

McGOWAN GOVERNMENT — PERFORMANCE

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) informed the Assembly that she was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [2.50 pm]: Madam Speaker —

Mr D.J. Kelly: Not a single National Party member was here last night.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Where was I?

Mr D.J. Kelly: No; I said not a single National Party member was here last night.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We are a hardworking opposition, minister.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Water, I have given the Leader of the Opposition the call on a matter of public interest; she is the person I want to hear from.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I move —

That this house condemns the WA Labor government for its failure to deliver a gold standard of transparency and accountability, and breaching the trust of Western Australians since the state election in relation to matters including COVID-19 management, electoral reform, the health crisis and the appointment of the Corruption and Crime Commissioner.

I remember the words of the Premier just before the election: he promised to keep us safe, he promised a sensible government and he promised to keep us strong. I remember also the words of the Premier —

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am not inviting interjections, Madam Speaker.

I remember also the words of the Premier from the 2017 state election, which were that he would deliver gold-standard transparency in government—gold-standard transparency in government. This government, in its first 100 days, has been drunk on power. It has drunk its own Kool Aid, and its members have spent too much time in this place patting each other on the back and congratulating themselves while crises plague our health sector and our housing sector. This is a government that has been unable to resist the temptation, newly minted with a massive majority, to take a “we know best” approach. What do I mean when I say “we know best”? I mean that the government refuses to acknowledge what everyone in the state can see as plain as the nose on the face of the Premier that while the government continues to run a narrative of “destruction, deception and diversion”, there are significant crises in our health services and our housing sector. A number of areas need to be addressed. Although the Premier rode into government at the 2021 state election on the wave of the COVID-19 approval, in the first 100 days, it has failed to prove it can meet its own standard of transparent accountability and it has failed to meet the promises it made to the Western Australian people that it would keep them safe and strong. I think we are finding out that the government is a one-trick pony—safe and strong!

The Premier posted a message to all Western Australians on his Facebook page in February this year, directed towards people who might never have thought to vote Labor before, saying —

My promise is simple — I will lead a sensible, responsible, and experienced Government.

We will keep our promises, and properly manage the finances.

And we will always keep WA strong.

That is what the Labor Party promised in 2021, and in 2017 the Premier promised the gold-standard transparency. I cannot imagine that he would walk away from that commitment, so we hold him to that promise as well. In just a few short months of its second term, we have been served up anything but. As we head into the winter break, when members are about to go back to their electorate and check in with their constituents, I think there will be some questions for those in government. I am reluctant to say “on this side of the house” because we are all on this side of the house, but they will all have to go back to their electorate and talk to their constituents. I want to go through the list. The regional MPs sitting in this house will need to explain why electoral reform magically emerged despite repeated denials from the Premier prior to the election saying that it was not on the agenda.

Mr D.J. Kelly: Self-interest.

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Ms M.J. DAVIES: Self-interest indeed—the Labor Party’s self-interest.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Self-interest indeed—from the Labor Party, Minister for Water! That is exactly what this is about. Electoral reform is nothing but self-interest from the Labor Party.

Several members interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: All MPs will need to explain why there has been a massive breach of the public’s trust through the use of its data and that of Western Australia Police.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Water, I ask you not to continuously interject.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

All MPs will need to explain why there has been a massive breach of the public’s trust through the use of their data by the WA police, allowed by this government and I think overlooked or covered up—I am not sure which; we cannot tell—by the Premier, the Minister for Health and the Attorney General. I think members will be asked why the government has chosen the path of an astonishing misuse of power with its parliamentary numbers to install a captain’s pick for the Corruption and Crime Commissioner accompanied by the Machiavellian moves to remove any person in the Labor Party who might oppose the Premier’s position. They will also be asked about the failure of the Premier and the health minister to act properly on multiple recommendations from health experts to improve our system of hotel quarantine and an inability in this place, in the first 100 days, to answer even the most basic of questions when asked about progress on these recommendations that the government agreed to implement. We still do not have a response to that, Minister for Health. The minister promised to keep us safe and strong but he has failed to manage the system that allows us to continue to do this. If government members’ electorate office tables are anything like mine and their mail is anything like mine, they will also be dealing with the health minister’s persistent and arrogant failure to acknowledge or concede that there is a health crisis in this state. Statistics and data have been manipulated to cover his own failure to adequately resource the health system, and that is exactly what has happened.

Today, we saw new heights of arrogance with the announcement that we will see a sham of an inquiry into the St John Ambulance service, setting it up no doubt to take the blame for the Labor government’s failure to invest adequately in or resource the health sector. Our regional MPs—I will put this on the end of the list; we talk about it regularly—are always asked about the continuing smoke and mirrors in relation to royalties for regions, that sneaky shifting of funding from government departments for ordinary everyday expenditure into the state government’s only regional development program. The government is short-changing the people of regional WA and the whole state while glibly and deceitfully continuing to deliver the line that it is still there and it is still delivering.

They are the questions I think every member will be asked when they head into their electorate. My colleagues will elaborate further on some of them because the list is long, but I would like to focus specifically on the failure of this government to be honest with the people of Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, I am just going to interrupt you again. Members of government, you will have the opportunity to respond when the government’s 30 minutes’ time comes on the clock. Incessant interjections by a lot of members makes it difficult for Hansard to be able to transcribe the member on her feet.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I will focus specifically on the failure of this government to be honest with the people of WA on electoral reform and the misuse of data it has presided over and failed to disclose to the people of Western Australia. My colleagues will focus on some of the other matters I have raised in my introduction.

On the matter of electoral reform, it took 44 days for the Premier to let the numbers that won him government go to his head—44 short days between the formation of the cabinet, to rewrite history and reframe an argument that is laughable at best and deceptive at worst. The Premier would never ever have admitted before an election that he wanted to reduce regional representation. He just would not have done it; it would have been political suicide. He is politically savvy enough to know that there is no way that prior to the election, he could have admitted to having an electoral reform agenda. However, I can guarantee that it was being discussed. He had very polished lines for the media, carefully crafted and ready to be trotted out when the media, the Nationals WA and the Liberal Party started asking questions about this very important matter. We all wanted to know the Labor Party’s intent before the election because we thought the voters deserved to know. It was not as though the issue was not canvassed or was not raised. The Premier was asked directly again and again. On Tuesday, 9 March, just days before the state election, the Premier was asked by Dan Mercer of the ABC Albany a very precise and careful question. He was specifically

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asked whether the country–city weighting in the Legislative Council would be changed. The Premier’s repeated answer was, “It’s not on our agenda.” He said it again and again and again. He added to the farce by saying, “We will always ensure that regional WA receives enhanced regional representation.” He would not explain at the time what that meant. I will tell members that at the time it confounded the media and the public and no-one actually understood what he was talking about. We knew they were weasel words because it was a very carefully crafted response. We knew they hid the fact that the Premier and the Attorney General had a plan to slash regional representation, but they did not want to tell regional voters before the election. Then they added insult to injury, perhaps thinking that regional people would not care, were not interested or were foolish, when they announced their intention to create a committee to contemplate a system of greater equality—I cannot put the quotation marks into *Hansard*, but that is certainly what I meant. Greater equality will not be an outcome of this process. I wonder whether the Premier actually thinks that anyone is buying this ridiculous act—his manufactured surprise as he trots out the lines on what a vote is supposedly worth if a person resides in Wundowie as opposed to Wooroloo.

The Premier’s contempt is so great for the voting public that he and his Attorney General barely even pretend that they are running a line. This government has become accustomed to the fact that the public were compliant, willing and supportive during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has exploited that fear and concern by demonising anyone in the opposition who dares to question legislation or policy about that matter. I have seen it happen in this place with the government’s members, who have become infected with the hubris and are willing to spin the talking points, peddle the lines, pat the public on the head and soothe them with the cry: “We kept you safe and strong, so trust us. Ignore all these matters that we have let slip. We’ll keep you safe.”

Mr M. McGowan: Don’t you think that what you’re saying is slightly extreme?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: No, Premier, I do not. While the Premier is dealing with all these issues that were not on the agenda —

Mr M. McGowan: Do you actually believe this?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Absolutely. The Premier said electoral reform was not on the agenda. The Minister for Health refuses to admit that there is a health crisis. The Minister for Housing says that we have a tight market instead of admitting that it is a housing crisis. All these matters have emerged over the last four years and they are of the government’s own making.

I have a media statement in front of me written by Hon Darren West, member for the Agricultural Region. He runs these lines out into my electorate on a daily basis. He cannot actually rewrite the media statement that he is given as a shell, so it makes no sense. I will not embarrass him further by repeating what he actually wrote, but he ran out the government line that the current Electoral Act dates back to 1907 and that it is time this is reviewed and updated in line with the times. What a load of bulldust! The act was reviewed and substantially changed in 2005. That was the advent of one vote, one value in the Legislative Assembly, which ripped regional representatives out of this Parliament. That was the Labor Party’s doing. It was engineered by the Labor Party. Once again, we have deceit, spin, hubris and dishonesty from the government. It said that reform of the electoral boundaries was not on the agenda, only to concoct some outlandish excuse to pursue a long-held ideological position of the Labor Party. If the Premier had come into the house and said that he wanted to deal with the apparent issue around the Daylight Saving Party, we would have supported that wholeheartedly.

I turn now to the breach of trust that this government has presided over when it comes to the SafeWA app and the G2G PASS. Last week, it was revealed that Western Australian police had applied to the Department of Health to access the data that had been collected directly by the SafeWA app. I will put it on record that I use the app. I will continue to do so and I hope that the Western Australian public continues to do so. A briefing note that has sat with the Minister for Health since 31 March specifically pointed out that if this information became known, it would undermine public confidence, yet nothing was done about it until last week. We certainly know that high-level officials from within the department and the Western Australia Police Force understood very well the impact that this had, and I think that the Premier has sought to sweep this under the rug. The Premier should have come out at the time and just called it as it was. He should have come out when he first knew about it. I cannot imagine that he did not know about this at the time when these applications were being made. He should have encouraged people to continue to use the app and he should have apologised for the loophole in his legislation. Instead, he sat on that information before he rushed legislation into the house and used his numbers to push it through. Again, that does not bode well for the next three years. We will continue to detail some of these matters during private members’ business.

I know that my colleagues want to go through some of the issues that they have seen around accountability and transparency. As the Premier turned his mind to coming back for a second term, this government, led by the Premier, has done a number of things that have come up wanting in terms of accountability and transparency. As government members head out to the electorate for their five-week break —

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Ms S.E. Winton: We are always in our electorates!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: As they head back into their electorates for the winter break, their constituents will be asking those questions.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members! Member for Wanneroo, if you want to have a conversation, take it outside, thanks.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.05 pm]: With all the extra noise, Mr Deputy Speaker, it was hard to hear that it was my turn. I wish to vigorously join this debate. We have a Premier that now sees himself as a statesmanlike figure, a sort of Churchillian figure, who is lecturing federal Labor and the New South Wales government on how they should be running their affairs. This Premier and this Labor government have let down the public of Western Australia in many ways, as was excellently outlined by the Leader of the Opposition. There is no greater betrayal of the people of Western Australia than the absolute tainting of the appointment of the Corruption and Crime Commissioner in the way that this Premier, Attorney General and Labor government are choosing to go about it.

We have had a Corruption and Crime Commission in this state since 2000. In all that time, that commission has been regarded as bipartisan and above partisan politics, and critically so. When that commissioner decides whether to undertake a prosecution, it is critical that it be done without fear or favour and with the certainty that that commissioner is acting in the best interests of the state, and not in the interests of a particular person. Why is the government undermining that with the legislation that it wants to put in? It is absolutely clear to that commissioner and to every person in Western Australia that that appointment is a Labor Party appointment. Whenever that commissioner considers any matter, whether it be to undertake a prosecution or to not undertake an investigation that would lead to a prosecution, decisions will be tainted by a perception of political bias. This Attorney General and this Premier are the two people responsible for that. It is a betrayal of the state. Nothing is more important, ultimately, to the integrity of the executive side of government, this Parliament and government agencies, which are so critical to the people of Western Australia, than the Corruption and Crime Commission. The commission is there to investigate matters, as I said, without fear or favour.

What have we seen happen on top of this? The Premier appointed the member for Bunbury—we know it is the Premier's appointment; we have heard the ruse about who voted for whom—as the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission. The member for Bunbury, who in his Facebook posts tried to disclose the affairs of that committee in a previous Parliament —

Mr W.J. Johnston: The member for Bunbury is a minister!

Dr D.J. HONEY: The member for Kalamunda, I should say; I apologise. The member for Kalamunda tried to reveal details in the last Parliament of that committee's actions. He was only stopped from revealing those details in this Parliament by the vigorous actions of the Madam Acting Speaker at the time. That member has been put in that position—the least experienced person one could imagine to be put into that role. We can only wonder why the Premier has done that, but it is certainly not to strengthen that committee.

In the last Parliament, an outstanding member of Parliament was the chair of that committee. The former member for Girrawheen, the current member for Landsdale, was on that committee. She is above repute and an outstanding lawyer. She carried out that role without fear or favour, but if a person in this Labor government does something without fear or favour, do members know what happens? They get sacked—see you later! That outstanding member of Parliament, that outstanding member of that committee, was punished. Not only was she punished; they thought they were pushing her into a seat that she could not win in the next election just to get rid of her out of Parliament altogether. This is where government members foiled themselves: their election result was so good that that member is back in this Parliament as the member for Landsdale.

More than that, what have we seen in this place about transparency? We saw the President —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister! As the Speaker said —

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister for Sport and Recreation, I am going to call you for the first time.

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Members, as the Speaker said previously, you will get your chance to have a say in 12 minutes. Carry on, Leader of the Opposition.

Dr D.J. HONEY: We saw the President of the Legislative Council—again, I suspect, one of the most respected members in this whole Parliament—sacked. Why was she sacked? She was sacked by this Premier because she did her job! She defended privilege in this Parliament against an Attorney General who does not care about privilege, who does not care about process, but cares only about the “might is right” and using his strong arm to get his way. That is what we have seen in relation to the appointment of the Corruption and Crime Commission chair, a matter that we know will go through the upper house. Why will the legislation go through the upper house? It will go through because the government members there will not scrutinise it; they will just push it through. That fundamentally undermines the integrity of that most important tradition in this Parliament.

What do we see in terms of transparency around other projects? Look at Metronet. Metronet is the single biggest capital spend of this government. Can we get one fact out of this government about the actual capital cost of this project? We know that it is the largest capital blowout of any project in the history of this state, and this Minister for Transport is responsible for it. Government members boast about how good they are counting numbers—they certainly count their own numbers within the party well! We see this government not only blowing out that project, but also refusing to reveal any details on the ongoing operating costs for that project.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister!

Dr D.J. HONEY: There is no transparency. We do not have gold transparency; we have a government drunk on power.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo!

Dr D.J. HONEY: As the Leader of the Opposition said, we have a government that has drunk its own Kool Aid. We have a government that does not care about the people of Western Australia but cares only about the ruthless exercise of its power for its own dogmatic reasons.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.12 pm]: I also rise to support this worthy motion.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister!

Ms S. Winton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo!

Ms L. METTAM: This motion highlights the fact that this arrogant government has certainly failed in its promise of gold-standard transparency. Once again, today, issues were raised about the deflection of blame when it comes to these issues as they affect the health sector. Issues have been raised today about the government’s lame attempts to deflect attention away from the health crisis that has, quite obviously, happened under this government’s watch. This government has major issues with gold-standard transparency. We have had more unanswered questions in the first term of the Labor government than seen under two terms of the previous Liberal–National government, making this the most secretive government since WA Inc.

In relation to the government’s lame promises to keep WA safe and strong, we have seen a health system obviously in crisis. There are record levels of ambulance ramping. For 12 consecutive months, we have seen ambulances ramped outside hospitals, and month after month statistics highlighting that the government has failed its own benchmarks of what was supposedly a crisis when the minister was the shadow Minister for Health under the previous Liberal government. What is the government’s approach to addressing ambulance ramping? The first approach is to stop recording those statistics. When it came into government in 2017, the government’s first approach was to stop recording ambulance ramping statistics. Fortunately, St John Ambulance has provided that information in the interests of transparency and in the interests of the public. We now have a Labor-dominated committee that is looking into whether it is worth investigating St John Ambulance—a not-for-profit charity that has been providing an efficient service to the WA public for over a century—and the merits of such a service going into government hands. This is an extraordinary witch-hunt and an extraordinary opportunity for the government to deflect blame—something that is very obvious to the public.

Obviously, this government cannot manage health. We have seen that right across the health sector, whether it is with code yellow internal emergencies or the fact that although Victoria is able to resume elective surgery, this government still has restricted elective surgeries under its watch despite there being no COVID in the community. The elective surgery waitlist has now blown out by over 50 per cent. This government has failed in this area.

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Regarding statistics, I asked in this place yesterday for emergency department numbers. We received an arrogant response from the minister, who stated that those were available on the Department of Health website. Although the last 12 months of statistics may be on the website, we were asking for the last four years of statistics. We wanted to compare the emergency department attendances, not with a locked down COVID year, but with 2019 when we saw a predictable trend on emergency department figures. The statistics point to the fact that this government has had every opportunity to invest in our hospitals. But we do not get that level of transparency. We do not get that information. It is never forthcoming. Quite obviously, this is an issue of the McGowan government.

This is not a new concern. When government members were in opposition, they talked a lot about the presentation and publication of stimulant statistics. In the months after becoming the Minister for Health in 2017, Roger Cook promised to continue publishing an important report that kept track of the number of stimulants such as amphetamines being prescribed by WA doctors for conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. But what happened when those members came into government? From 2017, those figures are no longer available.

Again and again, we see this government fail. Whether it is in health, housing or electoral reform, we hear spin from the government. What really concerns patients and health workers on the ground regarding the health crisis is that every effort has been made by the government to deflect blame and provide excuses instead of putting patients first and investing in our health system for the benefit of Western Australians. That is the real issue. That is the crux of the concern, whether it relates to St John Ambulance, the deflection of responsibility or any other matter.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [3.18 pm]: Rolled-gold transparency—that is what this Premier promised when he came into power in 2017. But what did we see? We saw a wage freeze for the public service, but we also saw the Premier’s pension go up! He voted to get rid of the pension for members of Parliament, but kept his own. So when he froze the wages of public servants, he kept his pension to make sure that it went up in value.

The Premier is focused on focus groups. When the former Leader of the Opposition said that we should close borders, the Premier said, “Don’t be silly; don’t be stupid”, but what did the Premier do after he had his focus group? He closed the borders! This government is all about focus groups creating policy on the run. Look at the real issues affecting Western Australians. I wish Western Australians could see the spin and the arrogance that comes from the Premier and this bench. Look at the health crisis and the housing crisis and at what the Premier during the election campaign said: “I’ll replace the soil from the floods in Carnarvon.” It will be six months until they first see a drop of soil come to their properties. But then he keeps going on. Look at the collapse of Pindan. The Labor Party’s legislation and policy was to protect subcontractors, and it failed to do that. The Labor Party has been bought out. It will be interesting to see when donations are suddenly put on the table. It will be interesting to see who has donated to the Labor Party.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What deals has it done with the construction industry to change its legislation that does not protect subcontractors?

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Finished minister? Thank you. Carry on, member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Premier has failed to protect subcontractors. He has failed to follow his own legislation. The Premier is not sober; he is drunk on power.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister for Mines and Petroleum!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The people of Western Australia will find that out and these backbenchers, all these temporary backbenchers, will soon go. We will start to see that swing.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We are not talking about a “McClown”, we are talking about this Premier who has failed the people of Western Australia and has not been open and transparent. Time will tell over the next three years how public opinion will change because of the Premier’s failures in health, his failure to address the housing crises, and his failure to protect subcontractors and provide housing for the workers in Western Australia.

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MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [3.21 pm]: Obviously, the government will not support this matter of public interest today, so I want to go over some of the things said by members of the opposition and explain why not. The first point that the opposition made is about transparency and accountability. I want to address something that occurred recently, which I think is very important in that regard. Members might recall that before the state election in March the government submitted all our policies to Treasury for costing every week in the lead-up to the election. Every week we provided a folder of all our policies, fully costed, that we put to Treasury for costing, and on a weekly basis it released the costings of what we committed to for the following four years. In the final week of the election campaign all our policies were collated by Treasury and the outcomes were published. The total cost of our policies was \$2.4 billion over the coming four years. We were clear, concise and honest and open with the people of Western Australia in an extremely accountable way, so much so that that had never been done before by a Labor government or opposition in the history of Western Australia. That is what we did for transparency and accountability.

What did the opposition, the Liberals and the Nationals do? They did not submit their policies for costing, they did not get them independently costed and the National Party did not have any costing whatsoever. It did not even get some accountancy firm, someone with an economics degree or someone who went to Bentley TAFE to collate its policies and do a costing before the state election. It did none of that before the state election. The Liberal Party's effort at transparency was there for all to see from Sean L'Estrange on a Thursday before the election. Where is he now? He is long gone. He is out of Parliament, because the Liberal Party lost the electorate of Churchlands. When we think about transparency and accountability, what is more transparent and accountable than having all our policies fully costed by Treasury on a weekly basis and then released before the state election? What is less transparent and accountable than the National Party not having any costing process around its policies, and the Liberal Party bodgying up something that was totally inaccurate? When it had its policies costed, it turned out that one of its policies cost \$15 billion. That was the first point, on transparency and accountability.

On the second point, the Leader of the Opposition seemed to denigrate our efforts to keep the state safe and strong. Somehow she indicated that we failed in that regard. We have the strongest economy in the nation, by far; we kept the economy strong; we kept people in work; we have the lowest unemployment rate in Australia; we have the highest participation rate of any state in Australia; we have the highest consumer and retail confidence in Australia; and we have the highest business confidence in Australia, all under this government because we took the steps necessary to ensure that would happen. Western Australia has the strongest set of public finances of any government in Australia and potentially any government in the world. It has the strongest set of public finances. The only government in Australia in surplus is this government, because of the actions that we have taken as a government.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I hear the Leader of the Liberal Party constantly whining and complaining over there. Maybe it is because there are women in the room. Maybe he hates being in this room because there are women here, so he is constantly undermining and complaining. He hates being in a room where there are women. Maybe that is what he is doing. He hates being in a workplace, or somewhere of some significance, where there are women around.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is safe and strong. That is the economic outcome of Western Australia at the moment. It is the strongest in Australia under this government and we will fight tooth and nail to keep it that way. We had to turn around the deficits and debt of the last government. That is what we had to do for four years and thank goodness we did, because otherwise, when COVID hit, with all the costs and loss of revenue and all the efforts we made for recovery, where would we be? We would be in the position of New South Wales, with zero debt to \$103 billion in three years. That is where we would have been. Fortunately, we had a government that actually put effort into it.

Then the opposition criticised our COVID management. It is actually in the motion. Today the Minister for Health and I announced that we are reinstating a border with New South Wales. That is what we have done today and the opposition attacked us for our management in its motion. This is the group that supported Clive Palmer in the High Court. That is what it did. Liza Harvey, the then Leader of the Opposition, was out there backing Clive Palmer.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party!

Mr M. McGOWAN: As did the federal Liberal–National government. Clive Palmer is a life member of the Liberal National Party. He was a National Party activist in Queensland for years. He funds the Nationals WA's election campaigns in Western Australia. That is how close members opposite are to him. Members might recall that

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he was coming over here with those two private jets, their friend Clive, and flying members of the National Party around the state, including some who are here presently. That is what was occurring with their friend Clive Palmer. Members opposite criticise us over our COVID management.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Your friend, Clive; that is who I am talking about. The member for North West Central's friend Clive Palmer; that is who I am talking about. Brendon Grylls' friend Clive Palmer; that is who I am talking about.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition! Opposition, you had your go. It is time to sit and listen.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Today we reintroduced a hard border with New South Wales and opposition members came in here and criticised us on our management of COVID. We took the steps that were necessary to protect Western Australia, and we stood up to those people in the east who tried to bring it down, and those people here, in the Liberal Party in particular, tried to bring it down. That is what we did. Members opposite come in here and actually criticise us over it. Do they know what the last 18 months has been like? It has been hard and we have had to make many difficult decisions. They could not even comprehend how difficult it has been, the sorts of measures we had to take and the sorts of conversations and negotiations we had to go through. They would not have a clue and they would not comprehend it.

Then they came in here and blithely moved a motion like this. Then the Leader of the Opposition stood up and said that I, the Premier of Western Australia, "exploited fear and concern". How disgusting. That is what she said. We have been through a crisis the likes of which we have not seen in 100 years and we have made difficult decisions to protect the state. We have gone through the most protracted set of meetings, negotiations and considerations with the commonwealth, state government agencies and the private sector and had to consume voluminous amounts of information in order to make these decisions, and then the opposition comes out and blithely and very impolitely says something as gross as that I "exploited fear and concern". The member should be ashamed of herself for saying that in here.

Obviously, we have done all of that to keep the state safe and strong, which the Leader of the Opposition criticised a moment ago. Opposition members would prefer—I hear it all the time—that we had deficits as far as the eye could see, that we continued to rack up debt as they did when they were in office and that we kept open the borders; imagine the consequences there! That would have been the opposition's response to the situation that we faced.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is because I hear you say it; that is how I know it. It is because I hear you say it all the time.

I will come back to the issues the opposition referred to. Let us start with the Corruption and Crime Commission. Before the state election, we said that we were going to do what we have done. If we could not get the appointee recommended by the selection committee appointed, we said that we would legislate. That is exactly what we said. I can pull out for members all my quotes from before the state election.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party!

Mr M. McGOWAN: That was what we committed to. What is going on here is actually corrupt. The reason the Liberal and National Parties do not want Mr McKechnie reappointed is that he investigated their members; that is why.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: You are totally and utterly conflicted. He investigated the upper house Liberals. He found corruption in their ranks and so now the upper house Liberals cannot stand him and do not want him reappointed. That is actually corrupt. That is corrupt on the part of the Liberal Party. We will not stand for that. We will not stand for that and I will not stand for that—that level of corruption.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: How can you justify the finest corruption fighter this state has ever seen being blocked by the people he investigated? That is like someone out there in the community who gets charged by a police officer then

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having the right to dismiss that police officer. What the Liberal and National Parties are doing here is wrong and we will not stand for it.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a point of order. The Premier has implied that the Liberal members on the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission were being investigated by the CCC. I believe that is a slur on those members and I believe that to be completely untrue.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Leader of the Liberal Party.

Ms S. Winton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo, I call you to order for the first time.

Leader of the Liberal Party, there is no point of order. The Premier was not naming or referring to any specific person. Carry on please, Premier.

Debate Resumed

Mr M. McGOWAN: We are doing exactly what we said we would do before the election. We are seeking to reappoint the appointee recommended by the selection committee, chaired by the Chief Justice. The Liberals and Nationals do not want him reappointed because he investigated their parties —

Dr D.J. Honey: That is untrue and you know it; it's a straight lie.

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is absolutely why. There is no reason given. They cannot give a reason.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party!

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Commissioner of Police has verified —

Withdrawal of Remark

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, Premier. Leader of the Liberal Party, you cannot actually accuse someone of lying. Please withdraw that, thank you.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carry on, Premier.

Debate Resumed

Mr M. McGOWAN: The police commissioner —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party, no more interjections, please.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Honestly, the Liberal Party in this state is an embarrassment. There are two of you out of 59 members; does that not tell you anything? You do not like going into a room with women in it; does that not tell you where the Liberal Party is at today?

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr M. McGOWAN: What a disgraceful organisation the Liberal Party is. What a hopeless organisation it is. When I arrived in this Parliament, there were people I could respect. These days, there are not. The reason the Liberal Party is where it is at is its members. They need to look in the mirror. One of the issues that was in play in the state election campaign was the CCC—an organisation that was rudderless for years, that the Liberal Party did not appoint anyone to head, but finally, the Liberal Party in government appointed John McKechnie. I received, as I recall, some correspondence from Colin Barnett, which asked my views on these matters or advised me that he was going before the committee. I said, "Great". He is an ex-Supreme Court judge and an ex-Director of Public Prosecutions in Western Australia. So he was appointed. What did he do? He sorted out the CCC. It then became a functional organisation. What did it do? It investigated an act of corruption in our trade office in Japan that occurred over many years. As part of that investigation, it uncovered that there were Liberal Party members behaving inappropriately. The CCC investigated that. It was published. What did the Liberal Party do? It blocked his reappointment. That is what happened. In any other state in Australia, what it has done would be regarded as worthy of a royal commission. If it had been Labor in office, the world would have fallen on us. The Liberal Party in the upper house, the Liberal Party in here and the National Party members who are backing this sort of conduct should be ashamed.

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I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition to advise what the committee had recommended.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court recommended him, my friend. The Chief Justice of the District Court recommended his reappointment. The Commissioner of Police recommended his reappointment. What did the opposition do? It blithely ignored that. The Leader of the Liberal Party comes up with silly interjections that show how shallow and useless he is. Honestly, the Liberal Party is so useless. In question time, I feel sorry for all of the members in opposition. They are so bad. In question time, during which a government is meant to be held to account, they ask the dumbest questions.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party!

Mr M. McGOWAN: I cannot believe how bad it is. It is no wonder that lifetime members of the Liberal Party come up to me and say that they cannot vote Liberal—it is because of how bad it is. Both members should resign actually to make way for someone with a bit more ability.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is true. If the Leader of the Liberal Party wants to perform a service for the Liberal Party, the best thing he could do is resign. That is the best thing he could do. But, fortunately, he will not, so I am very happy with him continuing in his role. I am very satisfied with his performance.

That is what occurred with the Corruption and Crime Commissioner. We are just trying to appoint the recommended appointee, an ex-Supreme Court judge and ex-DPP of Western Australia, who has been the best corruption fighter in history, and the opposition blocked it.

Dr D.J. Honey: Your man.

Mr M. McGOWAN: What another dumb interjection. Just so the Leader of the Liberal Party understands, he was appointed by Colin Barnett. He was appointed by the Liberal government. I received correspondence about it. As if we would seek to interfere in that process. For some reason, the Leader of the Liberal Party has the brazenness and sense of entitlement to think that somehow the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Chief Justice of the District Court and the Commissioner of Police are wrong. That is how entitled the Liberal and National Parties are.

We will seek to do what we have a mandate to do, which we took to the people before the state election, and seek to ensure that a proper and appropriate person is appointed to head that organisation.

Over the course of the rest of the debate, a grab bag of complaints was run by the opposition. On electoral issues, at the state election, a member of the Daylight Saving Party was elected with 98 votes. Obviously, we did not know before the state election that that was going to occur. I do not know about anyone else, but I do not think that is right—that he should get 98 votes and game the system. We have Mr Druery, this character from over east who gets payment for organising these arrangements. He gets \$50 000 for every person who gets elected through these arrangements. He gets \$50 000, games the system, and someone gets elected to Parliament for four years with 98 votes. I actually do not think that is right. I think that should be reformed. We have an eminent Western Australian, Mr McCusker, reviewing the system. Mr McCusker will present a report at some point.

What I also think is wrong, as I have said before—I was not aware of this before now—is that someone's vote in Kalgoorlie is worth four times as much as the vote of someone in Albany.

Dr D.J. Honey: It only took you seven years!

Mr M. McGOWAN: The member for Cottesloe assumes that I know everything, but I do not. I did not know that the vote of someone in Wooroloo is worth a quarter of the vote of someone in Wundowie. The member assumes that I know all these things, but I do not. I am not as knowledgeable as he gives me credit for.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr M. McGOWAN: All of these things were not on our agenda before the election, but obviously Mr McCusker is now looking at these issues.

Let me go back to Mr Tucker. Honestly, Mr Tucker, with 98 votes, is in the Parliament. People who scored many thousands of votes are not in the Parliament, including Liberal Party members. They got many thousands of votes and they did not get elected. One guy got 98 votes and he did get elected. If members opposite think that is fair,

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they are wrong. It is not fair. All of this needs to be reviewed. If there is unfairness in the system, it needs changing. Mr Tucker is from the Daylight Saving Party. He represents the Mining and Pastoral Region. He was living in America. We had one Tucker and the other Tucker. It turns out that his mother was running as well. I think members will know where I am heading. We had the Tucker family running: Mother Tucker, young Tucker and another young Tucker were running for office, and one Tucker, Wilson, got elected. Out of the three Tuckers, we got one. In any event, for 98 votes, we got one Tucker. I do not think it is right; I think it needs reform. We have given it to Mr McCusker to look at. He will prepare a report. He is an eminent Western Australian. I urge the opposition to stop attacking him.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [3.42 pm]: Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on this debate, which hinges on four words: safe, strong, accountability and trust. On being safe and strong, I will take our side of the fence any day of the week. We are the government that has kept Western Australians safe. We are the government that has maintained our economy and kept it strong. That has been recognised by a most extraordinary authority—one of the greatest authorities that we have—that is, the people of Western Australia. The people of Western Australia asked: Who do we trust to keep us safe during the COVID-19 pandemic? Who do we trust to keep the Western Australian economy strong and to keep Western Australia moving forward? They voted in droves. They supported the WA Labor leader, Mark McGowan, and returned the government for the great work that it did during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Let us contrast that with those on the other side. The Premier said it, and it bears repeating. Who did those opposite side with during the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when we needed support and needed to stay strong? They equivocated, they caved in, they hid behind Clive Palmer—there is a lot to hide behind—and they tried to destroy our borders by backing Clive Palmer’s bid in the High Court to tear down our borders. The Leader of the Opposition at the time, the Leader of the Liberal Party, was 100 per cent behind Clive Palmer. We know where members opposite stood on this; they stood against the people of Western Australia and the people —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party.

Mr R.H. COOK: We see that Clive Palmer, the friend of those on the other side, is at it again. It was not enough for him to challenge us in the High Court on our response to the COVID-19 pandemic—he is out there again, putting out leaflets to undermine the vaccine campaign. I might ask: Where does the Leader of the Liberal Party stand on this particular Clive Palmer intervention? Does he stand behind the COVID-19 vaccine or is he once again hedging his bets? The member for North West Central is very quiet on this particular point. We know where his loyalties lie: they lie between the Nationals in North Queensland and his mate Clive Palmer. We know where his loyalties lie, and they are not behind the person who is sitting in front of him right now.

We have kept the economy safe and strong. When the Leader of the Opposition stands up and tries to make COVID-19 part of the opposition’s attack on us, I say to her, “Look at the numbers.” We have been absolutely honest with the people of Western Australia on COVID-19. When we answer truthfully questions without notice about whether we were aware of the issues surrounding the SafeWA app, an app that all Western Australians have got behind, the opposition says that it does not believe us. What we have here is not a failure to be accountable but a failure to be believed by those opposite who, quite frankly, cannot be trusted when it comes to the issues around COVID-19.

A lot has been said about the accountability and transparency of this government. The member for Vasse raised it in the context of ambulance ramping and all the efforts that we have made in health in Western Australia. I place on the record that during the Liberal Party’s time in government, ambulance ramping numbers were on the website for a matter of days. The only reason the previous opposition, WA Labor, could present those numbers to the people of Western Australia was because every day we had someone tot up those numbers and make sure that there was a total monthly figure to present to the people of Western Australia; otherwise, the then government would have tried to keep the figures secret and hide them from the people of Western Australia.

Since we came into government, we have undertaken a rolled-gold approach to accountability. We now list emergency department numbers, elective surgery numbers and the number of admissions to hospital, and we livestream the waiting times for people in our EDs. We have produced transfer-of-care statistics and we insist that St John WA provides ambulance ramping statistics via a link on the WA Department of Health website. In addition, we introduced Care Opinion, a publicly available website that publishes people’s opinions about the care they receive in the WA healthcare system. We also produced the Your Voice in Health survey, an absolutely accountable system of ensuring that staff in the healthcare system feel they are valued. We care about their morale in the workplace. This is rolled-gold accountability. This is rolled-gold transparency. The only problem is rolled-gold laziness on the other side. When those opposite come into this place and say, “Give us the statistics”, we say, “Do the work. You get the statistics. They are available publicly. If you want them to be made available, put forward questions on notice and come into this place and do some hard work for a change rather than sitting there carping, whingeing and failing to

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represent the people you purport to represent.” What we have here is not a failure of accountability, but a failure of commitment to do the hard work in opposition.

MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Butler — Attorney General) [3.48 pm]: I wish to speak to the matter of public interest by adding to the words of the Premier and supporting his comments on the appointment of, and failure of the system to appoint, Mr McKechnie, QC, to the role of Corruption and Crime Commissioner. I just add this: the Premier said that Mr McKechnie was stopped and blocked during the process because he was investigating, and had investigated, members of the Legislative Council. Might I remind the house that at the time Mr McKechnie handed down his report identifying Mr Phil Edman as being corrupt, he said that it was an ongoing investigation of members of the “Black Hand” group of the Legislative Council, which constituted Liberal members of the Legislative Council, and he warned, “This is only the start; there is more to come.” That warning contained in the report sent a shiver up the spine of all those Liberal members of the Legislative Council who were members of the “Black Hand” group and who were subsequently identified by Hon Peter Collier.

One of those members on the committee, Jim Chown, was a member of the “Black Hand” group. He voted against the reappointment of Mr McKechnie, whom Mr McKechnie said, “I warn you I have an ongoing investigation into these people.” The next thing that the member for Cottesloe did was criticise the member for Kalamunda for being the chairperson. The misconduct identified by the member for Kalamunda previously was a posting on his Facebook page, which was hardly controversial. He said that those members on the committee who voted against the reappointment of Mr McKechnie should publicly state why. That is reasonable.

We know that has gone to committee again and the member for Moore has voted against it. During debate in this chamber on the Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Amendment Bill 2021, the member for Moore refused to stand to his feet when I challenged him and say why he voted against Mr McKechnie. What has he got against Mr McKechnie? What they had against him was the warning that there is an ongoing investigation.

As to transparency, the Leader of the Opposition complains about there being an inquiry into electoral reform. What were the terms of that inquiry: “Mr McCusker, could you please advise how the votes of Western Australian citizens could be counted equally?” The Leader of the Opposition, in speaking to this motion in the manner she has, has identified as being against equality between citizens when they enter the polling booth. She does not want them equal; it is a part of the privileged class who have an entitlement that their vote should be more than someone else’s vote. All we are asking Mr McCusker is: “Could you advise us on how you could achieve equality?” As for transparency, Mr McCusker’s report will be made available to the public. All the submissions, as they come in, are being posted on the website. How could we be more transparent in reviewing how to make the citizens of Western Australia equal in their vote? That is not something that the Leader of the National Party or her party wants; they do not want people to have an equal say. It is counterintuitive to a democracy when it is assumed that everyone’s vote will be equal.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy Speaker casting his vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (6)

Mr V.A. Catania	Dr D.J. Honey	Ms L. Mettam
Ms M.J. Davies	Mr R.S. Love	Mr P.J. Rundle (<i>Teller</i>)

Noes (45)

Mr S.N. Aubrey	Ms J.L. Hanns	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mr G. Baker	Mr M. Hughes	Mrs L.M. O’Malley	Dr K. Stratton
Ms H.M. Beazley	Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr P. Papalia	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr H.T. Jones	Mr S.J. Price	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr D.T. Punch	Mr P.C. Tinley
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Ms E.J. Kelsbie	Mr J.R. Quigley	Ms C.M. Tonkin
Ms C.M. Collins	Ms A.E. Kent	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr R.R. Whitby
Mr R.H. Cook	Dr J. Krishnan	Ms R. Saffioti	Ms S.E. Winton
Ms D.G. D’Anna	Mr P. Lilburne	Ms A. Sanderson	Mr D.R. Michael (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr M.J. Folkard	Mr M. McGowan	Mr D.A.E. Scaife	
Ms K.E. Giddens	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms J.J. Shaw	
Ms M.J. Hammat	Mr S.A. Millman	Ms R.S. Stephens	

Question thus negatived.