope now that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has had an opportunity to make a speech she will stop interrupting mine.

I want to deal with this matter because the minister could have provided in the budget for an MRI machine to go to PMH. The money was in the budget for one and it could have been spent more than a year ago. The federal Government issued an interesting press release in March this year that sets out the truth of the matter. There has not been much truth in this MRI scandal. The press release states -

The Federal Government offered Western Australia \$500,000 to help with the installation of MRI services at the Princess Margaret Hospital. The Federal Minister for Health wrote to State Health Minister, Bob Kucera, with the offer.

This is the \$500 000 to help run the MRI service. The press release continues -

“I wish to propose a way forward -

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.

Hon PETER FOSS: Will you shut up!

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Don't get nasty.

Hon PETER FOSS: Just shut up! I have a few minutes left. I am trying to read something out and the member has said more words in this debate than I have, so she should just shut up!

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: That is very unfair because you never stop interjecting on me and I handle it; you don't.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Peter Foss has a point. I would not have put it in those terms but the sentiment is the same.

Hon PETER FOSS: Thank you, Mr President. The press release continues -

“I wish to propose a way forward for a MRI for the Princess Margaret Hospital,” she said. “The Commonwealth Government offers \$500,000 towards the cost of locating a MRI unit at this site to assist the State in providing care to the children in WA.”

Senator Patterson made the offer to the State Government after the expert, independent body, the MRI Monitoring and Evaluation Group (MEG), -

That is an expert group -

noted that WA was not disadvantaged in the provision of MRI services to children in the State compared to all Australian children.

That indicates the nonsense that has come from the State minister. The press release continues -

The expert body advised Senator Patterson that children aged less than 14 years in WA received scans paid for by Medicare at a rate of almost 10 per cent higher than the national average.

However, the expert group agreed to conduct a further study to examine whether children were disadvantaged by the absence of Medicare eligible machines in all specialist children's hospitals in Australia.

Senator Patterson said, “I am concerned about the children of WA, as are the Liberal Western Australian Senators and Members and the Western Australian Opposition Health Minister, with whom I have had discussions. This Government takes its responsibility seriously.

“I have therefore written to Mr Kucera today and offered a grant of \$500,000 to the WA government. This will assist in the cost of installing a machine at PMH to address the needs of children requiring scans as inpatients.

“However, as there is clearly no need for enhanced access to Medicare-funded scans . . .

This relates to in-hospital scans, not Medicare-funded scans. Members should keep in mind that in-hospital scans are paid for by the State Government anyway. Therefore, the minister was talking nonsense; the Medicare

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funding is not for in-hospital scans but for people who go for a scan as outpatients. The minister is talking about an absolute myth. More Medicare-assisted scans occur in Western Australia than anywhere else in Australia and the State Government pays for the in-hospital ones anyway. This indicates the nonsense from the minister. The press release continues -

“Should Mr Kucera believe that Medicare eligibility for a machine located at PMH is a priority within the State health system, I am happy to facilitate a transfer of Medicare eligibility for another machine in WA.”

Members may wonder whether that will happen. The press release continues -

Senator Patterson said the Federal Government had supported the Northern Territory to enable it to transfer a privately-owned machine to its hospital.

Has that offer been taken up? No. The minister prefers to trumpet things as opposed to doing something about them. This Government is all about press releases, not about doing anything. The press release continues -

Senator Patterson said the offer to WA mirrored the one made to the South Australian government to assist with the installation of a machine at the Adelaide Women’s and Children’s Hospital. The \$500,000 grant was made on the condition that it not seek Medicare eligibility for two years.

All that the Government needs to do is say that it will not seek Medicare eligibility for two years and the \$500 000 will pay for more than one year. The South Australian Government understands that this is a good idea; this minister cannot. The minister has had to finally accept his rhetoric about children on the hospital’s waiting list and that it is about time he spent some money on it. However, what did he manage to do? By having this argument with the federal Government since he has been in government, he has avoided having to spend the money that we put in the budget. He has cynically used the money that we put in the budget to try to prop up his promises to the public of Western Australia while blaming the Commonwealth Government when, plainly, he was wrong about the Medicare argument.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: You are wrong and you know it.

Hon PETER FOSS: Come on! All the time he was wrong and all he has managed to do is find himself a few more dollars to keep up the extravagant claims that have been made by this Government. Members of this Government are a cynical lot. They promise the world and issue press releases yet do nothing. The parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Health epitomises the way this Government works. She does not know her portfolio. She does not know her policy. She cannot do a job when it is assigned to her. She cannot even write things down. She can only sneer when the facts are totally against her. It is time for this Government to realise that when it is elected to govern, it must carry out its promises and do things. It is not enough for government members to just moan and criticise and think they have done their job. This Government is here to govern and make things happen. However, all that has happened since members opposite have been in government is that we have had more ambulance bypasses and longer waiting lists, both of which members opposite used to trumpet when in opposition. The parliamentary secretary is a total failure and epitomises exactly why this Government will always fail. This Government will always fail because it is incapable of doing anything and it is incapable of telling the truth. It is fascinating that members opposite seem to think like Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon Johnson had a set of notes in his pocket containing false statistics and said, “The Vietnam War is not happening; but, if it is happening, we are winning it.” The Government is not winning this task, because it is not doing anything. The Government’s statistics are false and the Government is false.

HON BARBARA SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [10.31 am]: This motion is that this House recalls the Labor Party’s pre-election claims that it “understood the public health system” and “would fix the health system” and calls on the Government to explain a number of things.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: Get rid of John Howard for a start.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: We are talking about this State Government, which has a responsibility for health.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members of the ministry may be leading the parliamentary secretary into bad ways if they continue with their interjections.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: The interjections have tempted me to use a football phrase; that is, Bob Kucera seems to have been very good at flick passing to the federal Government the State’s responsibilities. I will follow up the issue that Hon Peter Foss raised.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson interjected.

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The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Derrick Tomlinson will not disrupt the member's speech.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: Thank you, Mr President. Hon Peter Foss spoke about the magnetic resonance imaging scanner debacle in this State. The last budget of the former coalition Government allocated \$2 million from the sale of AlintaGas to purchase an MRI scanner for Fremantle Hospital. Some weeks ago I asked a question without notice about where that money was and was told it was in the Health Department's public works budget. I ask today, on the day of the budget speech: where is that \$2 million that has been allocated for the purchase of an MRI machine at Fremantle Hospital; will the State Government now purchase an MRI machine for Princess Margaret Hospital for Children; and will the Government take up the Commonwealth's offer of \$500 000 for the annual recurrent costs for an MRI machine at both Fremantle and Princess Margaret Hospitals? That will be the question on people's lips today.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Far too many people who have not received the call to contribute to this debate seem to be contributing.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: One of the phrases in this motion is "understood the public health system". I thought that with all the glossies the Labor Party put out when in government, and with all its talk prior to the last election, it would have made sure that in trying to fix the public health system it tried to understand the needs of the public. Three weeks ago I initiated a petition in the Fremantle and Rockingham region. That petition was presented to the Parliament yesterday. That petition, which after that short time of three weeks contains almost 5 000 signatures, calls on this Government to put an MRI machine into both Fremantle and Princess Margaret Hospitals. If the Government does not think that is an example of people demanding something in an area, then it had better do its homework. If it wants to fix the health system, it should ask the people what they want to have fixed.

Hon Kim Chance: I take it that is a petition to the Commonwealth Parliament.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: No. It is a petition to the State Parliament. It urges the state Minister for Health to purchase an MRI machine out of the \$2 million that was set aside from the sale of AlintaGas.

Hon Kim Chance: Why would you not send it to the Commonwealth?

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: Because it is not the Commonwealth's responsibility to fix the health system.

Hon Kim Chance: Are you saying that an MRI machine is not a commonwealth responsibility? Why is it that in every other State it is a commonwealth responsibility but in Western Australia it is not?

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: I will take a moment to inform the House of the ignorance of the state Labor Party in thinking that it is the Commonwealth's responsibility to purchase an MRI machine.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Not to purchase it.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: The Leader of the House just asked me whether I realised it was the Commonwealth's responsibility to purchase an MRI machine. That is an ignorant statement.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Barbara Scott will address her comments to the Chair, and other members will not address their comments anywhere.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: Thank you, Mr President. The Leader of the House asked me whether I thought it was the Commonwealth Government's responsibility to purchase an MRI machine. Perhaps I can give him a short lesson on the health budget.

Hon Kim Chance: Are you saying the Commonwealth has no role in funding the operation of an MRI machine?

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: The Leader of the House said purchase.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Leader of the Government, we are waiting to hear a comment by the person who has the call.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: That statement by the Leader of the House is ignorant of not only the Commonwealth's role but also of the relationship between the Commonwealth and the States in the health arena. I explain to the Leader of the House that the only part of this issue that concerns hospitals in Western Australia that is at all linked to the Commonwealth Government is the issue of a Medicare licence to operate the MRI machines.

Several members interjected.

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Hon BARBARA SCOTT: I do not want to spend the short time that I have in this debate rebutting the ignorant statements made by the Leader of the House, but I inform him that it is the State's responsibility to purchase MRI machines and equip our hospitals.

Hon Kim Chance: What about the licence?

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: The Leader of the House interjected and asked whether I realised it was a commonwealth responsibility to purchase the MRI machines.

Hon Kim Chance: I asked why did your petition not go to the Commonwealth.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: Because it is not the Commonwealth's responsibility to purchase the MRI machines.

Hon Kim Chance: But it is its responsibility to issue the licence.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: The Leader of the House said to purchase the MRI machines.

Hon Kim Chance: I do not think I said that.

The PRESIDENT: Order! This is not question time, and it is not the committee stage of a Bill. Therefore, those members who are participating on that basis should cease, or they should regain their composure out of the Chamber.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: The simple point I was making is that the Commonwealth's role in this matter is to provide a Medicare licence to operate the MRI machines. That is an income-earning aspect of the MRI machines. I repeat: the coalition Government allocated \$2 million from the sale of AlintaGas for the purchase of an MRI machine at Fremantle Hospital. I was told in an answer in this House that that money is sitting in the Health Department's public works budget.

Hon Kim Chance interjected.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: They do not need a licence.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Leader of the House and Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich are not participating in this debate.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: I will return to my original statement. This motion states that prior to the election the Labor Party claimed to understand the public health system and stated that it would fix it. Perhaps the Labor Party ought to have asked Western Australians what they wanted fixed. People in the South Metropolitan Region wanted a magnetic resonance imaging machine at Fremantle Hospital and at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children. In two weeks, nearly 5 000 people have signed a petition urging the State Government to purchase MRI machines for Fremantle Hospital and for Princess Margaret Hospital, and, although this was not in the petition, to seek a licence later.

Hon Kim Chance: That was not in the petition?

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: No. Why would it be? The petition was directed to the State Government.

Hon Kim Chance: Who drew up the petition?

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: I did. There is nothing wrong with that.

Hon Kim Chance: You forgot to tell the people who signed the petition about the licence.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: No, I did not. Debates previously conducted in this House should have absolved the ignorance of members opposite.

Hon Kim Chance interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Is the Leader of the House seeking the call? If so, on what basis?

Hon Kim Chance: No, I am not.

The PRESIDENT: Why is the member participating in the debate?

Hon Kim Chance: Because I thought I could help.

The PRESIDENT: Hon Barbara Scott has the call.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: I object to the interjection by Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich that I am lying - I am not lying. I have done my homework. Obviously, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has not done her homework.

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Magnetic resonance imaging machines can be purchased and put in place by the State Government. A licence from the federal Government is not required to operate such machines. This will allow compensation from the Commonwealth Government every time they are used. The federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Senator Kay Patterson - to whom I have written on behalf of the hospitals - has clearly stated that the Commonwealth Government would advance \$500 000 to the hospitals so that the MRI machines could operate without the hospitals being out of pocket.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: You have lost the argument.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: I have not lost the argument. It is laughable to suggest that I do not know what I am talking about. The member has made an ignorant statement.

If we want to fix the health system, we must look to not only the problems but also the people of Western Australia to determine what they perceive to be the problems.

Seven thousand children are referred to Fremantle Hospital because it is the paediatric, obstetric and gynaecological reference centre. It is also the main teaching hospital south of the river. Any children referred to Fremantle Hospital must first go to Fremantle Hospital, and, if they require an MRI scan, they have to be taken to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. Such technology is a good diagnostic tool.

I refer now to the renal dialysis issue at the Rockingham-Kwinana District Hospital. There are 85 000 people living in Rockingham who, for some years, have been waiting for a renal dialysis unit to be established at the Rockingham campus. The State Government has now allocated that machine to the Peel campus. That is fine for the Peel campus. Mr President, I am sure that you, in your other capacity, are pleased about that. However, in Rockingham there is a higher level of need for renal dialysis, and at the moment people have to travel from Rockingham to Fremantle Hospital for renal dialysis. My constituents have been let down. Once again, this so-called Labor electorate has been discarded.

I was hopeful that the Government would look at the issues concerning children's health in a holistic way; certainly, the Labor Party promised to do that when it came to power. However, I have been disappointed that this has not been the case. One of the programs with which I was originally linked came out in the form of the building blocks program. The report that I brought out about early intervention and assessment and early education in 1994 stated the necessity for early assessment and intervention. It also stated that instead of individually looking at child development, child health and child education, we needed to examine the whole cycle and interaction of health care and education. When talking about young children, these factors cannot be easily separated. The building blocks program, which the State coalition Government introduced, was allocated \$9 million, and it was based on a family support scheme. Child health nurses, or other professionals in that area such as child development officers and early childhood teachers, would visit families when they first brought their babies home from hospital. High-risk families were to be visited on a more regular basis. I am pleased that the Government has decided to strengthen that program, although it is changing the name to align it with its family strength program.

The answers to the questions that I have asked in Parliament over the past few days have left me puzzled, and I am left to wonder if we are not just hearing words. Will \$10 million be allocated to strengthen families? At 2.00 pm today, I will go through the budget with a fine toothcomb to see what is happening to the money that I have asked about. During questions without notice on 7 May, I asked the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Community Development, Women's Interests, Seniors and Youth how much money had been spent on the building blocks program - this is part of the health budget - because there must be an interagency approach when dealing with young children. I also asked what funds had been spent on the program in 2001 and 2002 -

Point of Order

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The funding of the community development program under the minister's portfolio does not bear any relevance to the motion that is being debated.

The PRESIDENT: There is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: The member's interjection confirms my earlier statement about her ignorance and that of the Leader of the House. Yesterday, when I asked the parliamentary secretary how much money from the budget would be spent on the building blocks program and the Government's family strength program, she stated that \$1.2 million would be spent. She further stated that -

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The estimated allocation from the health budget for 2002-03 is \$1.2 million. Any questions about funds allocated by the Department for Community Development - which includes building blocks - should be addressed to the Minister for Community Development.

I had already done that the week before.

Point of Order

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: I would like Hansard to record that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has admitted that she made a mistake.

The PRESIDENT: There is, once again, no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: This Government has been caught right out. My sums would say that, in the answer of 7 May, the total funds allocated for 2002-03 to the Department for Community Development's family strength program, which now includes building block services, is \$2.839 million. The allocation from the health budget is \$1.2 million. That makes a total of about \$4.8 million.

I have an article headed "Early life focus in \$10m family services" from *The West Australian* of 14 May. I would be the first to acknowledge, encourage and congratulate any government that funded an interagency attack on high-risk families at an early stage. I must, however, ask the Government where the rest of the money is coming from. According to the article, the program is \$6 million short. Will the answers be given this afternoon? This Government that said it would fix the health system has been leaking these little stories. It is a good story if it is backed up by the funds. The Opposition will look for the rest of the money this afternoon, and I would be very happy if there were another \$6 million. It is certainly not coming out of the health budget or that of the Department for Community Development. If it comes out of the youth budget, well and good. This kind of early intervention is a real health issue. At a very young age our children must be vaccinated and given healthy diets, and they should be examined for speech and hearing problems. The previous Government established these things in its building blocks program, and I am very pleased that the Minister for Community Development has announced that family strength programs will be worth \$10 million over four years. I look forward to that being in the budget this afternoon.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Do you agree that the Government is doing a good job, then?

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: I have not said that the Government is doing a good job. It is building on the good work that was begun by the coalition Government, which started the building blocks program, targeting the early intervention programs. The program has come out of extremely good research. As I have said a number of times in this Chamber, Western Australia is well placed to develop good policy based on sound research. On Tuesday morning I had the privilege of attending the presentation of the Fiona Stanley medal to a man who has done a lot of work on meningitis. I always come away absolutely stimulated and invigorated from any meeting with Professor Fiona Stanley. She is a state and national treasure. She has given this State a lead in child health research that no other state can boast. The coalition Government built on that research and funded policies that attempted to intervene with high-risk families at an early stage. That is not to say that normal families do not need the kind of help that the coalition Government put into the building blocks program.

Is this Government, which said it would fix the health system, adequately funding a whole range of early intervention programs in addition to the family strength program? That is just one program. I have asked about others in this House and received unsatisfactory answers. Nutrition is a health issue. How many children go to school without having a healthy breakfast, and what is the Government doing about introducing healthy foods into schools? Nutrition plays a very important role in the growth and development of young children.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: Did Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich say that she sponsored an apple? I cannot concentrate and answer all of the interjections, because they all seem to be quite nonsensical.

Early assessment programs, and the early identification of problems are vitally important. A good health system should be the result of a collaborative effort by a number of agencies. I asked a question this week about the number of prescription drugs being given to young children for behavioural problems. This is a health issue, and I have asked the Government to do something about it. However, it has no intention of finding out how many schoolchildren, pre-schoolers and small babies are being given untested drugs, of which nobody knows the long-term effect. A recent report released by a paediatrician from the Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital indicated that 70 per cent of Australian paediatricians and psychiatrists were prescribing untested drugs for things like lack of sleep, fractiousness, anxiety and depression in little children and schoolchildren.

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Dysfunctional and high-risk families can be identified through the building blocks program and the various agencies. In addition to nutrition and the promotion of healthy lifestyles, the issue of prescription drugs should be addressed. Many children live in families in which the relationships are not stable, and they need help. Family violence often leads to children becoming withdrawn and anxious. It is very unhealthy and inappropriate to give children pills every time there is a problem. Pill-popping can be very dangerous.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: As a result of the policies of the federal Liberal Government, the problem will be solved, because they will no longer be able to afford the prescriptions.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: It is inappropriate that this Government does not address the issues.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! One interjection at a time.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: I am directing this criticism at the State Government because we have been told that, nationally, 70 per cent of psychiatrists and paediatricians are prescribing untested drugs to children of school age and younger, for illnesses such as sleeplessness, anxiety and depression which could be addressed by the very good programs I have talked about in building blocks and strengthening families. There is a problem. Fiona Stanley would say that, if we do not have the data, we cannot develop the policy. In a question in this House I asked whether the Minister for Health would try to determine how many doctors in Western Australia were prescribing drugs for these kinds of problems in children. While they may be termed as mental illnesses, many of these problems would be eradicated by a commonsense approach through advice on good parenting, early intervention and home visits for high-risk children. I was extremely disappointed. Fortunately, I have released that information into the public arena and received local media exposure. People feel very strongly about this issue. Little children should not have to grow up in a pill-popping regime. Pill-popping is a very bad habit. The attitude that it is all right is manifested in the drug problems we have today. It is very much a health issue.

It is time this Government endeavoured to fix the health problems by listening to people's concerns. This Government has talked about being a people's Government and being close to the community and consulting. People often approach me on the basis that I have an interest in children because they are concerned about this issue. I have asked questions in the Parliament and received answers to the effect that the Government is not doing anything about it and it has no plans to do anything about children taking drugs because it is not the Government's concern. I will read the answer -

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: What was the question?

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: Would members like me to read the whole question? At the risk of repeating myself -

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Boring us.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich might find it boring. That is a classroom attitude. She does not understand the issue so she says it is boring. I have taught in enough classrooms to know that when children put up their hands because they do not understand something, rather than admit that they do not understand it, they say it is boring.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: I know that I can read it in *Hansard*; that is why I do not want to waste the time of the House.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: At the risk of repeating myself, the question I asked on 14 May about the national survey conducted by the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne was -

- (1) Will the minister conduct an urgent audit of Western Australian children being given untested drugs for behaviour control?

That was after a recent survey indicated that a new generation of psychotropic drugs had joined Ritalin as an answer to behaviour disorders in children. I will not read the whole question because members have heard it. The answer from the parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Health was -

- (1) The issue of prescription drugs for the treatment of behavioural disorders in children is of great concern for the Government.

Herein lies the ignorance of the answer -

A policy on attention deficit hyperactive disorder is being finalised for release in the very near future. The issue of drug prescription will be given consideration in that policy.

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Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: This Government is taking action in this area, which is something your Government didn't do.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: I find alarming the ignorance of the people in this House who are supposed to have responsibility for this area. My question indicated that a new generation of psychotropic drugs has joined Ritalin as a solution to behavioural disorders in children. Ritalin and dexamphetamines are tested and acknowledged by paediatricians as appropriate forms of treatment for attention deficit hyperactive disorder.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Not everyone shares your view.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: I am pointing out to the parliamentary secretary the answer.

I asked about a range of new drugs. What did the Government tell me? It indicated that a policy for attention deficit disorder had been finalised. We know that Ritalin and dexamphetamine are the two drugs prescribed for that. They have been tested and are properly administered by paediatricians. They are not the drugs I asked about and I was not given the answer I sought. I want this Government to find out how many Western Australian doctors are prescribing untested drugs to preschool and school age children.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Why didn't you find out?

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich is in government and her Government has responsibility for the matter.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: You had eight years.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: This report was released in *The Australian* only two weeks ago. Government members have probably not even read it.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.