

## **ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE**

### *Consideration of Tabled Papers*

Resumed from 3 June on the following motion moved by Hon Nick Griffiths (Minister for Housing and Works) -

That pursuant to Standing Order No 49(1)(c), the Legislative Council take note of tabled paper No 2170A-H (2004-05 Budget Statements), laid upon the Table of the House on 6 May 2004.

**HON BARRY HOUSE** (South West) [10.05 am]: Immediately after the budget was tabled on Thursday, 6 May, I made a few comments in the House on the motion moved by Hon Murray Criddle that related to funding in regional Western Australia. A cursory glance at the budget papers - I had a couple of minutes only to look at them - revealed that scant attention had been given to regional infrastructure funding in Western Australia. I accepted that that was my first glance at the budget and that before my budget speech I would need to refer back to it, enlarge on it and embrace the whole budget. I have done that. In looking at the budget in more detail I have found little more than I did when I looked at it for five minutes. That is a tragedy for regional Western Australia. I cannot find a lot more in the budget now than when I first looked at it for a couple minutes.

Today I will make comments in another vein. I cannot make those comments, however, without making a brief reference to last night's humorous debate on Country Labor (WA), which, regrettably, is the way Country Labor is regarded in country Western Australia. I do not intend to labour the point. I give credit to Hon Adele Farina for getting out and about in the country areas that we represent. Even though she was a city-based member who was parachuted into a country seat, she has moved around her electorate in the Busselton and south west areas, and has represented the Government in a pretty good way. However, there is precious little else to say. It was drawing a long bow to include the Minister for Tourism and like members as country members who represent Country Labor. The Minister for Tourism is also the Minister for Peel and the South West, and because I take a special interest in those areas, I find that regrettable.

Hon Peter Foss: He doesn't live in the country.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is right. His empathy for those areas is tenuous at best. Let us be positive, not negative.

Hon Peter Foss: It's nearly 100 years since Mt Lawley was in the country.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is right.

Let us be positive. During the week, the coalition in opposition, which will soon become the coalition in government, was announced. As I concentrate on the positives of the coalition line-up, members can compare it with the Government's line-up. The coalition line-up includes - I am looking at it from a regional perspective -

Hon Nick Griffiths: Hon Barry House!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes, among others. There are lots of others. Max Trenorden, the Leader of the National Party, is responsible for energy and science and represents the country electorate of Avon. Dan Sullivan's portfolios are health, small business and electoral affairs, and he represents the country electorate of Mitchell. The portfolio responsibilities of Hon Norman Moore, the Leader of the Opposition in this House, are resources development, mines and the north west. Of course, he too represents a country electorate. Matt Birney represents Kalgoorlie, a country electorate, and has the portfolios of police, commerce and communications and goldfields-Esperance. Hon Murray Criddle represents a country electorate and has in his portfolio road transport and water resources. Jamie Edwards represents Greenough and has planning, local government, heritage and the mid west in his portfolio.

Hon Nick Griffiths: Have you met these people?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I actually know them and their capabilities very well. I know that they will all make excellent ministers in the next Government. Brendon Grylls has in his portfolio the environment and the wheatbelt, and he represents the electorate of Merredin. I represent the south west and have in my portfolio regional development, racing and gaming, the south west and Peel, and I will also be shadow cabinet secretary. Paul Omodei represents the electorate of Warren-Blackwood and will have responsibility for labour relations, agriculture, including salinity, and forestry.

Hon Peter Foss: You will notice that we actually have a shadow minister for salinity, unlike members opposite who promised to have one and did not do it.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I will mention salinity a little later. There are other members who are not in the shadow cabinet who represent portfolios in opposition. They include John Bradshaw, a country member; Hon Bruce Donaldson representing fisheries and who will be the opposition Whip in this House; Hon Robyn McSweeney, representing the south west and with responsibility for emergency services, women's interests and the great southern; and Hon Bill Stretch and Terry Waldron who have different portfolio responsibilities. I can say with a

great deal of conviction that we have a team that represents regional Western Australia extremely well. I do not have to do that tongue-in-cheek; I can point to the people with those direct responsibilities and direct involvement in regional WA.

Last night in the brief debate we had, people started to talk about individual seats that will be at stake in the next election. I will quickly refer to situations in individual seats in the south west that will cost the Labor Government dearly. The Government's inaction on the Peel deviation, one project alone, will cost it very dearly in Mandurah and Murray. The Government's inaction again on power supplies, particularly the power procurement from Collie, will cost it very dearly in Collie-Wellington. In Bunbury, the Government's inaction and ineffectiveness, particularly on the motorplex complex in Dardanup involving the Bunbury greater area, will cost the Government very dearly. The Albany Regional Hospital, among other things, was earmarked for restructuring and an upgrade, and it appears in the capital works program of the budget. However, when looked at in greater depth, it can be seen that absolutely nothing will happen until 2009. For the Government to include that and claim it is doing something about the situation, is a cruel sick joke on a regional community. Anyhow, that will all wash out in the election, whenever that election will be held.

I have been allocated responsibility for the regional development portfolio, so I have started looking at regional development documents and information. It is a pity the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development is not in the Chamber, but we understand he has very important commitments in his electorate -

Hon Nick Griffiths: In the regions.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes, he is the Minister for Regional Development after all. We heard the other day that he is involved in Port Hedland. His whole focus on regional Western Australia has now descended on Port Hedland because of his changed priorities. He is doing his level best there to develop some sort of political presence in Port Hedland, which he hopes might get him elected. However, I am told by people who know the situation much better than I do, that those hopes are pretty remote.

As a starting point in working out what the regional development portfolio involves, I turned to a document titled "Regional Western Australia - A Better Place to Live", which was released in November 2003. It looks to be a pretty good document. It is a glossy document with nice pictures and nice words, and I intend to go through some of those. The opening paragraph in the introduction states -

Regional Western Australia encompasses one-third of Australia's land area but its half million people represent only 2.7 per cent of Australia's and only 27 per cent of the State's population.

"Regional" in the context of this document refers to all areas of Western Australia outside the Perth metropolitan area.

That sets the stage and the scale, and that is fine. We all appreciate how vast an area regional Western Australia is. The next paragraph in the document emphasises how important that is to not only Western Australia, but also Australia as a whole. It states -

One impressive measure of the importance of the regions to Western Australia is their contribution to exports: collectively they contribute 22 per cent of Australia's and 82 per cent of Western Australia's exports.

We should never forget in this House in Parliament of Western Australia that the contribution of regional Western Australia to this State's prosperity and the nation's prosperity is quite outstanding. The document goes on to acknowledge -

The diversity of regions emphasises the importance of each region having strong leaders, good decision-making processes and maintaining or developing its own strategic approach to future development.

They are very good words, and I will hold the Government to account on them. The document later states -

The State Government supports such an approach and its strong regional development structure continues to provide resources and funding to support locally driven planning and development.

Let us focus on resources and funding. Once again, that is good rhetoric, but we see here that statements are being introduced into the document that become debatable and arguable in a Chamber like this. In some cases, they can be dismissed as propaganda at the extreme. I will concentrate on resources and funding for two portfolios for which I have responsibility - the south west and Peel. The South West Development Commission's total appropriation for 2003-04 was \$3.55 million. For 2004-05 the budget estimate is \$6.504 million. That is fine, but if we look at the *Budget Statements* more closely, we will realise that that boost is solely swallowed up by the Back Beach project in Bunbury, which is an excellent project. It has had a long gestation period. The two people who deserve major credit for that project are the former member for Bunbury,

Ian Osborne, and the Mayor of Bunbury, John Castrilli. They pushed that project vigorously for about six years, and now we find it is starting to come to fruition with a real injection of funds in this financial year; that is why there has been an increase in funding. In 2005-06, the funding for the South West Development Commission drops back to \$4.24 million. The cynics among us might suggest that that blip in the appropriation of a couple of million dollars happens to coincide with an election year. Of course, I am not that cynical, and I am very pleased that the funding has been allocated to such a worthwhile project in the south west through the South West Development Commission.

The Peel Development Commission is the other area of special interest to me. The total appropriation for the Peel Development Commission in 2003-04 was \$2.756 million. The budget for 2004-05 is \$1.304 million - less than half the appropriation in the previous year. That is quite alarming, Mr President, as you would know, because the Peel region, like the south west, is a rapidly growing area. There is absolutely zilch in the budget papers for capital contribution in the Peel Development Commission. That is an alarming decline for a government agency in that area.

It is very arguable whether the Government is actually following its words and committing adequate resources and funding. The reason is pretty obvious. The Government's sole focus during its term of government is to put all of its capital works into one project, and that is the southern rail project, which is swallowing up everything else. Everybody else in the State, particularly those in regional areas, can see areas of neglect to which funding and resources that are badly needed are not being allocated.

Hon Nick Griffiths: Do you represent Mandurah?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes, I do.

Hon Peter Foss: Some 800 people in Mandurah will get a benefit out of that rail project. That is really useful!

Hon Nick Griffiths: So the Liberal Party does not support the new Mandurah -

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes, it does and it had a terrific plan -

Hon Peter Foss: And it did not cost another \$1 billion.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: It had a terrific plan to deliver that service to Mandurah without the cost blow-outs that this Government will inflict on the State for another decade or more. That is the main difference between us.

I could talk about all sorts of projects, but I will refer to just a couple. If the Government wants to boast that it is committing resources and funding to regional Western Australia, where is its commitment to country roads in particular? Where is its commitment to the Great Northern Highway? Where is its commitment to the coastal road between Cervantes and Geraldton? Is that correct?

Hon Frank Hough: Lancelin and Cervantes.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes, Lancelin and Cervantes. Where is the Government's commitment to that very necessary piece of infrastructure to complete a vital road network in this State?

Hon John Fischer: The commitments do not mean anything even when they are made.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is right.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! It is wonderful that Hon Barry House is being so ably assisted with his speech, but perhaps members could desist from the chorus approach.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Thank you, Mr President.

This Government often takes an inordinate amount of time simply to realise a commitment made in a budget by a previous Government. The Margaret River Hospital is one example. Funds were committed for the construction of that hospital in the last coalition budget in 2000. Hopefully - and I still cross my fingers and touch wood - we will see some bricks laid on that project towards the end of this year.

Hon Paddy Embry: I do not think Country Labor is represented in the Chamber.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I will name another couple of road projects that are vital to the south west. The Bunbury port access road is a vital piece of infrastructure. The total cost of that piece of infrastructure is \$17 million, and that road is becoming increasingly important for the Bunbury and south west regions. Greater pressure is going onto the port of Bunbury, particularly through woodchipping, which is unfortunately being centred on the Bunbury port. It is not being done in the hinterland because of the inability of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure to resolve a local dispute and have that plant located on the railway line in Donnybrook or Kirup. In the scheme of things it would not have made a lot of difference which place was selected, but that should have been done. The woodchipping plant is now located in the port of Bunbury, and another one will be located in the

same place. That will mean that all produce of the blue gum plantings in the south west region will come by road into the port of Bunbury as opposed to the port of Albany. The massive trucks used will block the intersection and cause a gridlock similar to what we have in Mandurah already. That is an example of poor planning and poor decision making.

Hon Christine Sharp: Let us get that stuff onto rail.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is what I am saying. It is a problem now because it has not been located in a Donnybrook or a Kirup, which would enable the use of the rail into the port of Bunbury. The real problem in the future will be the viability of that railway line through to Manjimup. That is already a problem and it will become a terrible problem for future Governments to address. Everybody wants to keep that line open, but it will cost a lot of money, and having no freight going on that line will be disastrous. That situation has been compounded by allowing the secondary processing of blue gums in the port of Bunbury. It is a planning and decision-making tragedy for the south west, and it will get worse.

The other road project I will refer to is the Peel deviation. If the Government asked anybody who lived between Mandurah and Augusta or Manjimup and the south west, they would say that that is the number one project for that area. It is vital for the tourist industry, it is vital for commercial activity right through the south west, and it is vital for the social amenity of particularly the people living in the greater Mandurah area. The Peel deviation should have been started by now. Today I believe the federal Government will be making an announcement about this, and my understanding is that it is about to commit \$150 million to the Peel deviation through its AusLink program on the condition that the project is started in 2006. The State Government has been extremely tardy about this project and has been characterised by its inaction and ineffectiveness. This Government must provide matching funds for this road, but the indications are that it will not commit one cent to enable that project to start until 2008. That is another two-year delay at the very least, which is totally unacceptable for the communities in that area and the many people who visit that area from Perth.

The next paragraph in the document "Regional Western Australia - A Better Place to Live" states -

It is also essential that an overall regional policy be in place to ensure that regions receive an equitable share of resources compared to the metropolitan area.

Let us concentrate on the words "an equitable share".

All members who represent country areas in this Chamber will be able to make comments about their areas receiving inequitable shares. Members should ask country people whether they are getting equal access to education, health, communication facilities, entertainment, power, water, radio and television, computer links and telephones. Country areas such as the Busselton-Vasse area are coming under critical strain. I will quote from an article from yesterday's *Busselton-Margaret Times*, which is titled "Tourist Tax Floated". The area is in such a desperate state that the idea has been floated to impose a separate tax in that area to fund some of the infrastructure needs. The chief executive officer of the Busselton Shire Council is Andrew Macnish. The article states, in part -

Mr Macnish estimated the shire's current shortfall in infrastructure funding was a staggering \$80 million, with an Australia-wide figure estimated to be \$5 billion.

Cr Barton said the Busselton shire faced enormous sea change challenges. While population was growing annually about 5 per cent, with a projected population of 50,000 by 2020, local infrastructure also had to support the impact of 600,000 visitors a year.

That is just one local authority under pressure. There are many more throughout the rapidly developing south west. They need to meet the backlog in infrastructure needs as well as needs as they evolve.

I will concentrate briefly on another area in equitable funding. The South West Area Health Service is locked into a centralised budgetary process. My understanding is that it allows for only a three per cent annual increment in its funding. There is no reference in that funding formula for any population base in the south west, whether it is residential or visitors. It does not reflect the growth, which is at a rate of eight to 10 per cent a year in some coastal towns. It does not reflect the seasonal influx that can increase the population of those areas by a multiple of five. It places enormous pressure on health services such as accident and emergency rooms in hospitals and aged care facilities, which are often visited by relatives of patients who also need to be taken care of. I understand that the budgetary restraints for the South West Area Health Service have forced it to shed 60 full-time equivalent positions this year. Once again, it is my understanding that it is the only health service in the State that is being requested, forced or demanded to shed that many FTE positions.

My next quote from "Regional Western Australia - A Better Place to Live" states -

Clearly the development of regional areas is influenced by a range of external factors outside the State Government's hands, from terms of trade for major commodities to climate change, and from immigration policy to interest rates.

Those words are all very fine; the words are fine and they do have some relevance. However, this is "the dog ate my homework" excuse. This is opening the door to blame everybody else for the problems that the State Government has.

Hon Peter Foss: Like the power shortage. It did not tell them to increase the capacity and they complain when the weather gets bad.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is dead right. I was going to mention that. The Minister for Energy tripped over himself to blame everybody and everything else: the pipeline, the executives in Western Power, the climate, the temperature and probably the dog eating his homework! Everybody except the State Government was blamed for the power shortage that brought this State to its knees on 18 February. It is not the only major problem in country Western Australia. It was real blow-out stuff on 18 February. However, it is a continuing problem in regional Western Australia. Power shortages and power blackouts - it is not uncommon for regional Western Australia to have three or four power outages in a week. It is not uncommon for those power outages to last for 18 hours or even a few days. It is not uncommon for the quality of the power to be extremely poor. It affects the operation of electronic equipment and pumps. Pumps are often burned out. That is a major problem that regional Western Australia seems to face in a greater degree than other parts of the State.

It is also convenient for the Government to beat up on the Commonwealth Government. I know it is a political tactic that has been used forever by State Governments. With the political make-up of State Governments being all Labor Governments, it has become an art form. It has become a national sport to blame the feds. Sometimes the feds do it in reverse; I realise that. Sometimes the criticism is justified; I will not stand here and criticise all the time. Over a long period we have heard from all State Governments, particularly Western Australia, criticism of the fringe benefits tax, which has led to a marked distortion in the way in which regional Western Australia operates.

The next paragraph from the document contains some very nice rhetoric. It states -

However, the State Government has a key role to play in ensuring that public services and essential infrastructure are provided to the people . . .

That is quite right. The State Government does have a key role to play. Whether this State Government is performing that key role and implementing it adequately is very debatable. We see the State Government falling down in its delivery on its obligations.

I realise I am running short of time so I will rush through my last few points. In terms of public services, this State Government established its attitude very clearly. One of its first acts in the south west was to scrap the regional offices of the Department of Commerce and Trade and the Small Business Development Corporation, which were headquartered in Bunbury. The corporation was centralised. That was an indication of how it viewed the world. Infrastructure is something that I referred to earlier. The next paragraph of the document refers to community ownership -

It is clear that the best people to drive regional development are the residents of regions themselves. The Government recognises that the best results can be achieved through partnerships between the State, Commonwealth and Local Governments, industry and the community.

They are very fine words but this is, once again, when we have seen the State Government fall down over the past three and a half years in following through. At best, the Government does not understand the concept of community ownership in country communities. At worst, it does not care. I certainly hope that, of the two evils, it is the first. There is then some hope of educating people to understand something but, if they do not care, we have a major problem. I have mentioned some examples previously, which all relate to one minister. Country health boards were removed unilaterally. We have seen in recent days a proposal from the current Minister for Health, Mr McGinty, to establish health advisory councils. In the media release there was no mention of the south west. I require clarification on that.

Hon Peter Foss: I believe they got some of that from our health policy.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Absolutely. Some of it could well have been pinched from our health policy.

Hon Peter Foss: If it is a good idea.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes. I will give him half points for that. I am referring to Mr McGinty, not Mr Kucera.

Hon Peter Foss: No points for originality.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is right. Mr Kucera supervised the restructure of tourism regions, which has decimated a very effective south west tourism industry body. The south west is the most product of all the tourism regions. It had a very healthy, effective tourism organisation that was well represented and had a good membership. The organisation promoted the area and did a fine job. However, it has now been scrapped and amalgamated into a broader area, which it is now expected to service. I think the term for that is “regionalisation”. People can read “centralisation” for “regionalisation”. This is the third in the three strikes of Mr Kucera’s business enterprise centres. They are now being faced with a restructure, which will dilute the impact of BECs in local areas. There is a problem with a couple of BECs in some towns. I believe Busselton and Collie have a problem. The minister’s approach to that is for the BECs that operate effectively to service a broader area. That approach is probably driven by budgetary constraints and demands. There is a need in Busselton and Collie for these centres. The BECs that operate effectively do a terrific job for their local communities. They introduce to the local areas innovation and people with good business ideas. The problems the BECs face cannot be addressed effectively by diluting them across the regions. It is better to fix the problem that exists in one town rather than try to dilute the effectiveness of the BECs by pretending that everything is common across the regions, because it is not. The major feature of most of our regions, in particular the south west, is their diversity. The south west has independent towns with independent community ownership of facilities and services.

Another term the minister used refers to partnerships. We have seen what the State Government thought about a partnership with the Commonwealth Government on the salinity problem. The State Government took forever to agree to its part of the commitment to deal with salinity. I think it took three or four years for the State Government to agree to contribute money to the national salinity program.

Hon Peter Foss: That is because it did not have the minister for salinity it said they would have.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is right. In reference to partnerships between various spheres of government, it must be acknowledged that enormous budgetary pressure is applied to local authorities as a result of these partnerships. State government agencies - particularly development commissions - often make announcements about the provision of seed capital for projects, which raises expectations in communities and puts unfair pressure on local shires to come up with their share of the funding. Often the projects are for areas that the local shires do not consider to be a priority and are considered by the local shires to be contrary to the local input. That can be a problem.

One of the very best examples of partnership-type funding agreements for infrastructure that I have seen working in this State is the community sport and recreation facilities fund. That roughly operates on the basis that the State Government, the local authority and the community each contribute one-third of the funding. Regional Western Australia has a beef about that. The same people always come to the party in rural areas and contribute their one-third, either through direct dollars or in-kind support. They then see projects being funded by local authorities in the metropolitan area because the community organisations do not exist. The community ownership does not exist whether something as major as an indoor aquatic facility or as small as a toilet block for a tennis club requires funding. That is a major difference between the regions and the metropolitan area. In my observation these projects work very well, particularly in the country, because they come from the communities themselves. The initial impetus for these types of projects comes from the club or organisation itself, be it a riding club, a bowls club, a netball club or whatever else. The clubs then go to their regional sport and recreation officers and the local authorities to get the local authority to make the project a priority, which is an essential part of the process. The State Government then provides its one-third contribution to, usually, get the project across the line.

I wanted to say some other things but I have well and truly used up my allocated time that has been agreed to. Regional Western Australia is a fascinating place. All the regions of Western Australia contribute an enormous amount to the social, economic and environmental infrastructure of this State in their own independent way. They certainly need to be given due accord. I maintain that they have been poorly treated by this Government and have been accorded a low priority. It has always been a major goal of mine since I have been a member of this House, and it certainly will be in the future, to make sure that the regions get their fair share.

**HON PETER FOSS** (East Metropolitan) [10.46 am]: This Government has all the signs of being like the Burke Government. Burkie’s great theme was to announce things. The kindergartens are a classic example. Each election he promised kindergarten classes for four-year-olds. Do members know who finally provided them? The former Government did. A good promise should never be wasted. The Labor Party is very good on announcements about capital works. It keeps announcing the biggest capital works programs ever, but it never delivers. The advantage of that is that it can offer an even bigger capital works program the next year. That tactic was learnt from Brian Burke. Should we be surprised about that? Of course not, because the Premier was the financial genius in Brian Burke’s office during the WA Inc years. People forget that the little cartel that runs

Cabinet - the ministers who have control - were all ministers from that era. Gallop, Ripper, and McGinty all came out of that stable, and it shows. It is all talk and no action.

We hear wonderful gestures from “Good News” Gallop. The Premier announced that he would completely revamp the public service and make it efficient. To demonstrate that he reduced by four the number of ministers in the Cabinet. What has been the result of that? It is a great system! People cannot see a minister. It makes it very difficult to be accountable if people cannot see a minister. By reducing the number of ministers the Premier has made it almost impossible for people to see a minister. I will deal with Mr McGinty if I have time. He does not want to see people unless he can use them in one of his good-news media releases.

Another great thing about that system is the Government has increased the number of parliamentary secretaries. They do not have to be paid a ministerial salary but it means there is a support team working for the ministers. The public service was to be rationalised. A team of people is reorganising the public service. I understand that they now take up two whole floors of a building. Their number has grown so much that they are the worst example of Parkinson’s law applied to the public service. They are the very ones who are meant to be reducing the public service; yet, their number has increased beyond all count.

Did they achieve what they wanted? Let us have a look at it. I will look at the overview of the public service between June 2001, June 2002 and June 2003 to see what the Government has done. It has done some good things. The number of senior executive service officers has decreased from 404 to 342. Fewer people are running it, which is excellent. The number of indigenous Australians employed has increased from 2.1 per cent to 2.4 per cent, which is excellent. The number of culturally diverse Australians employed has increased from 4.3 per cent to six per cent. I am not sure what one has to do to be culturally diverse. I am sure I am culturally diverse.

Hon Nick Griffiths: So am I.

Hon PETER FOSS: The minister might be Welsh and I have Portuguese heritage. We are both culturally diverse. I have an English father and a Portuguese mother; therefore, I must be culturally diverse.

How has the Government done generally? Has it done well in reducing the public service? As at June 2001 there were 88 000 full-time equivalents. How many are there now? What massive reduction has occurred? There are now 91 513. What a massive reduction that is! It has gone up 3 500. What about the headcount? In June 2001 it was 107 168; now it is 115 573. It has increased by 8 000. The Government said it would get outstanding leave under control. The amount of outstanding leave was valued at \$1.026 billion in 2001. The previous Government was actually reducing that figure. Today that figure is \$1.230 billion. It has increased by 20 per cent. The previous Government was reducing outstanding long service leave and other leave. Under the present Government it has increased by 20 per cent. What does that say about the Government’s management?

I kept asking for these figures. The Government said they were being placed on the Internet and I kept asking where they were, but they did not turn up. When I asked, I was told that an interim estimation had been put out that showed the figures decreasing. When the final figures came out, they had gone up again. This wonderful Government suddenly stopped putting things on the Internet. We are amazed at the number of times we checked figures on the Internet but found that they stopped in 2002, because the news got too bad. This Government is better at promising things than any other organisation I know, while it is worse at actually delivering things than any other organisation I know. The long service leave liability, which was \$649 million as at June 2001, is now up to \$783 million. It has gone up again. As a percentage of payroll, long service leave liability has increased from 14 per cent to 16 per cent over the same period. Sick leave taken over the past three years has gone from 3.1 days to 3.6 days per employee. The amount of sick leave being taken is always a nice indicator. It is not normally an indication of how ill people have been; it is how much they are sick of their employer. It is well known that the present public service, as it was in 1992, is totally and utterly fed up with this Government.

The proportion of females in the public service has risen. I should have mentioned that amongst the good aspects. It has increased from 61 per cent in June 2001 to 67 per cent today. The proportion of females in the senior executive service, however, has remained the same. They have been sacking them at the same rate as they have been sacking the males. People with disabilities accounted for 2.1 per cent of the work force under the previous Government, but that figure was down to 1.4 per cent last year. That is a significant drop. I will raise a particular example in this area. When I was a minister in the previous Government I had a severely disabled person working as a receptionist in my office. I originally took her on as a work experience person. She had been a thalidomide baby, so members will have a bit of an idea of the degree of disability she had. She was permanently confined to a wheelchair. She had to come to work by taxi. Members will remember the taxi vouchers that used to be available for such people, which were temporarily got rid of by this thinking, feeling Government. My receptionist did a fantastic job. Admittedly, I had to get a small dispensation from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I needed a little bit of extra help because there were certain parts of the job she could not do. However, the parts of the job that she could do, she did brilliantly. She worked part time

because of her disability. The person who moved into my ministerial office after the change of government was Hon Sheila McHale, who, members may know, is the Minister for Disability Services. She called this girl into her office and asked her whether she was able to work full time. When the girl replied that she could not, the minister got rid of her- she was relocated. The Minister for Disability Services in this feeling Government got rid of a disabled person. I have been asking the minister questions, trying to get her to admit this, but she refuses to answer, saying that she cannot reveal personal details. She is so sympathetic to disabled people that she will not say that she sacked one. That is how thinking and feeling she is! However, she makes out in answers to this Parliament that she will not reveal that sort of information because she is too sympathetic to them. She got that girl out of her office because she was disabled. I am raising this now because previously I did not want to prejudice the situation of this girl in the public service. I wanted to make sure she had another job. I hope that now she does not lose that job. I do not think the Government would dare dismiss her.

I refer now to expenditure by this Government on training. Under the previous Government, expenditure on training per full-time equivalent was \$748. It was \$607 last year and is down to \$546 this year. This is supposedly the Government of the workers! This Government says, bugger the workers! It does not care for workers one bit. Expenditure on training as a percentage of payroll has declined from 1.71 per cent to 1.2 per cent.

This Government is all smoke and mirrors. It says things and then does not do them. Of course, when it says it will not do things, it goes ahead and does them. Take, for instance, taxation. I will not go into a great deal of detail on this subject, because a number of other speakers have already referred to it. This Government lied to the people of Western Australia when it said there would be no new taxes and no increases in fees. It has increased everything. Only this year did the Government decide to not increase fees. It then claimed that an amount of money had been handed back to the people for the extra that they were not charged. What a wonderful Government this is! It did not charge an excruciatingly large amount of money, so it claimed that it had given that money back. It has made a big thing about the tax rebate on stamp duty. If it had not broken its promise and virtually doubled stamp duty for the ordinary person buying a house, it would not have needed to make that concession. It is only making a concession for the outrageous tax that it has imposed, despite the fact that it has been getting a windfall from the goods and services tax that it criticised. I heard the minister in the House today criticise the GST, although the Government has done brilliantly out of it. It has billions of dollars that nobody has ever had before, but is it putting that money into health, education or policing services? No, it is not. The money is going straight into the pork barrel. The Government does not care about people, it cares about pork-barrelling. Suddenly, government members are looking after their electorates. We know that the Government has upset country people, so it has decided to put some money into country areas. We know exactly where money is going: into the pork barrel. This is all the hard work that the previous Government did to make sure that the State Government had access to growth funds. The Labor Party criticised it, until it suddenly found it could not criticise it because it was getting more than \$1 billion a year out of it. Did the present Government increase spending on the health system? No; it used it for pork-barrelling. The Government thinks it is having a wonderful time, with a huge amount of money to put into the pork barrel.

Another point I mention about the public service relates to the median salary. Members can ask any public servant if it is easier providing the services at the coalface. Parkinson's law will tell members all about that. The classic example he gave was that the smaller the British Navy got, the more people it had in it. He worked out that it would eventually diminish to no ships and a massive bureaucracy that would continue to increase at the rate of seven per cent a year. We know that there is nobody at the coalface, but the median salary for all employees has increased from \$41 000 in June 2001 to \$44 972. It has increased by nearly \$4 000. The really interesting thing, however, is that the median salary of full-time employees has gone from \$46 000 to \$50 000. The median salary of permanent employees has gone from \$58 000 to \$62 000. It sounds as though the median salary of the people who are not full-time or permanent employees has gone down. The poor old casuals that the Government said it would look after are not included, unfortunately. The figures show that the salaries have gone up generally but mostly for full-time permanent employees. Therefore, the poor old casuals can go hang. People know full well that the services are extremely difficult indeed. It looks as though a lot of those people are the left-wing political hangers-on who are trying to help the Labor Government win the next election. Why would we doubt that? It is what they do every single time.

I will deal with a few matters. I will not go greatly into health issues. The suggestion of partnerships in the country is laughable when the Government has got rid of all the country hospital boards. The only thing the Government has come across as the idea of a partnership is what it did to Safer WA. Safer WA was very effective, and was one of the few things that local governments supported. The previous Government helped Safer WA by giving local governments - not charging them - a report titled "Mapping crime, offenders and socio-demographic factors". This document enabled them to work out what they had to do to tackle crime in their area. I understand that a similar report has been prepared, but people are not allowed to have it - we made ours freely available - unless they agree to the Government's new system; the new partnership, so-called. The



new partnership works really well. The Government wants the people concerned to hand over \$10 million worth of Safer WA assets. The Government had worked out that that is how it would fund it. However, Safer WA said, "Why should we hand it over? We happen to be an incorporated association, and we do not want to join the new partnership." Unless people agree to join that partnership and put up money, they will not get the report. Here is a wonderful, caring Government that wants to help people to fight crime, but it will not give them the information.

Hon Bill Stretch interjected.

Hon PETER FOSS: Of course; freedom of information is not allowed. In fact, I think we should put in an FOI application for this report, so that people do not have to pay for it to get it.

Hon Bill Stretch: They are like highwaymen.

Hon PETER FOSS: They are. They are union thugs. Labor only knows how to govern in the same way that it runs a union. First of all, it belts up the workers so they do not dare say anything. When it has all of them in line, it belts up the employers; and it uses thuggery. Thuggery is the only thing Labor knows. We know that it also likes buggery and skulduggery. They are the three things that Labor has always liked: thuggery, buggery and skulduggery.

Hon Bill Stretch: And it has legislated accordingly.

Hon PETER FOSS: Yes. That is what its legislation looks like.

I will raise a serious matter, which has not been raised by the other speakers, simply because it concerns me. I hope that as a result of my raising it the Government will deal with it, and find out what is the reason for it and what can be done about it. It relates to the statewide notification of notifiable diseases. The figures seem to be somewhat alarming. These figures are cumulative for the year. There are notifications for the past eight weeks, and there is a cumulative figure for the year. What is very alarming is that there has been a massive increase in genital chlamydia. There are statewide notifications and metropolitan notifications. I thought at first that it might be a particular concern for some of the north west areas of the State. Of course, it is a problem in those areas. However, I was concerned about the metropolitan notifications. There appears to be what one would call an epidemic of chlamydia. The figures to the end of May, cumulative to the end of week 21, show that in 2002 there were 707 incidences; in 2003 there were 973; and in 2004 there have been 1 045 in the metropolitan area alone. There were 1 204 incidences for the whole State in 2002; 1 484 in 2003; and 1 551 in 2004. However, the biggest increase of late appears to be in the metropolitan area. Therefore, I would like to draw the Government's attention to that fact. I have not seen any report in the newspapers that the Government is aware of it and is doing something about it. I am extremely concerned that over the past three years there has been nearly a 50 per cent increase in the number of cases of chlamydia reported in the metropolitan area.

There appears to be another far more serious epidemic, and that is Ross River virus. Ross River virus has gone from a usual reporting of about 91 cases at the end of week 21 in 2002, to 93 in 2003, and to 994 in 2004. That is a 1 000 per cent increase. A lot of that is in the metropolitan area. In 2002, in the metropolitan area, there were 13 cases reported to the end of week 21; in 2003 that had doubled to 27; and in 2004 it had risen to 528 to the end of week 21. Of that total figure of 994 that I quoted for Ross River virus, 528 cases were in the metropolitan area alone. That is a serious figure. As members know, people must engage in sexual behaviour to contract chlamydia. However, Ross River virus is a mosquito-borne disease. That figure of 528 people in the metropolitan area having contracted that extremely debilitating disease up to the end of May this year worries me significantly. I do not know whether any member knows anybody who has had Ross River virus, but it is completely debilitating and can go on for 12 or even 18 months, with people experiencing severe pain. Really, it stops people working.

Hon Barry House: It is horrible.

Hon PETER FOSS: It is a terrible disease. I would like to know what is seen to be the cause of this massive increase in Ross River virus - this epidemic. It must be of epidemic proportions when the figure goes from 91 as the usual average to 994. That is over a 1 000 per cent increase. I would have thought that is an alarming figure. There is some good news in these statistics - although I see that hepatitis B, unspecified, is on the increase. There has been a small drop in cases of hepatitis B, carrier unknown, and a small drop in gonorrhoea infections. The others have remained much the same.

On looking at figures such as these, one suddenly sees that there is an epidemic. However, when we have heard nothing from the Government about what it is doing about this epidemic and the cause of it, we must worry that the Government is not in fact alert to it. I suppose that is one of the things that has really concerned me about the health area. Again, we have a good-news person from the Burke era in that area, who is very good at issuing press releases and saying things, but not too good at getting things done.

I will read the answer to question on notice 1881 from 6 May this year. I asked the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Health -

- (1) What proportion of the Metropolitan teaching hospitals' 2003-04 Budgets has already been spent?

The answer I got to that was -

- (1) The proportion of the Metro Health Services' 2003-04 gross expenditure budgets spent at 31 March 2004 is 76%.

I asked -

- (2) If that spending rate continues to the end of the financial year, to what extent will they have overspent?
- (3) If it is believed that rate of spending will continue or some other rate that will lead to an overrun -
  - (a) what is the total shortfall in hospital funding expected; and
  - (b) how will it be met?
- (4) If it is believed that that rate of spending will not continue, what measures will be taken or what factors will lead to that change?

In typical evasive style, this is the answer -

- (2)-(4) Although the above result implies a marginal overspend to the end of the year, the Health Services are expected to achieve a balanced financial result.

Do members know how they are expected to do that? Members may recall that I read out a letter from Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital in which it said that it was cutting out essential operations. It was cutting out pain relief operations and deferring operations for brain tumours. The man who I told the House was going into hospital for an operation for brain tumours had his operation postponed twice because of lack of funds.

The man who went in for pain relief had his surgery postponed because of lack of funds. This is non-essential surgery. Operations are just cancelled and people are put back on the waiting list. That is how the funds are met. When I asked whether the minister would give hospitals more money or whether he would cut services, the answer was burble, burble, burble, blah, blah, blah, "I'm not going to tell you." The minister will not tell us whether the Government will give hospitals more money or whether it will cut back on services. We know that hospitals have been told to cut back. I asked for a guarantee from the minister that no hospital service would be cut to meet this deficiency. Would members take this guarantee? It states -

There are no plans to cut hospital services. Furthermore, the Minister for Health recently announced additional funding measures to improve services in emergency departments and increase the number of available winter beds by 332.

We know that there are an extra 900 Ross River virus cases, let alone people with colds. We know that the Government is cutting services, because some time ago, during a debate on health services, I tabled a letter that the hospital wrote to people telling them that it was cutting procedures such as pain relief and oncology services. Cutting pain relief and oncology services, and sticking everybody on the waiting list, is the way the Government will meet that requirement. We know what the waiting list is all about because the Auditor General told us something about that. I refer to his media statement, not to his entire report. It states -

Four years on from his 1999 examination of surgical services in WA hospitals, Auditor Des Pearson has revisited the issue of access to elective surgery and waiting times.

That is only elective surgery; that is not those poor people who need oncology services. Since when has oncology fallen into that category? It continues -

- 35% of elective surgery patients had waited longer than the maximum recommended time - some urgent patients had been waiting longer than 6 months, . . .
- 47% of semi-urgent patients are waiting longer than the clinically desirable time of 90 days.

I know that doctors have criticised that -

- In 2003 there were 1,050 patients who had waited longer than 1000 days, -

That is three years -

including 280 patients who had been waiting more than five years.

This is from the Government that was going to fix the health system. Do members know how it fixed the ambulance queues? It just told ambulance drivers that they were not allowed to happen. What a great system that is!

Hon Barry House: They just kept driving around.

Hon PETER FOSS: Yes, they just kept driving around and did not wait at a hospital.

Hon Barry House: That was the one that Dr Gallop said was a crisis, wasn't it?

Hon PETER FOSS: Yes, it was an absolute crisis. However, it still kept happening. The worst thing is that most people are not on a waiting list. The Auditor General's media statement continues -

In reviewing the information held by the Central Waitlist Bureau, Mr Pearson found that the publicly reported waiting list information includes only those procedures in the definition of surgery used by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - meaning that effectively the reported list represents only 13,500 of the 29,000 patients waiting for elective procedures.

This is from the Government that was going to fix the health system. It continues -

The reported list excludes a wide range of procedures such as colonoscopies, -

That is a procedure for people to find out whether they have bowel cancer. Do members know what happens to people if bowel cancer is not identified quickly enough? I know someone whose bowel cancer was not identified. He now has liver cancer. Do members know how operable liver cancer is? It continues -

various endoscopic procedures, procedures associated with obstetrics, and gastroscopies, and also excludes patients at most country hospitals.

Hon Barry House: A lot of those procedures could be done in country hospitals.

Hon PETER FOSS: They could indeed. The Government has downgraded country hospitals and taken away the right of the local people to speak about them. The fact is that it does not happen. If we degrade people's confidence in and feeling of ownership of their local hospitals, and the monetary value of the time local people put into those hospitals so that they can decide what they want to have, we will lose a lot. The media statement continues -

Further, publicly available waiting time information does not currently include the time between visiting a GP and subsequently being put on the waitlist.

There is about a six-month wait to see a specialist. It continues -

Consequently, patients do not know the full waiting time for their procedure, nor do hospitals have a true picture on which to make resourcing decisions.

This is from the Government that promised us a solution to the whole problem.

I had hoped I would have time to go into a few other matters, but we have agreed to confine our contributions to 30 minutes. However, I will speak on one of the impacts of the railway. The previous Government had set up a railway system, most of which was funded. There was to be a small amount of debt, but most of it was funded. Everybody knows that there is a house they can afford to buy. It does not need to be an awful lot more expensive to be unaffordable. If \$100 000 is added to the cost of a house, it goes from something that people can afford to something that they cannot afford within their income. For Governments, \$100 million is about the same sort of thing. Increasing the cost of the railway by an admitted \$400 million means that it will change from an affordable railway to an unaffordable railway. In fact, the cost has increased by more than that, because the minister has been sticking everything in other people's budgets. That is a great little lurk! If there is a group that is good at fiddling around with the budget, it is this Government. That is what the minister has been up to - hiding the true cost of the railway. We will find out when we get into government, unfortunately. It is always party time when Labor is in office. People enjoy splurging money and popping champagne - mainly in the offices of Labor Party apparatchiks of course. Then the poor old Liberals and Nationals come in and have the dull old time of cleaning up after the party. It happens every time, so we end up with a very overwhelmed Government. I have had eight years of cleaning up after Labor, and we are still paying the cost. When I was Minister for Justice and for the Environment, I was paying double the going rate for the building in Westralia Square because the Labor Government had agreed to continue to pay double the rate to raise the value of the building so that it would look good in the books. Practically the whole building was paying double the going rate in the city, and double that rate is still being paid. It is also being done in Bunbury. That goes back to Brian Burke. Decades later we are still paying the cost. One hundred years from now we will still be paying for the

blasted railway, because this Government has had to extend it. It has had to tell Western Power not to do capital works because it cannot have its net debt go that much higher. It has had to tell the Water Corporation not to borrow money for capital works because it will affect the Government's right to borrow for the railway. That railway is stopping authorities from borrowing to carry out works that they would normally carry out. That is due to this Government. It seems to think it is funny. It seems to think it is okay to go around completely stuffing up the finances and then claim that it is doing well on a cash accrual basis. The cash accrual method of accounting went out in the nineteenth century. This Government still uses that method because it can balance the budget on a cash accrual basis. However, if is done on the usual accrual basis, not the cash receival basis, it bombs out. If we look at the times a Labor Government has done that, we find that it bombed out every year. It cannot now do on an accrual basis what Carmen Lawrence did to balance her budget. She told the Department of Health not to pay its bills for a week, and that managed to balance the budget for her on a cash basis. It made it a bit difficult for me when I became Minister for Health and I had a week's worth of bills that had not been paid. That is a lot of money in the health portfolio, but it balanced Carmen Lawrence's budget. That is the way that Labor Governments do their accounting.

I will not go into some of those areas in which I think the Government has diddled the people of Western Australia. I think I have given some indication of how this Government is all smoke and mirrors and all promises and lies. In fact, it is no different from the Governments of Brian Burke, Peter Dowding and Carmen Lawrence. It comes from that stable, and it is pretty obvious that its dam and sires are those particular groups of people.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon Ed Dermer.