

APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 1) 2005
APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 2) 2005

Second Reading - Cognate Debate

Resumed from 28 June.

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West) [7.30 pm]: I am aware that the house wishes to move into committee so I will keep my concluding remarks brief. Yesterday, I was discussing education issues as they related to the *Budget Statements*. However, before I get back to that topic, I will interrupt that stream of thought by referring very briefly to a matter that I raised during today's questions without notice. I refer to a statement by the Premier today in the other place about measures that will assist members of Parliament to more effectively service their electorates. I have no objection to that whatsoever. However, I have a major objection to the way in which that proposal will be carried out. I hope that there is enough anger from members opposite and others in the government ranks to result in the Leader of the House making a statement when this house sits at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning to correct what has been a major oversight. I have raised this matter during the consideration of the budget papers because there is an extra estimated cost of \$3.273 million recurrent and \$755 000 capital for these initiatives. On the basis of the discriminatory nature of the Premier's announcement, I am inclined to not support the budget. The discriminatory nature of the announcement is the reference to members of the Legislative Assembly being provided with an increased staffing complement of a 0.6 full-time equivalent, in addition to the existing 1.4 FTEs. I have no objection to members of the Legislative Assembly qualifying for that provision. However, why is there a difference between Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council members? Further, all research officers will now be provided with relief when on approved leave of absence, which is fine. That provision applies to all members of Parliament. We get that too - you beauty! That is a great advantage. The Premier also said that these measures would particularly assist members in the Legislative Assembly who represent large regional electorates. Members in this house represent larger regional electorates than most members in the Legislative Assembly. That was the rationale the Premier used to provide certain members with a second electorate office. The seven affected electorates are Central Kimberley-Pilbara, Kimberley, Murchison-Eyre, North West Coastal, Merredin and Roe. I have no problem agreeing to the need for the abovementioned provisions in those electorates. However, the facts are very simple when one looks at a map. Members of the Legislative Council cover far greater distances than members of the electorates listed above. All members of Parliament will have installed standard hands-free mobile telephone car kits. Most of us have bought one of those at our own expense. I think I paid \$600 for mine. I have no objection to that. Country members should be entitled to satellite phones to pick up the gaps in mobile phone coverage. I have interrupted my remarks on education to refer to this matter because I am outraged about the discrimination between Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council members of Parliament.

Hon Norman Moore: You're absolutely right. I am looking forward to Labor members defending this decision.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Some Labor members have already made vigorous representations to the Premier. I applaud them for that. I hope that members opposite raise the roof on this matter in the next 24 hours or so, and that the Premier realises that what he is doing is absolutely outrageous and should not be tolerated. That is enough of that for the time being. On the strength of the Premier's announcement alone, I am not encouraged to vote for the second or third readings of the appropriation bills. That would be a major step, but that is the way I feel at the moment.

My remarks about education were centred around the proposed curriculum changes to years 11 and 12. I was outlining the fact that in the few months that Hon Ljiljana Ravlich has been the Minister for Education and Training and I have been the opposition spokesperson, there has been a major shift in community opinion. There has been an unravelling of two aspects of the proposal - the merits of the proposal being extended from K-10 to years 11 and 12 and the implementation of those proposals. The simple fact is that the merits of the proposed changes and the way that they will be implemented are being seriously questioned. A case has not been made in their favour. The Minister for Education and Training claims that she has overwhelming support for the changes, and that everybody is jolly and positive about the changes. Over the past few months, I have had widespread consultation with a range of people, including principals and teachers from primary and secondary schools, public and private schools, and city and country schools. I have also spoken with many academics and community and professional organisations. This issue has been raised in every discussion that I have had during my wide consultation. The minister ignores this situation at her own peril because it is gathering steam. The community is analysing the proposals for schools and education in Western Australia and they are seriously questioning what we are about. The situation has unravelled in a few different ways. First, the media sat up and took an interest in the matter. It printed articles and opinions that culminated in the weekend's press. I have copies of the weekend's press, but I will not quote from it now because I will not have time. The editorial of *The*

West Australian was quite scathing and advocated a delay in the implementation of the changes until further research has been carried out. Liam Bartlett's column in the *Sunday Times* also outlines some of the major concerns with the merits of the proposals and the way that they are proposed to be implemented. Yesterday, the Minister for Education and Training ridiculed an interview that Liam Bartlett conducted with Kevin Donnelly on ABC radio, simply because he is a qualified expert in the field. I have never met Kevin Donnelly, who is from Melbourne and, as was explained, is a member of the Liberal Party.

Hon Barbara Scott interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): Order! Hon Barbara Scott, I have one speaker and that is all I need.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I believe the minister dismissed him simply because Mr Donnelly happens to be a member of the Liberal Party and has worked as a staffer for the Liberal Party. Does that mean that the minister would dismiss some other qualified expert because she did not like some aspect of his background or the shape of his nose? The dismissal of that expert is completely irrational. He was quite concerned and scathing about the changes to the curriculum. I made some notes about the program. Every one of the six to eight callers to the program, except for one, was concerned and scathing about the changes. Those comments were from a range of people, including practising teachers, parents and a retired principal. The one call that was supportive came from the principal of Melville Senior High School who had been involved with some of these proposals as they were worked up about 10 years ago. He implemented changes in a drama studies course at the time and trialed the changes. As many experts will tell us, drama is one of the areas to which this outcomes-based approach is far more applicable than it is to knowledge-based areas, such as maths, science and economics.

I will move on quickly because I am aware of the time. The media are taking an enormous amount of interest in this, and rightly so. They are very concerned about it. A couple of months ago our old friend from this place Hon Tom Stephens, as Chairman of the Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, initiated an inquiry. We hear that it was without the knowledge or approval of the minister. I have the terms of reference of the inquiry, but I will not refer to them. The inquiry will not report until 30 June next year, which will be six months into the implementation of four of the courses next year. Having an inquiry reporting after a program has been implemented is ludicrous. That is why we are saying, along with, I would suggest, 85 to 90 per cent of the teaching fraternity and about the same percentage of the general public, that because of the concerns, confusion and anxiety that exist, we want a moratorium on the proposed changes. That is not saying outright that we dismiss the changes to the curriculum out of hand, because they obviously contain some good elements, but they seem to have gone off the rails. The state had to sign the federal agreement, to which the minister referred, in order to get the money. I, like the minister, am very uncomfortable with that situation in which the state must go with a begging bowl to the federal government. One of the issues is the apparent incompatibility of the reporting requirements of the federal government, which do not match up with the proposed new changes to the curriculum.

One important question was answered in this house yesterday. I asked the minister several times whether she would give a guarantee to all teachers and other public servants involved in education that they could provide submissions and appear before the Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee without any fear or retribution. The minister did not give me an answer.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: The answer is yes.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I know, but the minister did not give me an answer the first couple of times I put the question in this place. I put the question on notice and after about eight weeks I finally got the answer yesterday. The answer is yes, and I am very pleased to hear it, because there is a climate of fear in the public education system. There is fear because of concern about the consequences to individuals if they speak out. If the minister does not believe me, she should conduct a questionnaire or something similar to get to the truth.

We have seen problems unfolding in the Curriculum Council. For example, syllabus material is quite clearly not meeting time lines, which is causing alarm, and some people who were writing the material have resigned. However, the minister has pushed on through all of it. There has been concern about the lack of professional development. A couple of teachers only about a week ago started a web site called Plato, which has been astounding. The minister is a great fan of web sites. She likes to denigrate me by pointing to my web site. I did not know I had a web site. Apparently it is one of the Leader of the Opposition's initiatives, but I have never made any input into the web site and, quite frankly, I do not have the resources of the minister. I wanted to quote some of the material from the Plato web site, but I recommend that everybody in this house have a look at that web site.

Last week saw the State School Teachers Union of Western Australia directive on this. If nothing sways the minister, I hope that her union bosses can, because the minister is backing a loser. The minister would be doing

the right thing if she were to impose some delay on the implementation of these changes, so that the community and experts can step back and make a proper assessment and judgment of the merits of these changes to the curriculum and how they should be implemented.

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan - Minister for Education and Training) [7.48 pm]: I thank members for their contribution. I am aware of the time. Members have made some interesting contributions to the debate on the appropriation bills Nos 1 and 2. A range of issues have been put on the table, such as the desalination plant. Some interest has been expressed in the Carnarvon Police Station, which is referred to at page 599 of budget paper No 2, where the estimated cost of \$4.25 million is set out. Some \$200 000 has been expended so far in 2004-05 and the planned expenditure for 2005-06 is \$50 000. Some issues of tax competitiveness were raised. In both 2004-05 and 2005-06, Western Australia's tax to gross state product ratio is expected to be the lowest of all the states. In the forward years, Western Australia's share of GST is projected to remain the equal lowest of all the states. The total cost of the south west Yarragadee water project is estimated to be \$358.5 million, of which \$1.8 million will be expended in 2005-06. I want very briefly to put on record that on the matters raised by Hon Barry House - I will not spend a lot of time on this -

Hon Norman Moore: I hope not because the arrangement was that you were not going to speak.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Absolutely, but I do want to put on record that South Australia, Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have outcome-based education. I will not go into it because I am aware of the time imperative and the desire of this house to move into the committee stage. I look forward to moving into committee. I thank members for their contributions to the second reading debate and their support for the bills; I hope it will continue.

Questions put and passed.

Bills read a second time.

As to Committee Stage

On motion by **Hon Kim Chance (Leader of the House)**, resolved -

That the committee stage be adjourned to a later stage of the sitting.