

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2005

Second Reading

Resumed from 7 April.

MR D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN (Leschenault) [11.24 am]: Underpinning any government is the need for a system to ensure strong financial accountability. It has been seen in the past that those words just do not exist in the Labor Party's vocabulary. On the face of this legislation and the minister's second reading speech, it would appear that the Labor Party has learnt something from its mistakes of the past; it looks to have tightened up its financial accountability provisions and improved the deadlines for annual reports from government departments and agencies. However, as the surface of the legislation is scratched away, it is evident that members opposite have learnt something from the past; that is, they have learnt how to cover things up and reduce accountability in government. Government members are making a fine art of that whole process. Looking through some of this legislation is like taking a trip down memory lane. I refer to the days when the Labor Party did everything possible to avoid scrutiny by the Parliament, media and community generally. That is despite the fact that the Premier has a number of times stressed the need for greater accountability in government, and that the Treasurer who is handling this legislation previously had the title of "Labor spokesperson for accountability". I would have thought that that was a contradiction in terms. I note that the government did not bring that portfolio title into government with it.

Mr M.J. Cowper: It's an oxymoron.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: It is an oxymoron, to put it bluntly.

The Labor Party's policy on accountability contains the following glorious words: A Gallop Labor Government will aim for the highest standards of openness and accountability; the public has a right to know how their money is being spent and how their public services will be delivered; and Labor is committed to strengthening the checks and balances, particularly the agents of accountability that keep government and the public sector open and accountable. Time and again we have seen this government put the agents of accountability against the wall and give them the firing squad treatment. Aspects of this legislation indicate that the government is heading down its previously followed path. For the life of me, I cannot see how this legislation improves the overall degree of accountability of government. The opposition will demonstrate a number of serious concerns about the legislation. In some areas the bill seriously erodes the degree of financial accountability of the government, but this is nothing new for the Labor Party's Treasurer and Premier, who have had many years' practice in the art of cover-up. Indeed, I recall that it was the Premier who assisted then Premier Carmen Lawrence. Time and again the Labor Party did everything possible to withhold information from the Parliament and the community.

That stands in stark contrast to the approach the Liberal Party has taken in the past. Members should bear in mind that the Liberal Party throughout the 1980s used this forum to outline what was going on with the debacle known as WA Inc, which lost billions of taxpayers' dollars and ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Labor government and action taken through the courts. The Liberal Party learnt from the Labor Party's mistakes. Then Premier Richard Court brought to Parliament some excellent legislation. In 2000, the Court government brought to Parliament the Government Financial Responsibility Act 2000, which succinctly improved the level of accountability throughout the ranks of the public sector. Part 2 of the act, headed "Government financial planning and reporting", set out a range of procedures for the government financial strategy statements, government financial projection statements, government midyear financial projection statements - which, as member know, are extremely important - and government financial results reports. The Government Financial Responsibility Act, the Liberal Party's document for true accountability, provided for a very detailed report called the government financial results report. That had to be prepared in accordance with modern reporting standards. In fact, the phrase used in the legislation is "external reporting standards", which were designed essentially to keep up with the latest in accounting practices and, indeed, to take into account the government financial statistics methods, which are very much a statistical-based form of accounting. That piece of legislation held the government of the day and subsequent governments accountable in a number of ways right through to the election period. It provided for quarterly financial statistics and so on. It was a very good piece of legislation and stood in stark contrast to the approach taken in the years before it was enacted.

The Treasurer's indication of what the Financial Administration Legislation Amendment Bill 2005 sets out to achieve is quite interesting. I will quote a couple of sentences from the second reading speech. The Treasurer said -

... Western Australia now lags the rest of Australia with regard to the timeliness of financial reporting.

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That almost implies that we are behind all the other states so we must do something about it. If we look at the detail of this legislation, we find that in a number of areas the timing of reports will be set back. Are we likely to overtake the other states when the Treasurer has thrown us into reverse gear? The Treasurer went on to say -

Although financial reporting at the whole-of-government level is timely in the form of the government financial results report, that report is not subject to audit, given its basis is statistical rather than accounting standards.

That is very interesting, because, as I alluded to earlier, section 14(2) of the Government Financial Responsibility Act states -

A Government Financial Results Report must -

- (a) be prepared in accordance with external reporting standards;

That is the phrase I used earlier. The definition in the act states -

“external reporting standards” means -

- (a) the concepts and classifications set out in GFS Australia; -

They are the statistical Australian Bureau of Statistics based accounting practices -

- (b) the Australian Accounting Standards;

In fact, they are based on modern-day standards. I will return to that magic word “and” later because it is a very important word and has enormous implications in this legislation. The Treasurer said in his second reading speech that the government financial results report is only a statistical report and that we should not worry about that because it does not mean a great deal. When I read the legislation, I found that it is far from it. There is a legislative requirement to ensure that it is not just a statistical report and that it is compiled in full compliance with modern Australian accounting standards.

Let us consider something else the Treasurer said in his second reading speech. He said -

Our departments and statutory authorities have until November and December respectively to table their annual reports in Parliament. That is too long.

Later I will demonstrate that not only has he extended the deadlines in some cases, but also he has taken away the internal departmental discipline, the ministerial discipline and even the discipline on the Treasurer himself to ensure that reports are provided in an orderly and timely manner. The glib words are there: “The government is tightening up on the timeliness of reports, Western Australia does not want to lag behind the other states, and the government does not like this report because it is statistical and is not based on accounting standards.” However, when we scratch the surface and look at the legislation, practices and reports that are in place, we start wondering whether that is really the case. In his second reading speech the Treasurer used the word “rationalising”, and I hope that when we win government, and if I become a minister, I never use that word; I must try not to. The Treasurer went on to say -

It is important that our legislation be amended to address these shortcomings. Rationalising the number of year-end reports and legislating for tighter time frames for all reporting obligations will provide a platform for improved financial reporting in the Western Australian public sector.

What he is actually saying is that at the moment there are reports that provide for financial accountability, so let us chuck them in the bin and we will move on to a different process. That process does not provide for the same amount of information to be made available, for the same discipline on the timeliness of the preparation of reports, or for the same guarantee that modern-day accounting standards will apply, and I will demonstrate that shortly. First, according to the Treasurer’s second reading speech, we must rely extensively on regulations to understand how this legislation will work in practice. The Treasurer went on to say -

Regulations will provide for a phasing-in period of three years for all of the proposed tighter reporting time frames to which I will now refer.

I will ask the Treasurer to get the regulations ready so that he can show them to us during the consideration in detail stage. He has not provided us with a copy of them yet. When I have dealt with Labor ministers on a piece of legislation that is contingent on the detail of the regulations, I have found that the regulations have not been drafted or they are up to draft 33 and are not ready yet. It will be interesting to see those regulations. Again, some crucial accountability matters are not being set in concrete in legislation, but we have to trust the Treasurer and the Labor Party that they will bring in regulations that will do the right thing down the track in some way or another. With the Labor Party’s track record on accountability when it was in government previously, as well as now, the last thing we will do is trust the Labor Party on matters to do with accountability.

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The crunch is that, as the second reading speech states, the government's bill proposes to replace three reports with one annual report on state finances, which will be released within 90 days of the end of the financial year. I will touch on that later because the legislation does not provide for that; there is no legislative guarantee that that will be the case. The bit that really got under my skin was when the Treasurer said -

Cash-based quarterly reporting requirements under the Financial Administration and Audit Act will be discontinued, given the limited relevance of the reports in today's accrual accounting environment.

If a government is wedded to accrual accounting and nothing else, why would it want the cash figures? However, people in the business community know that cash is still king. What method is used by the federal government for its budget? It has a cash-based methodology. There are some very simple and important reasons that we need to continue to have unfettered and open access to cash-based reporting. Figures are still required to be collated on a cash basis. When people look at cash-based accounting figures, they very rapidly get a picture of the government situation with, for example, a build-up of debt, as well as a very good idea of the government's financial management strategies. It is much harder with cash-based financing to cover up things by using intricacies such as capital user charges or by playing around with depreciation figures and the like. As I said earlier, we need look only at the federal situation; the federal budget is still predominantly a cash-based document. I have not heard anyone in accounting circles or the business community say that there is a need to change that method and to lock the federal budget into a totally accrual-based accounting mechanism. Those are a number of aspects of the second reading speech, which is only three pages long, that deal with the core issues of accountability in the process of government.

Let me turn to a couple of those points in a bit more detail. First, this legislation will reduce the amount of information that is released by Treasury and that is available to assist in scrutinising the government's financial mismanagement of this state. For example, as I mentioned earlier, we will see the demise of the Treasurer's annual statements. The Treasurer's annual statements are very concise and important documents for those who want to gain a full handle on public sector finances. In effect, it is a constitutional requirement in the Constitution Act 1889, which provides for a full, detailed account of the consolidated fund. Ironically, I must say that this legislation, on the face of it, erodes a constitutional requirement that established a very important mechanism for financial accountability. However, this government has no qualms whatsoever about eroding constitutional safeguards in this state; we have seen that with the electoral legislation that was before this Parliament recently.

As I understand it - the Treasurer can correct me if I am wrong - the information published in the Treasurer's annual statements will continue to be collated and published in reports, held on computers or wherever, but the information will not be provided in this format and not all this information will eventually be provided publicly. This is, therefore, an extremely important financial document and, I suggest, the most important of the three documents that the Treasurer says he wants to throw in the bin. The consolidated fund is the purest set of accounts. As I said, it is cash based; it records money in and out of the budget and there is very little scope for manipulating results through depreciation, capital user charges or whatever. We can read the figures and know exactly what the situation is. We know, for example, that if there is a cash deficit, it will feed through into the debt situation, or whatever, and we can get a full appreciation of what is really going on in the state. Dare I say that if the government of the day adopts a privatisation approach, which has happened in the past, and uses those proceeds - we have had that debate with the Treasurer before - to pay off debt, for example, to give a long-term recurrent benefit to the state, that sort of thing is picked up adequately in the cash figures. The government finance statistics exclude privatisation proceeds from the bottom line; therefore, we do not get a full appreciation of the practices and methodology that the government of the day is adopting and we do not get full accountability. Therefore, the Treasurer's annual statements are very important.

Another reason the Treasurer's annual statements are important is that they are the only historically consistent set of accounts that enable us to analyse the state's finances over a long period. Looking back at the WA Inc days, we can see why it is very important to continue publishing the statements. In particular, they provide extensive details of trust accounts. I have in front of me a copy of the 2003-04 Treasurer's annual statements. I can see on pages 74 to 77 a full set of trust funds kept by the government. I can see the amounts in the trust funds and there are reference notes that give some detail. At a glance I can look at the trust fund situation in the public sector. As importantly, I can turn later in the statements to page 129 and see, for example, that there is a full trust statement for the Department for Community Development. The statement provides the name of the account, the purpose, the receipts and so on. When a new trust account is established, full details of the account are contained in the statement. Under this legislation there will be no requirement to include that information in this new report, which will take the place of the Treasurer's annual statements. In fact, it is my understanding, from reading the second reading speech and the explanatory memorandum, that that information will not be in there. We in opposition and people in the broader community will be expected to go through dozens or hundreds of annual reports if we want such detailed information about the government's trust funds. We will have to go

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through every single annual report, for example, of the Bunbury Port Authority to determine the state of the external loan sinking fund or whatever. We will have to look for a small footnote at the bottom of the report to see whether something has happened to that fund. For new funds we will have to look at the annual report. We will probably find a footnote somewhere and have to go back to the report to find some detail about it, or whatever. How on earth does that improve financial accountability for government trust funds? It does not do that at all. It buries them in an amorphous mass of annual reports that we will need to look at separately. On numerous occasions oppositions have turned to these pages and pursued matters that relate to these trust funds - we will deal with one today - because they were able to look at them and see the information concisely, clearly, openly and in an accountable way. The government wants to get rid of the report on those trust accounts, deny direct and open access to them and force us to go through hundreds of annual reports to find the same information that we can glean at a glance in the Treasurer's annual statements.

I want to know, when the Treasurer speaks, one good reason that we should accept having all that information buried in annual reports and not provided in one clear, concise document like the Treasurer's annual statements. That is a very important example of how this legislation sets back by volumes the degree of financial accountability in this state. The abolition of the government finance statistics report - I cannot see any other reason for it - smacks of a reaction to the negative political feedback that the government received last year when the Treasurer was caught out trying to mislead the community over the extent of the surplus in the budget.

Mr E.S. Ripper: That is completely misleading. That is just untrue.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: I remind members that when the 2004-05 budget was presented, the estimated budget surplus for 2003-04 at the time was a bit over \$240 million. We found within a matter of months, through the accountability processes that this government wants to dismantle, that there was, in fact, an \$800 million surplus. That caused public outrage as people knew that this government had been overtaxing them, that it had been understating the extent of the surplus and that it had been slamming the federal government for not providing sufficient money when the federal government was providing additional funds. People saw through the way the government was trying to mislead them about the state's finances. The Treasurer's annual statements and the documents that the Treasurer is trying to abolish with this legislation are the exact mechanisms that we need to hold this and any future government accountable for attempting to mislead the community in that way.

This bill proposes that the results will now be included in this new annual report on the state's finances. I believe that will give the government greater flexibility to delay the release of the results until a time that is of greater convenience to the Labor government. I will explain that in a little more detail later. The point at the moment is there are very firm timeframes for the production of this document, the Treasurer's annual statements. The current requirements provide a firm discipline on departmental officers to provide this information in a timely manner, according to strict timeframes, and if they cannot, the minister of the day becomes involved and ultimately responsible for helping to ensure that the document is produced in a timely manner. I will go through that process later to indicate how the government has eroded that aspect of accountability and how these reports could now slip back a few weeks or months, and how the degree of accountability of departmental officers, both directly and through the minister, has been eroded by this legislation. For example, the time limit for the Treasurer's new annual report under this legislation is a guaranteed 150 days. There is nothing in this legislation that provides a legislative guarantee that the report will be provided in under 150 days. Currently, the nearest equivalent - the superior report - must be provided within three months of the end of the financial year. All we know at the moment under this legislation is that this new report that the government is proposing will take two-thirds longer to hit the deck than it did in the past. Gee, call me cynical, but if we were coming up to an election and there was a huge blow-out in the state's finances, or something had gone chronically wrong with them, I would bet the Labor Party would love to sneak that report back a few weeks, a month or even two months. Sure, the minister might have to tell Parliament that the report will be late, but all he will have to say is that the information has come through late from the department or something. I will touch on that in more detail later on. We find that one of the core documents providing for financial accountability will no longer be needed, information contained in that document will no longer be provided, and the time frame for the replacement document will become somewhat vague and nebulous. There is no definite financial guarantee that those time frames will come within a bull's roar of matching the current situation.

There are a number of aspects to this argument, but one I shall touch on specifically is that the Treasurer's annual statements have not been supported only by the Liberal party over the years; they have actually had very strong backing from the Labor Party itself. The Premier, when he was Leader of the Opposition, in no uncertain terms expressed support for the Treasurer's annual statements - the current documents. I will read from *Hansard* of 13 October 1998. Dr Gallop, in reference to the Treasurer's annual statements said -

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The Treasurer's annual statements provide details of actual expenditure against the appropriated amounts on a departmental and agency basis. Those statements also provide details on the actual revenue raised by the tax type and expenditure against the Treasurer's advance account. They are a key document in the financial accountability of government.

Those are not my words, but the words of the present Premier.

Mr E.S. Ripper: When was that statement made?

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: On 13 October 1998.

Mr E.S. Ripper: That was two years before the passage of the Government Financial Responsibility Act 2000.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: Absolutely. The Treasurer took part in the debate on that legislation, and I took great delight in reading comments by the Treasurer and the Premier on that bill. When, in that debate, did the Treasurer ever suggest that the Treasurer's annual statements should be done away with? I cannot find any mention of his saying it. I can find the present Premier referring to the statements as vitally important documents. He refers to them as "a key document in the financial accountability of government." *Hansard* records of the debate on the bill referred to by the Treasurer - now the Government Financial Responsibility Act - show that Dr Gallop had a lot to say about a number of matters, but he did not suggest that the Treasurer's annual statements should be abolished in the manner that the Treasurer is doing now. So there it is - even the current Premier has pointed to the enormous significance of this legislation.

The time frame for this legislation is just too clever by half. Clause 2(3) states -

A day for the coming into operation of section 31 is not to be fixed under subsection (1) until the prescribed period referred to in section 14A(1) of the *Government Financial Responsibility Act 2000* is 90 days or less.

Clause 31 of the bill repeals section 14 of the Government Financial Responsibility Act and presumably is a prerequisite for clause 32, which introduces this glorious new report on which the government wants to pin all its hopes of covering things up. The government states that the period will be brought back to 90 days. We are told not to worry that it is presently 150 days; it will be brought back to 90 days. We will be given this marvellous new report that does not contain details of trust funds, and does not provide all the cash accounting information necessary to keep the government accountable. It will not contain a lot of information, but we will receive it within 90 days. We all breathe a sigh of relief and say that is fine; however, further in the bill, we find proposed section 14A(1), which reads -

The Treasurer is to release within the prescribed period -

- (a) an Annual Report on State Finances for each budget year; and
- (b) an opinion of the Auditor General prepared and signed under section 14B(1) in relation to the Annual Report on State Finances.

The "prescribed period" is defined in proposed section 14A(2) thus -

- (a) 150 days after the end of the financial year;

There is the 150 days; so we know that this new report, which does not contain all the details needed to keep the government accountable, but is probably better than a bash in the belly with a wet fish, will arrive 150 days after the end of the financial year. It is not 90 days, as it is now, but 150 days. The proposed section continues

or

- (b) the period after the end of the financial year prescribed by the regulations,
whichever is the shorter period.

This government loves the word "or", but I will come to that later on. The government is saying that we should trust it to have regulations in place within three years to require this reporting mechanism to be completed and take effect within 90 days. Hang on a minute - why not put that in legislation? Why should we trust a political party that has been responsible for some absolutely amazing episodes of financial mismanagement in this state, and has covered up at every opportunity, to bring in regulations within three years?

Mr M.J. Cowper interjected.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: Exactly. Imagine if, coming up to the election, the government had found that there was an \$800 million blow-out in the cost of the railway. Surely there would not be a blow-out in the cost of the railway! Hang on a minute - there was one! It is now up to about \$400 million.

Mr M.J. Cowper: It is called a contingency.

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Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: I am sorry - it is a contingency, or an escalation of costs, or something like that. Imagine if the government had an \$800 million or \$1 billion blow-out. Imagine if the railway, as so many people in the private sector are predicting at the moment, ends up costing \$2 billion or \$2.5 billion, and there is an election coming up, and the figures show up in the government statistics. There are ways in this legislation for a report like that to be fudged back; the time frame can be put back and there is no legislative requirement for this new report to be provided in a timely manner. It could be allowed to slip back. The government could hold back those regulations. At the moment, unfortunately, there is no legislative requirement - there is only a regulatory promise - that that report will be provided within a 90-day period. My simple question is: why not provide a legislative time frame? Let us not make it three years, let us make it two years. Within two years that report will be provided within 90 days. This is a bit of an academic argument anyway, because the report does not contain the information provided in the current Treasurer's annual statements. The point I am trying to make is that the government is saying it is tightening up the time frames, but, straightaway, the government has not only gutted the key document of financial responsibility, but also pushed back the legislative time frame for that document.

I come now to the word "or". Clause 28(3) contains what appears to be a very innocuous little change. It reads -

Section 4 is amended in the definition of "external reporting standards" by deleting "and" after paragraph (a) and inserting instead -

" or ".

I looked at that and thought it a bit odd. Proposed section 14A refers to this glorious new report that the government wants to introduce - the Annual Report on State Finances - its flagship of financial accountability through the fiscal year, and this subclause changes a word in the definition of "external reporting standards" contained in the Government Financial Responsibility Act. Section 14 of that act provides that, at the moment, the government financial results report, which must be produced within three months of the end of each fiscal year, must be prepared in accordance with external reporting standards.

In looking at the way in which this bill works, particularly clause 32, it can be seen that the government has applied a similar definition to the external reporting standards by which the annual report on state finances must be measured; in other words, the standards upon which the report must be based. Proposed section 14A(3), which is contained in clause 32, states -

An Annual Report on State Finances must -

- (a) be prepared in accordance with external reporting standards;

The government has used the same wording that currently applies to documents of accountability. Why is there a change from the word "and" to "or"? The answer is very simple. At the moment, the definition of external reporting standards could not be clearer. I refer to the Government Financial Responsibility Act 2000 - the Liberal Party document for accountability - which this Labor Party is now dismantling. Clause 4 states -

"external reporting standards" means -

- (a) the concepts and classifications set out in GFS
Australia; and
- (b) the Australian Accounting Standards;

The government is changing the "Australian Accounting Standards" definition a little bit but I do not have any qualms with that because that is just to keep up with the current situation. However, it is deleting "and" and replacing it with "or". What that means is very simple. The new report that this government is bringing - the annual report on state finances - does not have to comply with the Australian accounting standards. That is what the amendment means. The government can then take its pick. It can apply government financial statistics standards or Australian Bureau of Statistics standards. I do not mean to sound too demeaning. It can apply a statistical methodology to one of the key documents of financial accountability in Western Australia or it can apply Australian accounting standards. How on earth it is an improvement in financial accountability to take away the legislative requirement that a document dealing with the state's finances should have to comply with the Australian accounting standards of the day is beyond me. The definition of Australian accounting standards will be -

... the accounting standards and other requirements issued by the Australian Accounting Standards Board;

It will not be government financial statistics requirements or anything like that. The government can say that it will have a GFS-based annual report on state finances. It will not take into account the proceeds of privatisation, for example. It will be based on a statistical methodology and it will not be based on modern day Australian

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accounting standards. That is what the amendment means. By removing the word “and” and replacing it with “or” the government will take us back at least five years in financial accountability.

Mr G.M. Castrilli interjected.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: That is a very good point. The government is good at this. It has provided a financial management smorgasbord. It can decide which figures will cover up its financial mismanagement. I can imagine the Treasurer thinking that in a few years. They are stuffing up with the railway and charging too many taxes in other areas. Debts will creep up and it will be out of control again. They will decide which figures will cover up those things the most. The Treasurer and I have had this debate before; I have quoted figures when he was in opposition on what he thought was the best way to analyse the bottom line of the budget. He has looked at government financial statistics figures, cash figures and so on. I can remember him talking about having a budget in surplus when the ALP first took office. In actual fact it was in deficit. It was only subsequently when the government hiked up the tax rates and so on that it was able to smooth over the deficit. In the early days, had the government presented a budget in the same way as the federal budget has to be presented each year, the bottom line would have shown a deficit. The government was able to use accrual figures and avoid the cash figures. There will be no legislative requirement for the Labor Party and the Treasurer to apply both the government financial statistics methodology and modern day Australian accounting standards.

I turn to the timeliness of reports as provided for under this legislation. I have some major concerns. The rhetoric of the minister’s second reading speech is certainly not borne out by scrutiny of the detail of the legislation. For example, the bill provides for 128 days for agencies to deliver their annual reports along with the Auditor General’s opinion. That is presented as a “tightening” of the current time lines. The Financial Administration and Audit Act demands audited departmental annual reports to be provided by 31 October. That is five days earlier than the 128 days proposed by Labor. I am trying to work out how allowing an additional five days for an annual report to be presented is streamlining the time lines. The detail of the legislation shows that the two things do not marry up. I will go into more detail later during the consideration in detail stage. Very importantly, not only are some of the time lines extended, but also the discipline on departmental officers and on ministers and the Treasurer within those time frames is removed. If a deadline is not met, a minister is required to troop to Parliament and advise that an annual report is not ready and give a reason. A person can bet his bottom dollar that the way this government blames public servants it will say that such and such information did not come through from the department quickly enough or whatever. That is basically what this provides for. There are no other checks and balances as there are in the current legislation that provide in some cases, for example, for departmental officers who are supposed to provide information up the line within a certain period but cannot do so to seek approval from the minister to provide information later. That brings the minister in straightaway. That sets a firm time frame for the departmental officers to work within. It puts them on the spot; it cracks the whip on them. If, for some genuine reason, they cannot meet the time frame, it brings in the minister and starts to make him accountable well before the final time frame for the annual report. It is like cracking the whip at every stage to make sure the reports are presented in a timely manner. As I said earlier, if there are things the government wants to cover up, it has a couple of its mates in a department who can make sure that information does not flow through too quickly or whatever. I do not think I am too cynical in suggesting that of the Labor Party because it has political appointments everywhere. All it has to do is hold back the progress of some of the information through the new system. The minister has only to come to the Parliament and say that he is terribly sorry and that his department did not provide information on time. It could be before an election and people will not find out about the blow-out on the railway or whatever it might be. Quite clearly, as we will see later, this legislation takes us backwards concerning time limits.

Two months is the current time frame for annual statements to be provided to the minister and the Auditor General. In other words, 31 August. The Auditor General has two months to audit annual statements and provide an opinion to the minister. Agencies have to release the audited report and opinion within 21 days of receiving it. Very importantly, the Auditor General has the capacity to release an interim report if he is unable to meet his two-month deadline. Our reading of the legislation is that that has gone. The safeguard disappears under this legislation. The moment the powers of the Auditor General start to be eroded, it erodes the degree of financial accountability of the government’s finances. This has been previously recognised in debate. The Labor Party has come out publicly on this. One of its direction statements carried the Treasurer’s and Premier’s mug shots - when the Treasurer had the title of Labor’s spokesperson for accountability; the marvellous oxymoron pointed out earlier by the member for Murray. The document was obviously endorsed by the Treasurer and the Premier. It states, in part -

The Auditor General is one of the most important “checks” on improper conduct and misuse of public resources by government. It is vital that any changes to the legislation governing the Auditor General do not undermine the Office’s independence and effectiveness.

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Therefore, why do away with the provision for the Auditor General to produce an interim report if he cannot meet the two-month deadline for a full report? How will that in any way improve accountability? All it will do is set things back. Many of the time frames that we are talking about now were put in place by Labor Party amendments in 1990. These are things the Labor Party believed at one stage would be good to have but is now prepared to let slide.

Under Labor's new framework, public accountability could be undermined in a number of ways. An agency could hold up the preparation of accounts, because there will be no firm two-month time limit. The Auditor General could hold up reports - I am not suggesting he would do that - because there will be no two-month time limit, and neither will there be a requirement for an interim report if he cannot meet the time frame for the main report. An agency, or people within it, could engage in the delaying mechanism of deliberately creating issues for the Auditor General to resolve. That is quite foreseeable. There will be no compunction for the release of an audited report within three weeks of its return from the Auditor General. That would be very handy if the Auditor General's opinion were a critical one. Also, as I said earlier, there will be no need for departmental officers to report delays to the minister. Section 65 of the Financial Administration and Audit Act imposes a firm discipline on departmental officers. It is headed "Application for extension of time" and states in part that application may be made by an accountable officer to the minister for an extension of the period within which the accountable officer is required to comply with the various sections that detail the need to provide information. That holds departmental officers accountable for their actions, brings the minister into the process and provides a firm and definite degree of accountability. In other words, it holds the minister ultimately responsible.

Under this legislation, the position of principal accountable officer, which each government agency is required to designate under section 56 of the Financial Administration and Audit Act, will become a thing of the past. Clause 9 of the legislation proposes to repeal section 56 and replace the position of principal accountable officer with the position of chief finance officer. Why would the government want to repeal the arrangements dealing with the principal accountable officer and water down some of the important provisions in the FAAA that deal with the principal accountable officer? Why would the government want to do away with this position and bring in a person with a completely different title? The obligations of the chief finance officer will be significantly different from those of the position that the government is seeking to abolish. Clause 9 of the bill states in proposed new section 56(2) -

The chief finance officer for a department or statutory authority is responsible to the accountable officer or accountable authority, as the case requires, for -

- (a) the preparation of financial information to facilitate the discharge of statutory reporting obligations of the department or statutory authority;
- (b) the provision of advice on the effectiveness of accounting and financial management information systems and financial controls in meeting the requirements of the department or statutory authority;
- (c) the provision of advice concerning the financial implications of, and financial risks to, the department's or statutory authority's current and projected services;
- (d) the development of strategic options for the future financial management and capability of the department or statutory authority; and
- (e) the development of financial management skills within the department or statutory authority.

That is pretty vague. Compared with section 56 of the Financial Administration and Audit Act, it pales into insignificance. Section 56(2) states -

The principal accounting officer for a department or a statutory authority shall be responsible to the accountable officer or the accountable authority, as the case may require, -

That is similar to the wording in the bill, but it then becomes different -

for the keeping of such accounting and financial management information systems as will allow confirmation that all departmental or statutory authority revenues and expenditures have been brought to account and for the day to day supervision of the accounting functions and the proper operation of the accounting systems of that department or statutory authority.

In other words, the FAAA holds the principal accountable officer directly responsible for the keeping of such information. The chief finance officer as proposed under this bill will have a more vague and far broader responsibility for the preparation of information and the provision of advice and so forth. Why not keep it as tight as it is under the Financial Administration and Audit Act? If the Treasurer wants to bring in these other nebulous matters, by all means do so, but why not insert into the new legislation the same tight discipline that is

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in the FAAA? This legislation constitutes a major reduction in financial responsibility within departmental networks. We strongly urge the Treasurer to tighten this provision. We need to ensure that the chief finance officer is held lawfully responsible to maintain the integrity of the financial and information systems within each department and agency.

We also have some concerns about the provisions with regard to the Parliamentary Services Department. On the face of it, hopefully it is just a name change, but during consideration in detail we will ask some questions about this matter, because we want to ensure that it does not in any way erode the independence of the Parliament.

One of the reasons the government is saying that we should not hang around with this legislation but need to move on with it quickly is that it is supposed to make provision for the final fortnightly pay for government employees throughout the state. This financial year there are 27 fortnightly pays. I think the last time that occurred was in 1993-94. Since that time, departments and agencies have been required to put one day's pay a year into a suspense account, which is operated in accordance with the Financial Administration and Audit Act, so that when this year came around a huge chunk of money would be in the kitty and the government would be able to pay its bills. We want to know what has gone wrong. *The Treasurer's Annual Statements 2003-04* - one of a series of those magnificent documents of financial accountability that the Treasurer wants to get rid of - makes some comments about the relevant suspense account at page 79. It details an amount for accrued salaries of just over \$105 million. It is just above the consolidated entity holding account of \$1.2 billion, but we will touch on that at another time. I am interested in this, because I cannot see how that comprises one-twenty-seventh of the government's wages bill. We will be interested to see what Treasurer's Instructions have been released over the years to ensure that money is put into the accrued salaries suspense account so that sufficient funds will be available for that purpose. We will be interested to hear the government's views on whether that \$105 million will be enough to plug the gap. On our reading of the current situation, we do not need this particular legislative provision to ensure that government employees receive their twenty-seventh fortnightly pay this year. I can understand that, on the face of it, there is a bit of a technicality, because although the legislation provides that money can be put into a suspense account, it does not state directly that money can be taken out and used directly for this purpose. That is obviously the purpose of clause 7 of this legislation, which states in proposed new subsection (2a) -

Moneys standing to the credit of a suspense account under subsection (2) may be transferred as and when needed for application in connection with any commitment . . .

I can understand why clause 7 has been included in this bill but the opposition is not convinced that it is necessary. A person would have rocks in his head if he were to question the validity of the government's actions in taking money out of that expense account to pay public servants. The opposition would not seek to raise a technical problem and threaten to take the government to court to prevent it from paying public servants. It would encourage the government to pay their twenty-seventh pay on time. We wonder why this clause needed to be sneaked into the bill, albeit we do not have a problem with clause 7. I will come to that in a moment. However, we will question it during consideration in detail.

I also want to know who initiated the bulk of this report. The opposition is scratching to find how it really improves accountability. We can find some areas in which it either reduces the degree of accountability or provides no legislative guarantee that accountability provisions will be adhered to. The opposition wants to know whether the Labor Party canvassed its officers on this matter or whether it was raised in some other way. We will talk about that in some detail later.

The opposition will seek to have the legislation split so that clause 7, the part that deals with the twenty-seventh fortnightly payday, can be dealt with expeditiously so that all government employees can be paid their twenty-seventh pay. However, we will move to refer the rest of the bill to a committee to be scrutinised in detail. Its referral to a committee will enable the bill to be scrutinised in detail and digested and it will address the opposition's concerns, and we will come back to the Parliament with some amendments. We will then be delighted to assist the government, provided we do not lose any of the present accountability mechanisms. If the government is not prepared to agree to the bill's referral to a committee, the opposition will oppose the legislation. It will work with the government in any way whatsoever to ensure that public servants and government employees throughout the state will receive the pay they will be due this year. As I said, we are not convinced this legislation is necessary to achieve that anyway, but we will ask detailed questions about that later.

The bottom line of the motive for this legislation is that this Labor government has brought something before the Parliament that does not go anywhere near improving financial accountability. However, it detracts in some very serious ways from the degree of financial accountability that we have begun to take for granted and that has been necessary to keep the government of the day honest over the years. I look forward to the Treasurer's response after my colleague the member for Vasse has had his say. I hope the Treasurer will take our suggested amendment in good faith. None of the provisions in this legislation is urgent, bar one; namely, the clause

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dealing with the twenty-seventh pay. If the government is dinkum about ensuring high standards of accountability in this state, it will support the opposition's amendment; if not, it will show that accountability is going backwards and that it has learnt nothing from WA Inc other than how to perfect the art of cover-up.

MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse) [12.27 pm]: I rise to support the positions advocated by the member for Leschenault who, I hasten to say, has done an excellent job analysing many of the technical aspects of this proposed amendment.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Notwithstanding the fact that he has got it almost totally wrong.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is a matter of interpretation. The member for Leschenault has done an excellent job analysing many of the technical aspects of this proposed amendment and how it will impact on the specific financial reports that the government generates for perusal by not only this Parliament but also the people of Western Australia.

In essence, this bill seeks to replace three forms of financial reporting by an annual report on the state's finances. I note with interest that in his second reading speech the Treasurer highlights the following features of the bill.

consolidates and streamlines annual financial reporting by the Treasurer;

There is no doubt that will happen. To continue -

improves the timeliness of annual and quarterly financial reporting by the Treasurer and annual reporting by government departments;

When the opposition analysed the bill it discovered that it goes some way to removing up to 20 accountability mechanisms enshrined in legislation.

Mr E.S. Ripper: You shouldn't confuse unnecessary and additional paperwork with improved accountability; that is just a waste of taxpayers' money.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: We shall assess the impact of the bill on accountability. The member for Leschenault has done an excellent job of highlighting some areas in which that will occur. The net outcome of the bill will be the watering down of the essential financial information provided by this state. Its presentation will be made more complex and it will quite clearly be made more difficult for people to understand. Despite the protestations of the Treasurer, I have no doubt that the timeliness with which this information will be made available to this chamber and the people of this state will be under threat.

I cast myself in the role of perhaps a shareholder in a public company, who is attending the company's annual meeting.

Mr E.S. Ripper: That is a very good example.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: In such a meeting the chairman might stand and say, "Listen shareholders, we've had in this company a perfectly serviceable set of financial records that have served us well for many years. I propose to change them and to make them more complex and more difficult to understand, and I will not deliver them to you in a timely manner." That chairman would be run out of office by an irate group of shareholders. The public of Western Australia does not have that capacity and that is why people rely on the voice of the opposition to scrutinise and examine the government's actions. There is no doubt in my mind and in the minds of all who occupy the opposition benches - not necessarily all at this time, of course - that, in light of the clauses in this bill, the government is all about reducing accountability.

This government is working its way into a second term. It has displayed already an increasingly arrogant attitude towards the institution of this Parliament. We saw examples of that again today. Members on the opposition benches, and I am sure the people of this state, smell something suspicious. We ask ourselves: what tracks is the government trying to hide and what financial bad news is it giving itself the tools to hide in the future? The member for Leschenault has highlighted that the time changes in this reporting mechanism, particularly in an election cycle, will give the Treasurer and the government the capacity to delay the release of information to the public for fair and adequate scrutiny. This may relate to surpluses, especially after it was discovered last year that the government taxed the state into submission to get the fattest surplus in the history of government in Western Australia.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Seven per cent economic growth - the best on record. You can't stand it, can you? Best business conditions ever.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: This is the highest-taxing state government in the history of the state, producing some of the fattest budget surpluses imaginable and the Treasurer says this is great news, only to be howled down by the public of Western Australia because the public knows what it is about. This bill will give the government the capacity to hide from that. The government does not want this information brought forward in a timely manner.

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I note with some interest the continual appearance of the Treasurer. He is like a squeaky wheel bumping down a one-way road. It is undeniable that he wants a tool to hide the fact that this government is the highest-taxing government in the history of this state. He wants tools to hide the government's incapacity to manage government business. A minister of the Crown has claimed in this chamber that the government does not have cost blow-outs; it has "budget adjustments", and members opposite wonder why people are sceptical about the government's efforts to change the way in which finances are reported in this state. The truth is that people cannot predict what financial outcomes or economic news the government will try to hide in the future. We should deny the government the opportunity to have the tools to hide that information. I am surprised sometimes by the level of understanding of members opposite of some of the bills we debate.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: Are you reading from notes? Have you got a written speech there? It is against the rules of house, I advise you.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am interested to hear the noises from yonder from the member for Peel.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: I am listening to you on taxation because they tell me you are very inventive in the way you run your taxation.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I hear the call of the member for Peel. I heard him comment yesterday on the loss of steel from the railway line.

Mr N.R. Marlborough interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): If the member for Peel wishes to make a contribution to the debate, he can step up later, but the member for Vasse has the call at the moment.

Mr N.R. Marlborough interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I call the member for Peel to order for the first time.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I feel sorry for the residents of Peel because I know they feel guilty: they know that having the member for Peel live in their area is denying a perfectly good village somewhere in the world its idiot, yet the member sits in here and occasionally bursts into life and makes the most inane comments about nothing.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We do not mind humour in this house, but the last comment was somewhat unparliamentary and the member should withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I did not hear it.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: As the Minister for Disabilities, I have just left a group of people who suffer from intellectual disability. That particular phrase used by the member went out of fashion many years ago. It is totally unparliamentary to call a fellow member of Parliament an idiot.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Would the member like to withdraw that comment.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: On your advice, Mr Acting Speaker, I withdraw.

Debate Resumed

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Of course, I did not directly call the member an idiot, as the minister may well have heard. I merely referred to the fact that his presence representing the people of Peel was denying a village somewhere of its idiot. If people choose to make that deduction, that is their choice; they clearly know him a lot better than I do.

In relation to changing financial reporting regimes and the techniques by which financial reporting occurs, I refer to the words of the member for Belmont, the now Treasurer, in this house in 1998 regarding budget information; I believe a very good point was made that I stand to defend today. He said -

On the one hand the Government is saying that it is improving the presentation of budget information and it has instituted reforms in the presentation of financial information, yet on the other hand -

Mr N.R. Marlborough: You are reading your speech.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am reading from *Hansard*. The quote continues -

those reforms and changes are making it more difficult for members of Parliament and the public to compare what the Government has done or to examine the history of funding . . .

That point was made by the member for Leschenault; namely, that a number of the financial reports the government is about to replace, particularly the Treasurer's annual statements, are some of the few cash-based

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documents available to the opposition and the public of Western Australia on a consistent historical basis to assess the financial performance of the government. That cuts to the core of today's issue. The government is hell-bent on changing the way it presents its financial information and on hiding from proper scrutiny.

The member for Leschenault highlighted the issue of accountability. He rightly pointed out that when Labor was in opposition, the member for Belmont was the opposition spokesperson for accountability. The current government spoke at great length at the time in a policy document about setting a new direction and about its intent to be accountable at all times. Statements were made about members opposite delivering a government that would adopt and accept the principle of openness, accountability and fair representation in government at all times. Terms were used such as changing a culture of secrecy, and accountability providing proper checks and balances in government, yet as we go into lap two of the electoral cycle, the curtains are coming down and the smoke machines are beginning to pump out smoke to cloud our capacity and the capacity of the people of Western Australia to examine the government. As I said before, we need to do all we can to prevent the government's access to this apparatus to ensure we remain informed so that the government is subjected to reasonable and fair scrutiny.

Mr Acting Speaker, you may think that the opposition is somewhat nervous about the processes of these changes, and right you would be. You may think that the public of Western Australia will be nervous when people become aware of the changes, and right you would be. We are aware historically, unfortunately, of the Labor Party's willingness in government to move money about between trust funds to different accounts and through various avenues of government in an effort to hide budget deficits. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the Labor government ran the state into billions of dollars of debt through fiscal mismanagement. Importantly, this occurred as a result of the government's capacity to hide the fiscal mismanagement in the way it presented the relevant financial information.

As I highlighted before, members were given an interesting insight in the house yesterday into the government's attempts to ensure financial accountability when the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure introduced us to this new concept of budget increases as opposed to cost blow-outs. It was, I am pleased to say, a testing of the water that failed. It did not con the opposition, it certainly did not con the Press and I have no doubt it will not con the public in this state.

I will now spend a few minutes considering some of the nasty little details of this bill as it applies in three areas: firstly, responsibility; second, timeliness; and, third, accuracy. Under the Financial Administration and Audit Act, the Treasurer has wide-ranging and comprehensive responsibilities. He has responsibilities to ensure that certain reports are presented to Parliament in a timely manner, and to ensure that the content of the reports are accurate and proper. Indeed, those wide-ranging responsibilities are at the heart of the Treasurer's responsibilities to the Parliament and by default to the people of Western Australia. The Treasurer's responsibilities will be significantly watered down under this bill. In many respects, the Treasurer's responsibilities to financial reporting to this Parliament will be removed in full. The bill provides an opportunity for the Treasurer to avoid a number of the more onerous responsibilities that the house has historically demanded from him, and should continue to demand from him.

The issue of timeliness and time lines is interesting. It is clear that explicit time lines are required to be met under the current system. These are placed on bureaucrats, the Auditor General and the Treasurer for the formation and presentation of critical financial information to the chamber. If the requirements are not met, section 94 of the Financial Administration and Audit Act demands that the Auditor General issue interim reports. It is a system built around timeliness, with many checks and balances in place to ensure compliance. The Auditor General has the ultimate power to ensure that reports are made available, albeit in an interim form. These safeguards, unfortunately, will be removed. One must ask why. The logical person can only conclude that they will be taken away to provide a new avenue of political expediency. There is no other logical reason to take away the time line provisions that oversee the delivery of financial information to this chamber - none. We will watch with interest to see how it unfolds over the coming years.

The final point I mention is accuracy. The current reports, especially the Treasurer's annual statements, are easy to read. As I mentioned earlier, they provide a consistent set of cash records that enable simple yet effective historical comparison, not just by people expert in the art of reading between the lines in financial reporting, but also by laypeople and, dare I say it, fellow members of Parliament. This will quite simply not be the case with the newly proposed annual report on state finances. There is no doubt in my mind that some of the information - I refer in particular to the Treasurer's annual report - will not be presented for scrutiny in the form in which it is currently presented. The member for Leschenault earlier highlighted trust funds. The term "trust fund" may be somewhat misleading, but a significant amount - billions of dollars - of state government moneys are tied up in trust funds. It is a matter of great concern that the government may have access to those moneys but may not be required to report them to this chamber in a simple, concise manner. It is of great concern because of the

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historical incapacity of the Labor Party when in government to deal with cash on behalf of the people of this state with any form of trust. The question of accuracy needs to be brought to bear.

The second aspect is the financial standards that are used to govern the presentation or development of the financial reports. The member for Leschenault provided some detail of the distinction between the terms “and” and “or” as they apply to the two different sets of regulations with which the government must comply. As he indicated, there are the Australian accounting standards and the concepts and classifications used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. As was adequately highlighted, under the current legislative framework the government is required to adhere to both sets of regulations. The important word is “and”. The government must comply with Australian accounting standards and with the concepts and classifications used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Why has the word “and” been changed to “or”? It is an innocuous term in itself, but the implication is that the government will now have a choice. Will it use Australian accounting standards, or will it choose to use concepts and classifications used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics? I wonder again: why would the government put itself in the position of having that choice? What would be the rational and logical reason to explain the capacity to now have that choice? I can conclude only that it will help paint a rosy picture. The government will choose the set of standards that will give it the capacity to present its information in the most favourable light.

Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan: Gosh, you are cynical!

Mr N.R. Marlborough interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: There is something wrong with that, member for Peel, when the government is dealing with the assets of the taxpayers of Western Australia. There is something wrong with it when it is taxing people blind to extract that money from them and does not accept responsibility to report in a proper manner the way it spends that tax money.

[Leave granted for the member’s time to be extended.]

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is almost inconceivable to think that the government would dare suggest to the people of this state that it will present financials in a way that is not consistent with the relevant Australian accounting standards, which standards apply to almost every other reporting entity in one way, shape or form. However, no, this government wishes to have a choice. It wishes to present its accounting standards in either a way that fits Australian accounting standards or a manner that fits those concepts and classifications adopted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Of course, the Australian Bureau of Statistics does a terrific job, but it is not to be held responsible. It has certainly never collected its information in a manner that would help manage, run and account for the finances, wealth and assets of the people of a state. I am sure that the Treasurer has an adequate explanation of why the government wants this choice. I will listen to his response with some interest, because this is not about, as the Treasurer’s second reading speech states, consolidating and streamlining annual financial reporting and it is not about improvements in timeliness. It is about giving the government a set of tools that will enable it to avoid the proper scrutiny to which the people of Western Australia and, in particular, the members of the opposition in this Parliament feel they should be entitled. It is all about providing fuel for the smoke-making machine so that the government can hide and so that information does not have to be brought into the public forum in a timely manner to be debated. In my brief time in this place, I am developing a sting of cynicism. I have a sneaking suspicion that these tools will be drawn out as the next election approaches. It concerns me immensely that the government is attempting to use this bill to drive these changes through to deliver that outcome.

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont - Treasurer) [12.45 pm]: What a brazen approach from an opposition with the financial record it has! That team delivered five budget deficits out of eight when it was last in government. We have always delivered balanced budgets, and we will continue to deliver balanced budgets. The same people who are concerned about debt also criticise the very measure that offsets debt and helps to fund the capital works program; that is, a surplus on the day-to-day operating expenses of government. Members opposite just do not get it. That was shown by their appalling performance in opposition during the election campaign. Not only were they bad in government, but also they were horrible in opposition on the question of financial responsibility. They had a promise for every person and no plan to pay for it. That was shown by the incredible list of unfunded promises; the opposition had more than \$9 billion of unfunded promises. We had to drag it kicking and screaming to meet the requirements of fiscal responsibility. It put off its costings until the Thursday before election day and still could not get its costings right. We had the excruciating spectacle of the then Leader of the Opposition struggling at a press conference as he sought to explain his savings measures. Frankly, I felt sorry and embarrassed for him. As a professional politician I do not like to see another professional politician look that horrible in front of the cameras, but there he was. Month after month, week after week and day after day he put off the evil day when he would have to face the requirements of fiscal responsibility, and when that hurdle appeared in front of him, he could not jump it. The opposition needs to understand that we campaigned on fiscal responsibility and we beat it on fiscal responsibility. The electorate made its judgment.

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Fiscal responsibility was one of the central themes of the election campaign. We beat the opposition on that question of fiscal responsibility, and with good reason. During our four years, we had a track record of meeting our financial management targets, delivering balanced budgets and preserving the state's AAA credit rating. That track record compared very favourably with the opposition's record in government of five budget deficits out of eight and with its appalling record of irresponsible, unfunded and uncosted promises, which all unravelled two days before the election.

Let me now turn to the criticisms of the member for Leschenault. I am not sure whether I should launch into this section of my speech or whether you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are going to move to another section of debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Only if you are very quick, I would assume.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Madam Deputy Speaker, having delivered that advice to the opposition, I might come to comments dealing more substantively with the opposition's argument at a later stage of today's sitting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think you have about a minute.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Madam Deputy Speaker, you have forced me to it. I am required, Madam Deputy Speaker, by your judgment of the time, to provide the psychological analysis of opposition culture and of the member for Leschenault that I intended to provide at a later stage. I am very concerned that paranoid fantasy has taken over opposition members. I think they have been neglecting their medication in recent days.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 945.]