

Ms Dianne Guise; Mr John Kobelke; Acting Speaker; Mr John Day; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Terry Waldron; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Tony McRae; Mr Rob Johnson; Deputy Speaker; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr David Templeman

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**APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 1) 2001**  
**APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 2) 2001**

*Estimates Committees A and B Reports and Minutes - Presentation and Adoption*

**MS GUISE** (Deputy Speaker): I present the report and minutes of Estimates Committees A and B, which recommend the appropriations and estimates and agree to the Appropriation (Consolidated Fund) Bill (No. 1) 2001 and the Appropriation (Consolidated Fund) Bill (No. 2) 2001 and move -

That the report of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

I have noted the comments that have been made about the somewhat crowded conditions that members and others experienced during the estimates committee process. I am not referring to this Chamber, but to the room in which Estimates Committee B was held. We will seek to review both the choice of accommodation and the allocation of rooms for some of the bigger agencies for next year to alleviate that pressure. I acknowledge that we experienced some difficulties in that room, and we will attempt to address that for next year.

I take the opportunity to thank the team of Acting Speakers for their support and the excellent job they did during the week, and also for the cooperation of members. It was a new experience for many of us, and it was good to see cooperation and collaboration from those who had been through the process before. They beared with us as we proceeded with the new experience.

I will highlight a number of questions of interest to me which were addressed during Estimates Committee A hearings. It is a broad view as I mostly chaired those hearings. First, in relation to the session on Parliament, I noted with pleasure the plans to improve facilities in Parliament. The relocation of the library will be a great advantage to both staff and members. Having visited the Parliamentary Library in Canberra, I can tell members that any increase in accommodation will be welcomed by staff. The library in Canberra is something to behold. It is very large. Members could spend a week in there and not find their way out. It will take us a long time to compete at that level, but I am pleased to note that the new library location will provide additional room, and everyone will benefit from that. As a person who once worked in this place all but briefly, any improvements in working conditions are to be commended, so I hope that we can continue along those lines.

I also noted with interest questions raised during the hearing on police and emergency services, in particular those pertinent to the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA. Moves by FESA to develop and align services to meet the needs of the community in fast-growing areas such as Wanneroo are absolutely vital and are to be commended. Preventive measures of education and awareness programs are of great importance. We need only look at the fires that ensued earlier in the year in the electorate of Wanneroo. Those programs are essential for people to know the difference between what is and what is not a firebreak, how to clear their properties effectively, and how to ensure that they have water available. They also must have access to each other and there must be access and communication between all the services they require. On that note, I commend the people who helped during that time, including the people from the fire and emergency services, the volunteer fire units, the units that came from all over the State, the other volunteers, the Country Women's Association and the police. In particular, I recognise the work of the people from the Salvation Army who were absolutely exceptional.

I recently met with the staff of the local fire office and I commend them for the job they do in supporting the community. The allocation of funds is essential for this service and is to be commended. I note that \$7.78 million has been allocated for capital works for the ongoing replacement of equipment and specialised appliances, as well as for trucks and trailers for the State Emergency Service volunteer units. Once again, they are crucial items for an area such as mine.

Another session of the estimates committee hearings of interest to me was disability services. I commend to the House the importance of recognising the needs of people with dual disabilities. It is acknowledged in the major initiatives for 2001, with a framework being developed in conjunction with the Department of Health for the provision of accommodation. During the estimates committee session, Dr Shean pointed out the difficulties quite well. Although people with profound intellectual disabilities are able to access support through the Disability Services Commission, those with low intellectual disabilities but with severe psychiatric impairment require little ongoing support, but often need high levels of support from the Department of Health; hence the need to develop the services of the two departments working in partnership.

As I said, it is a broad view, because I chaired many of the estimates committee hearings during the week. However, I wanted to highlight those particular points. Also, members showed great diligence during the week. I commend the work of the committees. We covered a lot in Estimates Committee A, including public sector

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management, citizenship and multicultural affairs, environment and heritage, training, state development, tourism and small business, to name but a few. The questions were asked and answered in good spirit at most times. I believe that supplementary information, when sought, has now been provided to all members.

I also thank the parliamentary staff who did a wonderful job during the week to support people such as I who were new to the experience. They are all to be commended, particularly the Hansard staff. They also had a difficult time with their appearance at Estimates Committee B, as did the other people who recorded those sessions.

I acknowledge and thank members for their cooperation and understanding during that time. It was a new experience, and I am sure we can improve on it.

**MR KOBELKE** (Nollamara - Leader of the House) [7.10 pm]: The Estimates Committees once again proved to be an important forum of the House to ensure that members understand items within the budget and can hold the Government accountable for the expenditure that will be voted on through the appropriation Bills. The Estimates Committees have been in place for some time and have been varied over the years. The model that we ran with this year was the one that the previous Government had used. It is a good model, but it has shortcomings, and what can flow from the debate on these two committee reports is some suggestions about how that model can be improved. I will comment on a number of areas in which we need to be mindful of particular factors or make changes. The large number of new members involved in the Estimates Committees meant that it was very much a learning process for the members of the committee and also the Chairs, because most of the Chairs were new members and had not had previous experience of sitting in the Estimates Committees. I congratulate all members for their contribution in making the Estimates Committees work, particularly the Chairs, who had to ensure that the committees ran efficiently and members could have a rational discussion about a range of matters and try to elicit the information that they were seeking. I give sincere thanks to all those involved, including the staff who helped to ensure that the committees ran smoothly, and the Hansard staff who gave us the record.

A number of issues arose in the three committees in which I was involved. One issue was whether members could ask questions about matters that were not in the budget. The ruling that was given by the Chairs in that case was in conformity with the ruling that has always been given; namely, that under standing orders, members cannot ask questions about an item of expenditure that does not appear as an item in a departmental budget. As in the past, that ruling was not necessarily satisfactory to some members, because it meant that members could not ask questions about matters that were not in the budget. That has been a perennial issue and one that we have not addressed in the past. I am open to suggestions about how we may address that issue, but I do not believe there is a ready and easy solution, because it raises the potential that the gamut will be so wide that we cannot control the process.

The value of the Estimates Committees is not only in the primary role of keeping the Government accountable and asking the Government questions about the expenditure that is to be approved so that members can raise points about its appropriateness or otherwise, or about the priorities that the Government is setting in its legislation. All of those matters should be taken up in debate and rightly were. The value of the Estimates Committees is also to give new members an insight into the way departments are structured, programs are run and budgets are allocated. It is important that members of Parliament have some understanding of the policy and program structure and the funding so that they can get the answers that they require or can influence the various processes of government with regard to those matters; and that came out in the committees in which I was involved.

I turn now to some procedural matters with regard to the Estimates Committees. A number of the sessions finished earlier than the scheduled time. This is often a difficulty, because from year to year the priority or concentration of questions for a portfolio may shift, and we cannot always foresee that when we are drawing up the program. The program that we ran this year was very much a replica of the program that we had last year. However, last year we had a different agency and departmental structure. Therefore, in cases in which two agencies or departments had been amalgamated, we took the times that had been allocated last year and added them together for the new agency or department. That meant that this year, the times for the various agencies closely mirrored the times that were allocated last year. Planning and infrastructure finished 30 minutes short of the time allocated; training finished two hours short of the time allocated; housing and works did not require one and a half hours of the time that had been allocated and finished early; education finished 15 minutes prior to the allocated time; sport and recreation and indigenous affairs, which were grouped together for a timeslot, finished 30 minutes short of the allocated time; and the Attorney General and justice did not need one hour of the time that had been allocated. Perhaps some of the other committee sessions needed more time. I did not receive any complaints that there were pressing issues that could not be addressed because the time had run out.

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Mrs Edwardes: Heritage was not dealt with at all.

Mr KOBELKE: In that area, clearly more time was needed. In past years, a range of portfolios were not dealt with because the ones that were dealt with earlier took up all the time and no time was left for portfolios in which members had an interest; or even if members did not have a particular interest, the officials were in attendance and would have liked the opportunity to answer questions but that opportunity was not presented to them because that portfolio was further down the list. It is difficult to find a trade-off, because if we specified a time for each portfolio, members would be locked in, in which case they might spend more time than they wanted on one portfolio, and the next portfolio, on which they might have a lot of questions, would be curtailed. The upside of the current arrangement is that members have greater flexibility to move between portfolios, because they are lumped into the same time allocation. The downside is that if one portfolio runs on for too long, members may miss out. I am happy to enter into a debate with members on both sides about whether we can find a better compromise between those two guiding spirits, but we are working on the model that has operated for some years. It is certainly not perfect, but we need positive suggestions about how we may improve it.

With regard to the allocation of times for next year's Estimates Committees, I will work on the same basis as I did this year, in which I provided a draft to members of the Opposition and the National Party, and the Independents, received some feedback, and then put the timetable together. We cannot please everyone, but I think members were given a reasonable opportunity this year to have some input into the allocation of times, and on the whole it seemed to work, although perhaps we were a bit generous with the time in some areas. In my view, we should not restrict the length of time. I would rather we have more time and not use it than allocate time and find that a range of questions that need to be asked cannot be asked because we have run out of time.

Another issue was the bomb scare, which meant that the Chamber and the whole building had to be cleared and 45 minutes was lost from the treasury and education estimates. The standing orders do not allow for the times to be readjusted in cases such as that, for the good reason that if the times can be adjusted on the vote of the committee, things may get out of control. We need to have a schedule and to stick to that schedule. However, we may need to find some way in which the standing orders can provide flexibility to cater for an exceptional circumstance such as if the building needs to be cleared in an emergency or a hoax emergency. That is the only time in my 13 years in this place that the Estimates Committees have been interrupted by a hoax bomb scare. That is certainly a matter that we can consider, and I am happy to listen to the views of members on that matter.

The health Estimates Committee was held in the Assembly select committee room. It might have been more appropriate to have held that hearing in this Chamber, because the large number of advisers overcrowded the room and meant that there was limited access for the media. We need to consider the agencies that have a lot of departmental people who like to be involved and that may be of particular interest to the media, and next year we will try to ensure that those portfolios are programmed to take place in this Chamber rather than in a smaller room.

A new innovation with the Estimates Committees this year was the ability to have teleconferencing. This arose from the fact that I was acting on behalf of the minister in the other place, who had responsibility for three regional development commissions. We could have had the situation that sometimes happened in the past, in which we flew the chief executive officers to Perth at reasonable expense and perhaps required them to take a day or two out of their program if it did not fit in with some other business that they had to deal with in Perth, and they might not be asked a single question. Therefore, we tried a teleconference arrangement. I think it worked satisfactorily. We were able to get direct answers from the chief executive officers from the Kimberley, Pilbara and Gascoyne Development Commissions. The answers they provided were very much to the point and provided information. In only one case was the line bad, when it was hard for the CEO on the other end to hear what was being said. However, we were still able to have an effective conversation. In other cases, that problem did not arise. Clearly, there was direct access to the CEOs to provide the detailed information that the minister may not have had, and one would not expect a minister representing a minister in another place to be able to provide that detail. That innovation worked well, and I hope it will be continued next year.

In closing, I again thank all members for their contributions, particularly the Chairs, who handled their job admirably. The committees were productive. My view may be seen to be subjective, but the fact that a number of committees finished prior to the allocated time indicates that all members had an opportunity, at least in those committee hearings, to ask whatever questions they wanted to ask, and were able to do that in a reasonable time. I therefore thank all those involved for the smooth running of those committees.

Mr Johnson: Can we have an assurance that next year the Premier won't dish out his green folders with the dorothy dixers and the long answers that he read out, because that wasted a lot of time in this year's estimates?

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Mr KOBELKE: If the time was wasted, why did so many committees not use their full time?

Mr Johnson: Time was taken up by your backbenchers asking the dorothy dix questions that were given to them by somebody from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. The questions were all in those green folders, and the Premier had all the written answers. He read them out, and it wasted a lot of time.

Mr KOBELKE: I do not think there is evidence of that. I remember being in this Chamber in a previous year when Minister Kierath wrote out a question and asked one of the Liberal Party members to ask him that question so that he could take up time going on and on and did not have to answer any questions from opposition members. The political realities are that all Governments -

Mr Johnson: Each of your backbenchers had a green file that set out all the dorothy dixers that the Premier or his staff wanted asked.

Mr KOBELKE: The member is making a fairly wild assertion. All Governments help to provide information to their members, and information that may assist them with questions is available. The leap of illogicality that the member then takes is to say that that wasted time.

Mr Johnson: It took up the time of the Opposition, which has every right to ask questions.

Mr KOBELKE: The member alluded to the Premier. This year, in the time allocated to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in the estimates committee hearings, the Opposition asked approximately 30 questions of the Premier, and government backbenchers asked about 18 questions.

Mr Johnson: Those 18 questions took twice as long as the questions we asked. The Premier made such long statements in his answers that they took twice as much time.

Mr KOBELKE: Is the member suggesting that we should emulate the last Government and take five times as long?

Mr Johnson: No. I am suggesting that you should play fair and give opposition members the opportunity to ask all the questions they want to ask.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McRae): Members, we have only one hour for this debate, and a number of members will want to comment. I am sure that the member for Hillarys will want to do the same. Now that that matter has been raised, it is probably better for the member to reserve the rest of his comments for when he speaks.

Mr KOBELKE: I need to deal with the interjection rather than go on and on. All Governments provide information to assist their members. This Government did that, as did the last Government. The issue is whether that was used in any way to prevent opposition members asking questions. I do not think there is any evidence of that. In the estimates committee hearing for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 30 questions were asked of the Premier by opposition members, and 18 questions were asked by government members. If the Opposition says that is too many, it should look back to 2000, when the Labor Opposition asked 25 questions of Premier Court, and Liberal backbenchers asked 20 questions. Therefore, last year, government and opposition questions were almost equal in number. This year, the ratio was almost two to one, with the Opposition getting two chances to the Government's one. If there was a problem, it seems that it was a much lesser problem than existed under the previous Government.

Mr Day: Give us the figures on health.

Mr KOBELKE: I have just given the figures for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. There may be one or two portfolios in which the Opposition has a basis for some argument. However, one or two over four days does not seem to amount to much of an argument. In fact, in the portfolios in which I was involved, there was ample time for the Opposition to ask questions. Government members did not take up a lot of time with their questions. The overwhelming number of questions came from opposition members. That is appropriate and good. On that basis, the facts show that although the issues raised in the member's interjections may continue to be monitored and looked at, we did much better this year than we did in previous years under the last Government.

**MR DAY** (Darling Range) [7.25 pm]: I agree that the Estimates Committee process is an important part of the analysis and examination of the budget. It gives members an opportunity to consider matters in much greater detail than would otherwise be the case in most other forums. It also gives members the opportunity to scrutinise programs that are planned by the Government for the forthcoming 12 months, and to question in more detail how funds have been expended over the previous 12 months.

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On the timing of the committees, I was surprised to hear the Leader of the House say that the hearings for a number of portfolios concluded early. Certainly, the ones in which I was involved did not conclude early. All the time was used. In some cases we could have done with a bit more time, although generally it was about right. I was present for the end of the hearing on the health portfolio, and it could have gone for at least another two or three hours. The member for Murdoch will make additional comments about the Estimates Committee process for the health portfolio, because he was dissatisfied with the inability to get answers to many of the questions he asked. At least in the time that I was present, government members seemed to focus on occupying as much time in the process as possible.

The Opposition appreciates that the Government agreed not to schedule the Estimates Committee meetings on the Thursday night of the sitting week so that the Parliamentary Liberal Party could hold the dinner for retiring members of the Liberal Party that had been planned previously. It was good that we had the opportunity to go ahead with that.

It has been reported to me that the provision of information was more effective in some portfolios. Certainly, from my recollection, in the state development and energy portfolios there was a good interaction and a good discussion. Generally speaking, the information sought was provided. The session with the Premier was less satisfying. He seemed to be much more defensive and closed. As has been stated, a range of prepared questions were resorted to by members of the Government. A degree of frustration was felt by the member for Murdoch and other opposition members in the health portfolio estimates process.

An issue has been raised about the provision of supplementary information. Some supplementary information was not provided until the dinner suspension that has just concluded. The point was made by the then Opposition last year, and on previous occasions, that it is important for the Opposition to have adequate time to analyse this information, so that it can scrutinise the whole process in this debate and in the third reading debate when it is appropriate to do so. Indeed, further supplementary information has still not been provided in the education portfolio, in particular. That is something on which the Government has fallen down. Some supplementary information came through quickly. The first supplementary information that I received was on the parliamentary budget allocation. Supplementary information from other portfolios came through reasonably quickly. Supplementary information from Treasury came through only during the dinner break. I understand that we are still waiting for supplementary information from the Department of Education.

The Leader of the House referred to the location of the Estimates Committee that considered the health portfolio. Quite clearly it should have been held in this Legislative Assembly Chamber rather than the committee room. I believe the same applies to the Estimates Committee that considered the education portfolio. I know from my direct involvement over the past couple of years that the health portfolio has been dealt with in this Chamber, given that it is such a complex and diverse portfolio and that a large number of officers assist in providing information. This is by far the most appropriate room in the building in which to hold the Estimates Committee that deals with the health portfolio. I have no idea why it was held in the committee room this year, but it was a mistake. I hope the mistake will be rectified for future years. The same applies to the education portfolio for exactly the same reasons.

The estimates committee process is an opportunity for members of the House, in particular opposition and non-government members, to question the Government in detail about the budget that has been presented, and to get further information on a whole range of issues. I can do no better than refer to the member for Nollamara's comments when in opposition, in June of last year during the equivalent debate. He said -

There is certainly a degree of frustration in a committee when opposition members, who put considerable work into preparing questions to try to get an understanding of key issues within the budget, are denied the opportunity to ask questions by members on the government side, who ask a range of trivial questions which lead to a general discussion about whether a program of weed eradication or support for a football team is the way to go in a particular minister's portfolio. Many of those discussions are obviously of some interest to individuals, but they can take place at any time outside the Chamber.

Now that the Labor Party is in government, one would have thought that on this occasion it might put a little of what it preached into practice.

Mr Kobelke: On the figures I gave you, we have.

Mr DAY: In some cases the estimates committee process was quite satisfying; in other cases it was far less satisfying. The session with the Premier was one example of that. As the member for Hillarys asked by interjection, what did we see from government members during the estimates committee process? We saw them

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sitting with their little green folders and their typed-out questions, religiously going through them and ticking them off when they had been asked. The Premier and some ministers virtually read out answers. I do not argue with the proposition that it is perhaps reasonable for ministers to give members of the Government some idea about questions or subjects that might be raised. That has been done previously. I have certainly never seen such an orchestrated and manipulated process undertaken by a Government, in which questions are typed out at some length and put into green folders, and the gnomes of the government backbench religiously and slavishly go through them.

Mr Brown: Is it the colour of the folders that you did not like?

Mrs Edwardes: Some of them took the pages out of the folders the next day because they were embarrassed.

Mr DAY: They did indeed get a little embarrassed. I am pleased that in the session with the Minister for State Development, although that sort of approach was used to a certain extent, it was not to as great an extent as during one or two other sessions. I am not sure whether the minister was here when I said it, but I believe that the exchange we had was generally constructive and reasonably conducted. I hope that the Government has learnt a lesson. The way it approaches the Estimates Committee must be far less orchestrated.

Mr Kobelke: Are you saying that we should be far less organised?

Mr DAY: I said "orchestrated". I am sure that some back bench members would appreciate being given credit for being able to read through the budget papers, being aware of issues in their communities and the portfolios in which they have an interest, and generating their own questions. Next year they might be able to show that they can think for themselves and ask a few questions that they generate rather than having to slavishly follow the very orchestrated process that was attempted by the Government, particularly on the first day. After that, government members became a little embarrassed when it was pointed out by the Opposition, and they did at least remove the questions from the brightly coloured green folders that were so obvious to everybody in the Chamber at the time. The Opposition supports the motion, with the reservations I and other members have outlined.

**MRS EDWARDES** (Kingsley) [7.36 pm]: I support the motion. In doing so, I will raise a couple of points aimed at achieving a level of improvement. There are always ways in which we can improve the process. The Leader of the House raised some points that he grappled with in opposition and we grappled with when in government. When I first came to the Parliament and our roles were reversed, we similarly grappled with those problems.

There will always be advantages and disadvantages with time management. Given some of the challenges that have arisen through the different portfolios being pulled together under one umbrella, we must examine time management. The environment portfolio was a clear example of there not being enough time, because of the broad range and the number of divisions in the portfolio. The member for Greenough will obviously comment on the fact that he did not get a chance to raise questions on heritage. Members experience frustration when they put a lot of time and effort into reading budget papers and preparing questions, and do not get a chance to ask them.

Although there was an informal arrangement that we would finish at a particular time, some members of the Government did not follow through with the spirit of intent. That was a shame because most of the committees were dealt with in very good spirits. A great number of them generally had camaraderie. On some occasions, if a minister was getting into difficulty or needed support, the Chairman helped, as did some of the government members. On only one occasion did one of the government members do that in less than good spirit. The vast majority of government members are to be commended on the way they asked questions and how the ministers answered them. However, some ministers fudged the answers. It was only a small number, fortunately. The rest dealt with questions with a great deal of integrity and answered candidly. It was a shame that on a couple of occasions that was not done by all ministers.

I shall refer to the reason for estimates committees, and the fact that not all the supplementary information has been made available before the start of the estimates debate and the third reading. I remember well a couple of years ago when the Leader of the House asked, at about 4.30 pm on a Wednesday, why we should rush through the estimates debate when he had received his supplementary answers the previous morning. He said that he had attended a Labor Party meeting, and then had to do this and that. He had the supplementary information for more than 24 hours, whereas some of us were still waiting for answers. That may be because the information had not come through or it may be a matter of interpretation as to what supplementary information would be provided on a specific question. I have a couple of queries along those lines. Prior to the debate I spoke to the Leader of the House about how we can better structure the supplementary information that is provided. We

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could number it in some way, and the ministers could indicate the supplementary information they understood would be provided. For example, I received an answer to only one of the three areas in which I had asked for supplementary information. There was no intent to deny me that information, but there was a misunderstanding about the information that would be provided. I would be happy to discuss a better way of organising the supplementary information with the Government and the Clerks.

I refer to the ALP policy on accountability, which indicates that a Labor Government will aim for the highest standards of openness and accountability. It says that members of the public have a right to know how their money will be spent and how their public services will be delivered. Those elements should be evident in the estimates committee hearings. However, both the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Hillarys commented on the level of frustration that arose out of the structured and orchestrated green folder of questions from government members. In some instances ministers were shuffling their papers trying to find the prepared answers. We had the ludicrous situation of government members, who had returned from making phone calls, asking questions that had already been asked by their colleagues because someone had forgotten to cross them off the Government's list of prepared questions! That took this practice to a higher level than I can remember in the 13 years that I have been in this Parliament.

A couple of government members are independent thinkers and asked questions on issues that pertained to their electorates and were important to them. I congratulate those independent thinkers - they know who they are - because they have set the tone for next year. Government members do not need a list of prepared questions. They are members of Parliament, and they did not get to that position by being spoon fed. They have had their first run at an estimates committee hearing; they have now learnt the game. New members can receive guidance about what questions to ask, but not in such an organised and ordered fashion. The Royal Commission into Commercial Activities of Government and Other Matters raised concerns about ministers answering a block of prepared questions. We do not want to again fall into the habit of using this Parliament as a venue in which questions are not answered. We have already seen that occur with questions on notice.

I can number ministers from one to 14 on the basis of who provides the best and who provides the worst answers to questions. The Attorney General provides the best answers. He has answered openly and candidly every one of the questions that I have put on notice. The worst minister is in the other House. Hon Nick Griffiths refuses to answer any questions, and he always has a damn good reason for the information not being available!

Mr Kobelke: Perhaps we need to help you with the questions.

Mrs EDWARDES: If I had some help I could probably ask two or three times more than I do at the moment.

Mr Kobelke: The volume is there; I am talking about the quality.

Mrs EDWARDES: I thought I was doing pretty well.

This is about the use of the Parliament as an open forum to get the information out to the public. Members have an opportunity - as stated by the Leader of the House - to put the minister on the mat during not only the estimates committee hearings but also question time. If the Government were serious about accountability it would live up to what it said; that is, members of the public have a right to know what their money is being spent on and how their public services are being delivered.

I mentioned the time management of portfolios. The time allocated to justice and the Attorney General was changed this year. It was less than the five hours allocated last year, which would have been far too long. Dealing with prisons and the other justice issues in the morning was an appropriate change. The environment portfolio was too extensive. The portfolios that the Leader of the House dealt with brought three major agencies under one division, which worked better than splitting up portfolios and dealing with separate areas. That allowed some crossover of questions in those very important areas. If we had been able to do that with the environment portfolio we may not have got all of our questions up, but we could have asked a number of questions across the different areas in the portfolio.

Mr Kobelke: Are you talking about areas within the divisions or across the divisions?

Mrs EDWARDES: Some portfolios have numerous divisions. For instance, the Minister for the Environment dealt with Kings Park and the Zoological Gardens Board.

Mr Kobelke: If the member is talking about across divisions, that becomes technically a little more difficult.

Mrs EDWARDES: The other ministers did not bring their portfolios together under one umbrella. The Leader of the House dealt with his portfolios and presented his budget in a far more effective way. The environment

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portfolio did not have the same integrated approach as that taken by the Leader of the House. That may happen next year.

Mr Kobelke: That is because areas in my portfolio have been amalgamated under a single department. The Minister for the Environment's portfolio has separate agencies and departments, so it must have separate budget divisions. It does not have that flexibility.

Mrs EDWARDES: I thought some of that integration was still to occur.

Mr Kobelke: The point the member is making is that to the extent that the integration worked in that area, it would be an advantage to other areas.

Mrs EDWARDES: Absolutely. It overcame some of the difficulties of time management faced in other areas. I will raise another couple of matters about Estimates Committee B. The venue for committee B is far too small. Some of the members talked about using the fantastic new committee facilities across the road. That would not work, because members need to have the flexibility to move from one committee to the other. The Chairman of Committees has suggested that we deal with the large portfolios in this Chamber, because the venue for committee B is not as comfortable. Presentation of the budget papers made them easily understood. I have only a couple of issues with them. Budget paper No 3, the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, contained a lot of information that was not available in budget paper No 2, which referred to the approval process for budgets. On a number of occasions I had to refer to a page number in budget paper No 2 but the detailed information I was asking for was contained in budget paper No 3. Budget paper No 3 is a highly valuable document for interpreting some of the material in budget paper No 2. I had no difficulty in asking questions through any of the chairmen of committees. In fact I commend the chairmen of the respective committees that I attended. However, some value would be gained by putting some of the information into budget paper No 2. An example in which the Deputy Speaker would have an interest is the proposed new primary schools at East Marangaroo and Carramar. I could not find them until I searched the CD-ROM. They should have been identified somewhere in budget paper No 2, otherwise it gives a misleading picture of the projects that are budgeted. If \$5.5 million is budgeted for each school in the out years, it should be identified in budget paper No 2, yet only the current year's capital works projects and aggregated figures are listed, not a breakdown of those figures. Members were constantly asking for breakdowns of the information provided.

Another issue is that the CD-ROM was great to use and is an improvement on last year's CD-ROM. However, it could be further improved so that members could use it on laptop computers obviating the necessity to bring into the Parliament files and pieces of paper. If the CD-ROM were paginated, we could refer to it in committee. It could also be developed so that members could insert their questions as an overview - I do not know the technical term - when referring to the division and item numbers. Time would be saved and greater efficiencies gained if that program could be developed in time for next year's budget.

Mr Hyde: And it won't need a green file!

Mrs EDWARDES: The member for Perth will have to find his own cover!

The chairmen were good facilitators and continued the progression of the committees. Very few government members of Parliament asked individual questions and I encourage them to do that next year. They did not get where they are in this place without the ability to think for themselves. They should ask questions because it will help them to do their job much better. If the other points I raised about time management, the presentation of the budget papers and the CD-ROM are taken on board, we will continue to improve the estimates committee process.

**MR EDWARDS** (Greenough) [7.53 pm]: I shall keep my comments brief because the member for Kingsley said a great deal about the estimates committees. I am a new member to this place and this was my first experience of estimates committees. I was also one of the chairmen of those committees, which I believe ran smoothly in the main. As a chairman, I appreciated the goodwill returned to me from members. I must say as chairmen we had some moments.

I will comment on the heritage issue raised earlier by the member for Kingsley and the issue of timing raised by the Leader of the House. Heritage may not be a high profile issue for this Parliament but it was unfortunate that the time allocated was not enough to embrace it. I asked many questions on the environment and was probably as much to blame as other members for continuing the run of questions in that area. However, the environment is an important issue and an important portfolio and those questions needed to be asked. I ask that due consideration be given to heritage in the future. I am aware that chief executive officers and advisers were sitting in the back of the Chamber probably twiddling their thumbs most of the afternoon waiting to be called



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upon and of course were not. Obviously, they also wasted their time. Heritage issues will increase the pressure on planning and development issues in the future. Our younger generation will see that heritage issues are of importance and will become far more relevant. I therefore ask that heritage matters be addressed.

Another issue that arose for the chairmen of the committees was the so-called supplementary questions. A member recently asked me whether they were supplementary questions. I wondered whether they were more questions that arose from an issue, which were not really supplementary questions, but rather questions that followed a line of interest. How we follow through those lines of interest is something that may need to be considered. On a few occasions - I am sure the Deputy Speaker is making a note of this - members sought to ask supplementary questions. There were probably 10 supplementary questions at that time, but I do not believe they were all genuine supplementary questions. We must define more clearly where a line of questioning is leading. I raise that matter as an issue.

Mr Kobelke: In support of the Bill?

Mr EDWARDS: Yes, a line of questioning in support of the Bill or an extension of a question.

Mr Kobelke: You are suggesting that members should be able to pursue a line of questioning to get details about an issue?

Mr EDWARDS: Yes, that is what I am suggesting.

That is all I have to say. In general I support the motion. We can only improve on what we did this year. I suppose I could have a small shot at the Government by saying that perhaps the green folders do not need to be quite as obvious as they were. I support the motion.

**MR WALDRON** (Wagin) [7.57 pm]: I shall make a brief comment as I believe most of what I want to say has been said. As a new member, I found the estimates committee process valuable. I was not sure how it would work until I got into it and I found it to be a great way to listen and learn, although I may not have been directly involved in all of the process. It was of great use to learn from the questions asked in the areas in which I have a special interest. I believe that the committees were conducted in a good manner but I intend to mention briefly the time given for asking questions.

It was disappointing to note that some areas of a portfolio were not reached. I do not know whether it is possible to allocate an amount of time to each portfolio as that may cause problems in the attendance of advisers. However, in one division when the Acting Speaker was chairman, we did not reach one section, and I believe that the allocated time ran out to ask questions in the fisheries section of the agricultural division. If these portfolios were allocated a time, at least the priority questions could be asked. If time were still available, more questions could be asked, as the Leader of the House did, between one portfolio and the other. I guess the Government will examine that issue. Overall I found it to be a terrific process and I look forward to it next year when I will probably ask some more valuable questions and learn more. I congratulate the chairpersons, especially the new members who did a terrific job.

Question put and passed.

**MS GUISE** (Deputy Speaker): I move -

That the report of Estimates Committee B be adopted.

I will make a number of quick comments about Estimates Committee B, but in doing so I will address a couple of issues. Members have already mentioned the difficulties that were experienced in the room in which Estimates Committee B was held. As I indicated earlier, that will be addressed. Some big-ticket items were assigned to the room, in particular planning and infrastructure, housing and works, and local government. The session on the Pilbara and Gascoyne was the only session that finished early. The session on education, which traditionally has a large number of advisers, and the session on health were also held in the room. I concede that the hearing on health was extremely difficult in the room due to the number of advisers and the interest of members and the media. We will need to address that next year.

The member for Hillarys raised an issue about the time management of Estimates Committee A, which is also relevant to Estimates Committee B. There is some difficulty in assigning a particular amount of time to each division. Perhaps members of the committee might like to enter into some prior discussion to see whether a consensus position can be reached on the order of the divisions that will be taken next year. It is something to which we need to give some thought. A couple of divisions were not dealt with, and that is most unfortunate.

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However, that was not always the case. There was some agreement and movement about the order in which the divisions were taken. When that happened, there was a good result.

Questions have also been raised about supplementary questions, which needs some discussion. The Acting Speakers agreed that it was appropriate to allow a line of questioning to ensue, so that members could develop the theme of a question. However, where that begins and ends is something that we must discuss. As the member for Greenough indicated, a questionable number of supplementary questions then ensued. It was appropriate to the theme, but it was hard to handle. We will have some discussion on that, because the standing orders are relatively silent on supplementary questions. It was appropriate to allow members to pursue a theme and everyone seemed to collaborate and cooperate, so I thank them very much.

I had a great interest in the session on education. The minister was probably quite relieved that I was chairing the hearing rather than asking questions, because it is an area about which I am passionate. The Government has answered the questions. I am pleased to note that the middle school in Kinross is going ahead, as is the senior campus in Mindarie, which will be great news for the people in the northern suburbs. The \$5.5 million each that has been allocated over four years for the East Marangaroo primary school and the Carramar primary school is also of great need. There is always a great challenge for any Minister for Education to meet the needs of areas of growth such as Wanneroo. I commend him for acknowledging our needs. The Government has also placed emphasis on providing additional support for teachers in the whole school community for additional programs to support literacy and numeracy in our children. Greater emphasis will also be placed on the profession of teaching. Work was started under the previous Government and I am glad to see the support of teacher registration. It is imperative that we improve the status of teaching. Teachers do a wonderful job and it is time they were acknowledged and respected once again in the community.

Another area of interest was health. Chairing a large amount of the committee hearing highlighted to me the complexity of that portfolio. The issues that were raised were varied, but one point that came through was the mutual concern we all have for mental health. It seemed to dominate. Several questions were asked about general practitioner services and the pressure that is put on our public hospitals due to the shortage of doctors. However, I was interested to note that Professor Stokes commented that up to 70 per cent of people presenting at our public hospitals would qualify as GP patients. That was an interesting statistic. It highlighted the importance of a GP after-hours service, which is pertinent in the northern suburbs because areas north of Burns Beach Road have difficulty accessing a locum. The GP after-hours service is absolutely crucial, as was the discussion that came up in answer to a question about the Medicare provider numbers and how they are allocated. I encourage the minister to keep pursuing that issue with our federal colleagues, because Yanchep-Two Rocks is a classic example. It is designated an area of unmet need, but it continually struggles to find and maintain a permanent doctor service.

I will also mention the issues surrounding mental health. The importance of early intervention is not to be underestimated. The support for young adolescents and older teenagers on youth suicide and other issues was raised again and again throughout the questions, as was support for young families; that is, support for the mums and dads as well as for the children, particularly in areas such as mine, whether it be money, marriage, children or family related. The support for the growing number of people in this State who are suffering from stress-related mental anguish is an area of great need. It is good to see that, through the budget process, the Government is putting in place programs that deal with not only the real issues of physical and mental need but also education and awareness programs for the broader community to support people. It is a subject that has always been shoved under the carpet somewhat. Anything we can do to bring it out in the open and address those needs will be welcome, particularly any support that we can offer our schools and schoolchildren. Anything that the school staff, the psychiatrists and the whole school support service team can do in interagency support is most welcome.

I particularly wanted to speak about the time management issues, not only for the whole program but also in dealing with divisions, which were raised by the member for Hillarys and others. They are very relevant. On the point made by the member for Greenough, a fellow Acting Speaker, we need some discussion about supplementary questions. I thank the member for raising the issue.

**MS SUE WALKER** (Nedlands) [8.07 pm]: I am not sure whether this is the right time to raise this issue, but I am told that it is. During the estimates committee hearings I asked for five supplementary items from the Attorney General, which I have not received. The first item was a breakdown of offences under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1985. The second was the moneys recovered from offenders and the process to recover them from the Crown Solicitor's Office. The third was the process review that looked at ways in which that was undertaken, which is at page E431 on 27 September. The fourth item was the statistics to show that the

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District Court backlog is only 52 weeks, which is at page E446 on 27 September. The fifth item was for a copy of the structural review report from the Director of Public Prosecutions, which is at page E461. I have not received any of that information; therefore, I am not able to participate fully in the upcoming debate. Until I receive that information, the third reading should not proceed.

**MR OMODEI** (Warren-Blackwood) [8.10 pm]: I have always understood that the Estimates Committees provide an opportunity for the Opposition to scrutinise the Government, and for all members to ask ministers questions and to raise concerns about their electorate or any matters, whether they be inside or outside the Chamber. On some occasions the estimates committee debate bordered on the farcical, to the extent that in one of the divisions, as the opposition spokesperson it took 35 minutes before I received the call from the Chair, and that Chair was you, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr McRae). I found that remarkable. I found also that the process of allocating questions in a rotational manner did not contribute to the debate in any way. In fact, it denied opposition members the opportunity to question the ministers on a certain theme or in such a way that they could draw out information. It would have been more sensible had the ministers welcomed questions and the opportunity to let the Parliament know how well they are handling their portfolio. In the eight years that I was a minister, I welcomed any questions from the Opposition, because it gave me the opportunity to tell members opposite how well I was handling my portfolio.

Mr Barnett: You used to look forward to the Estimates Committees.

Mr OMODEI: Yes. I distinctly remember that during one local government estimates debate when the Wanneroo royal commission was on, the member for Peel referred to a certain line in the budget and used that to discuss the Wanneroo royal commission, and no other local government matter was discussed in that estimates debate. However, that was the way that the Labor Party wanted to handle that situation. This year, particularly in committee A during the debate on the police and the environment portfolios, there was not enough time to scrutinise the budget. That can be contrasted with committee B and the debate on the regional development portfolio, particularly in the south west region, during which the Attorney General answered every question and seemed to relish the opportunity to answer every question, in concert with the chief executive officer of the South West Development Commission.

Mr Barnett: Despite his misguided policies, he is actually across his portfolio.

Mr OMODEI: I found it refreshing that the Attorney General was able to answer the questions; and if he could not answer the questions, he took them on notice or offered supplementary information. The chief executive officer was also in control of his responsibilities. That can be contrasted with the performance of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Kimberley, Pilbara and Gascoyne, and with the chief executive officer of the Gascoyne Development Commission, who could not attend the estimates debate because he could not catch a plane. Despite the fact that some country members of the Opposition and some government members had to travel for three, four or five hours to get to this Parliament, that CEO could not get to the estimates debate because he could not catch a plane. I find that unacceptable. The parliamentary secretary could not answer some of the questions, and the chief executive officer could not attend, so a lot of questions were taken on notice.

Mr McGowan: Was that because of the Ansett collapse?

Mr OMODEI: Yes. I drove to the Parliament from Pemberton, for three and three-quarters of an hour, and he was in Geraldton -

Mr McGowan: It was no-one's fault.

Mr OMODEI: He could have driven a car the same as anyone else. That is a flaw in the system, because the CEOs should be here; and whether they catch a plane or ride a bike, I do not care.

The rotational question process must be addressed, because it just does not work. The ideal way to handle the estimates debate is to allow the opposition members to ask as many questions as they want and to exhaust the questions from the Opposition, and to then allow the backbench members to ask the questions that they want to ask. It should be borne in mind that the backbenchers can sidle up to the minister at any time, because they are in the same political party, and ask as many questions as they want.

Mr McGowan: As can you. When you were a minister, I sidled up to you and asked you questions.

Mr OMODEI: Yes, and I always responded. I do not think some ministers were too keen to answer questions. The Minister for Police was certainly reluctant to answer some questions. That might have been a political tactic by the Labor Party to obfuscate or give the minister some respite, or whatever. However, I believe that is a nonsense. If ministers have any problems in their portfolio, sooner or later someone will highlight them, either someone in the public or someone in the Parliament. I am suggesting that enough time should be given to

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important issues such as the environment, which was a major pre-election issue, and the police portfolio. In the current world crisis situation, the answer that we received from the Minister for Police was that Australia is not a target. That can be contrasted with the reports in today's news and with the Premier's comments about the anthrax issue.

Mr McRae: There was some discussion about the potential social and economic issues, and as I recall there was some reluctance to discuss the measures that were being taken because that might reveal the operational nature of that action.

Mr OMODEI: I think the member will recall that I acknowledged that when I talked to the Commissioner of Police about what preparations had been made for not necessarily a terrorist attack, because I would not expect a terrorist attack in downtown Perth, but for a copycat-type situation in which people who are psychotic or have some problems do exactly what has been happening in the past 24 to 48 hours. Despite the fact that we are not ministers of the Government, as opposition members we have received a lot of messages and telephone calls about water supplies and other matters. People want to know where they will get their drinking water the day after tomorrow, because they can go without a drink of water tomorrow, but what will they do the day after tomorrow if the water supply in metropolitan Perth is affected by some stupid act?

Those sorts of questions should be answered in this place. However, we did not have enough time to do that, mainly because of the rotational question situation. I know I am harping on that point, but I have always thought that the convention in this place is that the first person who catches the eye of the Chair or the Speaker is the person who is given the call, and that the convention in the estimates committee debate is that the Opposition is given the running first, for a reasonable amount of time, and the government backbenchers can then ask questions if they deem it necessary. Please correct me if I am wrong. I believe that convention should be reinstated.

Mr McGinty: It has never applied in the past.

Mr OMODEI: I have just been singing the Attorney General's praises because of the way the debate was handled for the South West Development Commission.

Mr McGinty: Sorry about that! I retract that comment!

Mr OMODEI: I said that I thought the Attorney General seemed to relish the opportunity to answer questions, but that did not seem to be the case with other ministers.

Mr McGinty: I am sorry I did not hear that.

Mr OMODEI: I do not think any minister should fear any question from an Opposition. If ministers do not know the answer to a question, they should take it on notice or ask the member to put it on notice, or provide an answer by way of supplementary information. The opportunity should be given for the Opposition to scrutinise the budget. That is what the estimates committee process is all about. Of course every member of Parliament should have an opportunity to question a minister; and if a member cannot get an answer from a minister about a delicate or controversial subject, then something is wrong with the relationship between the member and the minister. The estimates committee debate is an important part of the parliamentary process, but it should be run in such a way that the maximum amount of information can be extracted for the general public's consumption.

**MR McRAE** (Riverton) [8.19 pm]: I want to comment on the process as well as some of the content of the estimates committee hearings. When I was in the Chair during the past hour and a bit, I listened to some of the comments about process. As a new member of this House, and certainly a new acting chairperson, it is probably important that I put on record my approach to my role as a chairperson of committees, and reflect on the discussions held in the Speaker's chamber, in the week prior to the Estimates Committees, with all Acting Speakers who were to act as chairpersons of committees, about how to manage what, in the end, is always a contentious and tension-filled time, when the Opposition attempts to illicit as much information as possible. I understand that there have always been complaints from Oppositions about whether the process was fair.

I will make a couple of comments about my experience of the process. Firstly, on Tuesday, the first day of committee hearings, I was the chair of Estimates Committee A, which was examining the Premier's portfolio interests. The experience of being what I can only describe as screamed at, told that I was a disgrace and that the whole thing was a -

Mr Omodei: You performed very poorly as a chairman, member for Riverton. You were the worst of all the chairmen.

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Mr Johnson: You ruled one of my questions out of order because the Premier was getting embarrassed. It was a genuine question that related to the estimates that we were looking at. However, you wanted to protect the Premier, so you ruled my question out of order. It was disgraceful, quite frankly, and I have never seen it happen before.

Mr McRAE: It does not seem as though members opposite have learnt a thing since that time. I did not stand tonight to get into a barney with members opposite about these matters. I just wanted to discuss, in a rational and open way, how I approached my role and went about employing myself in it. Having been screamed at and accused of being a disgrace, I think it is appropriate that I put a number of comments on the record. I will quote them so that all members will hear them. On Tuesday, 25 September, after I had ruled one of my government colleagues out of order, and was still accused of being a disgrace, I am recorded as saying at page E24 of *Hansard* -

For the benefit of members, I place on the record that the Chairmen of Estimates Committees met last week to discuss the procedures that would be followed during the course of the Estimates Committee hearings. It was agreed on a bipartisan basis that members would have equal status, and that our task was not to keep members to time and get them through all the divisions before the committee this morning or in any other allocated period, but to allow a distribution of questions from members on either side, as represented in the committee hearings. That was a bipartisan agreement.

Mr Omodei: If that was the case, why did it take you 34 minutes to give me, as shadow spokesman for police, the call?

Mr McRAE: I will come to the member's concern. However, I want to explain where that agreement left new committee chairs in applying the sorts of protocols and understandings of process that were given to us by way of explanation and guidance in the week before. As I understood the advice from the Clerks and members of the House - indeed, I did not speak to only government members - the chair of a committee had a choice of how to give the call. That could be by giving the call to the first person in line of sight, or, if that became difficult in the committee process, as it sometimes did, the suggestion was that committee chairs might create a call list, and allow each member to indicate that he or she was ready to take the call and to be placed on a list that would enable that to occur.

Mr Barnett: Who do you think is competent to make a bipartisan agreement?

Mr McRAE: I believe that the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and the Acting Speakers from both sides of Parliament, in open discussion, are able to raise concerns about process.

Mr Barnett: I am not talking about process. The only people in this Chamber who are competent to make a bipartisan agreement are the leader of government business and the leader of opposition business.

Mr McRAE: I do not have a problem with a moment of reflection after this exercise, whereby we get together and have that discussion. I am talking about the procedure for informing new Acting Speakers, what their understanding should be, and what role they should perform. If there is to be an amendment to that, I am open to it. I do not have a problem with it.

Mr Omodei: Surely, you must acknowledge that you allowed 35 minutes to pass, and you called everybody else before me, as the shadow spokesman for police and emergency services, and the former Minister for Police. Doesn't that beg the question that you were trying to politicise the process?

Mr McRAE: I said I would get to the member for Warren-Blackwood's concern in a moment, and I will. Firstly, I am trying to respond to the -

Mr Omodei: Maybe you should refer to the debate.

Mr McRAE: I have it here in front of me, and I remember very well the concerns the member raised. However, I want to respond to the Leader of the Opposition. It is absolutely appropriate that people who have been around this place longer than I have should get together to discuss whether other protocols should be put in place.

Mr Barnett: It is not a matter of experience. The only two people in this Parliament who should negotiate that are the leader of government business and the leader of opposition business. They are the two people who determine any agreement.

Mr McRAE: I do not think that is right. My view is that everybody should have some input into that process.

Mr Barnett: Clearly, the Speaker can have a view on the way things operate. You were talking about a bipartisan agreement across this Chamber. Only two people can determine that.

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Mr McRAE: Maybe I should characterise it as a bipartisan discussion. Perhaps that would be more appropriate.

Mr Barnett: It was a discussion involving members who would chair committees; that is all.

Mr McRAE: I am not rejecting the Leader of the Opposition's point; I am just saying what was the bipartisan discussion that informed my approach to the job the week before the Estimates Committees.

I refer to the member for Warren-Blackwood's and the member for Hillarys' objections and continuing dissatisfaction. I say to the member for Warren-Blackwood that I took the Chair on the hour, according to the roster for the changeover of the chairpersons of committees. When I sat down, there was already a full list of speakers. I am sorry I did not keep my notes from that session, because I put the member for Warren-Blackwood further up the list than would have otherwise been the case. I tried to give balance and recognition, but within the overriding principle that every member of a committee has an equal right to ask a question.

If we are to move away from that principle, more members than just the Leader of the House and the leader of opposition business should be involved, because a fundamental principle is at stake here, which is that all members who appear and present themselves as members of a committee can participate. Indeed, as a member of this Chamber, I sat in on a committee process, and one opposition member called a point of order and suggested that I was not even entitled to ask a question because I was not a member of the committee. That was an extraordinary approach to take, given that the basic principle is that every member is entitled to an equal role and equal participation in the Estimates Committees. It is an important principle that should be retained.

Mr Omodei: You should look at page E196, because you are misleading the Parliament. You were the chairman throughout those estimates committee debates. You came in at nine o'clock.

Mr McRAE: That is right.

Mr Omodei: You said that there was already a list of four or five people; there was not.

Mr McRAE: We are running out of time. I said that I came in -

Mr Johnson: You were there at the beginning. You were there at nine o'clock. It did not start at eight o'clock.

Mr McRAE: The member for Warren-Blackwood got the first call.

Mr Omodei: No, I did not. That was in emergency services.

Mr McRAE: I came in at nine o'clock.

Mr Omodei: I was talking about the police debate, which is a separate division. It is division 48.

Mr McRAE: The member might be able to find an error. At the moment, I do not understand from where he got that. I will look at it later.

Mr Omodei: It is page E202, and the debate in which I objected is at page E205.

Mr McRAE: I agree with members opposite that there probably needs to be some refinement of defining lines of questioning for supplementary questions. I believe there is a degree of confusion in the use of the term "supplementary questions" when we also understand that is taken to be a request for supplementary information.

I want to touch briefly on green folders. On environment, the Swan River Trust, training, education, justice and indigenous affairs, I asked at least one question that was not on the Government's list of questions that we wanted raised. Many members did the same. It is a bit cute and a bit of a nonsense in some ways for members opposite to say that members of the government backbench are not vitally interested in key areas of reform and initiative in the Government's agenda. To suggest that those questions were framed in the absence of government thinking totally misses the point. That might have been how the coalition Government was run, but as far as I am concerned from my involvement to date, it is not how our Government is run. I am quite comfortable with the process of exploring, exposing and advocating the Government's initiatives and reforms.

I found a couple of areas of my questioning particularly useful. The first relates to the Canning River Regional Park in my electorate, which borders on Shelley, part of Ferndale and part of Riverton. The capacity for the Minister for the Environment to talk about those matters of interest to me showed the capacity for any member of Parliament to raise local issues. I was very appreciative of the opportunity to raise those matters with her. The second area of concern related to some work that I am doing with the Economics and Industry Standing Committee. The Minister for the Environment was able to elaborate on the Government's moves on pollution control and abatement. That has a particular relevance to the committee's current Bellevue inquiry, which I hope will be reported to the House before the end of the year.

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**MR JOHNSON** (Hillarys) [8.32 pm]: I had not intended to speak in this debate on Estimates Committee B. However, the comments I have heard so far have forced me to speak. First of all, I compliment you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I believe that you did an excellent job when you were in the Chair, and so did most of the Deputy Chairmen of committees. You were fair and gave ample opportunity to both sides of the House to ask questions. I would love to be able to say the same about the member for Riverton, but I am afraid I cannot because I would be telling porky pies. I thought the way that the member for Riverton acted as Chairman was disgraceful. It is the worst I have seen in the nine years that I have been here.

I have had the privilege of being in your position, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was an Acting Speaker for four years and then the Deputy Speaker for something like six months before I became the Cabinet Secretary, so I have a fair bit of experience of not only being in the Chair in this Chamber but also in the Chair of estimates committees. I tried to do the job as fairly as possible. The practice I have seen in this House in committee A and committee B - I have chaired both - is that normally one would give a little leeway to the Opposition, particularly the spokesperson for a particular division that was being considered. That did not happen, certainly in committee A when I was acting as the spokesperson for citizenship and multicultural interests. In fact, the member for Riverton, as Chairman, ruled a question out of order after quite a bit of debate. The Premier took over the portfolio of citizenship and multicultural interests. He espoused that it is such an important portfolio that when he became Premier he would take it into his area of portfolio responsibilities. I wanted to know why the budget had been cut. It took a long time to try to elicit an answer. The Premier tried to tell me that the money had gone into the area of citizenship. I knew where the money had gone, but it had not been increased. The money for multicultural issues had decreased.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am having difficulty hearing the member. Members will desist from conversation in the Chamber.

Mr JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The other question I thought was very important was the question to the Premier on how many multicultural functions he had been invited to, how many he had attended and how many he had sent representatives to. I said that I had attended quite a few and that I had not seen him at many. His representatives had attended, which is fine. I always said that the Premier is too busy to hold that portfolio because it is probably one of the busiest portfolios for functions and meetings.

Mr McRae: I still do not understand how this is a budget matter.

Mr JOHNSON: I will explain. The member has been here for only five minutes and thinks he knows everything. It is a criticism that many of my colleagues make of him. If he wants to earn some respect in this place, he must listen more and interject less. Tweedledum and Tweedle Dumber have more conversations in this Parliament by way of interjection than most members would have in 20 years.

Mr Hyde: Tell us something sensible.

Mr JOHNSON: Tweedledum and Tweedle Dumber are doing it again. That is where they get their nicknames from. The member for Perth should listen. I did not say too much when I came into this place but listened and learned for six months. That is something that I recommend the member for Perth and his colleagues do.

*Points of Order*

Ms QUIRK: I understand we are addressing the work of committee B. The Premier's portfolio came under committee A.

Mr JOHNSON: I am trying to draw a comparison between the chairmanship of committee A and that of committee B. I am paying some compliments to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. If the Government Whip is so nervous about our criticising the Premier or drawing attention to his lack of commitment to that area, it is a pretty poor show.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I am sure the member for Hillarys was making some comparisons and drawing his comments to a conclusion.

*Debate Resumed*

Mr JOHNSON: The point I was making was that the member for Riverton ruled that issue out of order. He said that it did not come within the budget. I am sorry, but there is a general implication for the budget from the

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Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests attending functions and carrying out the duties of that portfolio. It was a genuine question.

Mr McRae: It still is not.

Mr JOHNSON: Of course it is, for goodness sake. We allowed the Opposition thousands of questions that had nothing to do with the budget estimates, when it was in Opposition for eight long years. Our chairmen of committees were pretty fair, as are most of the present ones, except for the member for Riverton.

*Point of Order*

Mr McGOWAN: I have been examining standing orders. I have not been able to find a reference to this point of order, but my recollection of standing orders is that one should not reflect upon the ruling of a Speaker or a chairperson, whether it be made in the Estimates Committee or in the House. I have heard speaker after speaker reflect upon some of the chairpersons and the job they have done. There are appropriate forums in which they can take up those criticisms outside this debate. The way opposition members are behaving towards chairpersons or Acting Speakers is inappropriate in this forum. Maybe the member for Hillarys should approach the Speaker outside this debate. I believe it is highly inappropriate to do it in this way.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There are rules for dealing with and addressing a person's role in this case. However, in this instance the member for Hillarys was responding to an issue that was raised by the member for Rockingham. I have allowed a reasonable amount of latitude. However, I ask the member for Hillarys to address himself to committee B as that latitude has run out.

*Debate Resumed*

Mr JOHNSON: I was just about to do that when the member for Rockingham made a point of order. I will give the Government a bouquet or two. The Attorney General did not hear the member for Kingsley say that he had done a reasonable job in committee B because he answered members' questions. Committee B was pretty fair. It was a well run committee - certainly when I was there. The Attorney General and Minister for Justice answered the questions that were put to him. There were very few questions that required the provision of supplementary information, and I certainly got the supplementary information that I asked for.

Mr McGinty: I think everyone did.

Mr JOHNSON: I cannot speak for other people. As the Leader of the Opposition said, the Attorney General did very well and I compliment him. On the whole, the Attorney General did not need to ask his advisers for too much information. The Attorney General has been around this place for some time, and he knows how things work. He is a fairly competent minister. He very rarely has to read answers to the questions that he gets.

Mr McGinty: I rarely get asked any.

Mr JOHNSON: The Attorney General will be asked questions in time. We are working up to it. There are a few problems looming on which I will be asking questions in the very near future. I found that in the area of justice and the associated portfolios under the Attorney General, committee B was worthwhile. All the questions that needed to be answered were answered. Most questions were answered on the day. Certainly Madam Deputy Speaker, when you were in the Chair, you gave a fair proportion of the questions to opposition members. The role of the committee chairmen is to try to ensure that both sides get a fair number of questions. Government backbenchers do want to ask questions. My experience is that they do not have many questions, and they often have to fish through the budget papers to find a question to ask, so that the Opposition does not get to ask so many questions. We all know what the game is, and it has been going on for years - certainly before I came into this place. Let us be honest about it. It is important that the Opposition has as much, if not more, opportunity to ask questions of the Executive Government. One of the best opportunities is in question time and also the budget estimates. I hope that some lessons have been learnt from this year and that those chairmen of committees will remember them next year. The only chairman this year who had any experience was the member for Carine. Even you, Madam Deputy Speaker, did not have any previous experience of being a Chairman of the Estimates Committee, but you did a good job. You were very fair and your bipartisan approach ensured that opposition members were able to ask questions.

**MR BARNETT** (Cottesloe - Leader of the Opposition) [8.45 pm]: During the 10 years that I have been a member of this Parliament, the convention during estimates committees has been to provide an opportunity primarily for the opposition spokesperson to challenge the minister and to ask questions. There is no doubt that a competent minister will relish that opportunity. The member for Darling Range referred to government backbenchers running around with little green folders. I found that extraordinary and a humiliating exercise for them. It did not reflect well on elected members of state Parliament to be running around with little green



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folders containing set questions. Backbenchers may indicate that they are participating in the estimates committee and offer to raise any issues that ministers may want raised. We have all done that, but to distribute preset questions was humiliating for the Government. That point has been made.

As has been the case in the past, it should be the convention in the estimates committees that the first half dozen questions or so be asked by the opposition spokesperson. If spokespersons are across their portfolios, they will have pertinent, well thought out questions, which ministers either answer or agree to provide answers to as supplementary information. That scenario should flow. It should not involve politicking; it should be a question and answer session. Progressively, other members should participate, including government backbenchers. It was ludicrous to see that preset rotational system in place. It reflected poorly on this Parliament, on the accountability process of the estimates committee and on the ministers concerned. It looked to me as an observer of many estimates committees that ministers were not confident or competent in their portfolios.

Mr Kucera: Rubbish.

Mr BARNETT: The Minister for Health was probably one of the worst offenders because he failed to satisfactorily answer any question asked of him on health.

Mr Kucera: You referred to opposition members asking well thought out questions. Had that happened -

Mr BARNETT: We will detail the minister's inability. Of all the ministers, the Minister for Justice gave some of the best responses to questions. However, it was the consensus among opposition members that without doubt the Minister for Health responded the most poorly to questions of detail on his portfolio. We will go through the health issues one by one tomorrow because he failed to answer questions satisfactorily. The bumbling, fumbling Treasurer did a good job in Estimates Committee A and responded to questions. It is not difficult to do so, and it is a great opportunity for ministers to display their knowledge and to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the Opposition. However, we found a contrivance by the Government to limit debate on something ministers should relish. They should relish the opportunity to talk about their portfolios and what they have achieved in the budget process. However, the committees were confronted with government members running around with little green folders to stop debate. The member for Swan Hills may laugh, but that behaviour has not happened in this Parliament in 10 years. She is a new member.

Ms Radisich: I did not have a green folder.

Mr BARNETT: Good on the member for Swan Hills if she did not. Members who ran around with little green folders looked ridiculous.

This is a place for members of Parliament. On some occasions too many advisers were allowed into the Chamber. I will concede that that happened during the coalition Government's term. When advisers are here, they should sit near the minister to assist the minister. They should not be scattered around the Chamber as occurred at least on one occasion that I observed. That was unacceptable. The Leader of the House and ministers, especially if they are inexperienced, must respect this Parliament and ensure that advisers are in here as guests of Parliament to assist the minister. They should not have the run of the Chamber. That is inappropriate and disrespectful to the Parliament.

Mr Kucera: We had the same number of advisers as your minister last year.

Mr BARNETT: I think there are often too many. I am not saying the minister was guilty of that, but advisers should not be scattered around the Chamber. Government advisers and perhaps even staff of ministerial officers sat directly behind opposition members during an estimates committee. It was totally inappropriate. Although it was a minor event, it should not have happened in this Chamber.

I want to make a serious point about the conduct and planning of the estimates committee process, for which I had the responsibility for eight years in government. I believe we made some improvements. It was not a perfect process and I know that further changes were made this year in the name of improvements. It is still not perfect. Having watched estimates committees for some time, I must say that I am unconvinced that the process of having two estimates committees works. There might be a difference of opinion about that, which Parliament must think about. There is merit, and I believe it is desirable, to have an Estimates Committee of the Whole for a week dealing with the major portfolios of health, education, justice and other major portfolios, which would allow all members of Parliament the opportunity and time to ask questions. Estimates committees could be run for two weeks but the Government would probably object to that. However, it would be ideal to run them for two weeks as a Committee of the Whole or a full week of major portfolios and a second week of the smaller portfolios - for example, sport and recreation - in which only a few members might participate. That second week could be run concurrently with the normal business of the House. I do not believe, in a House of 57 members, that a dual system of estimates committees works. There were times, probably even for government

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backbenchers, when members were participating in one estimates committee but were interested in the other one. That process must be reconsidered. The ideal process would be to have an estimates committee for two weeks as a Committee of the Whole. The Government probably would not want to give up two weeks for that. However, we could have one full week from Monday to Friday, and then another week with the smaller more specialist portfolios run on a dual basis with the House carrying on its normal business. That is very doable, which would then allow, with rare exceptions, all members to participate in the estimates committees they want to participate in. There have been some improvements to the estimates committee process. I compliment the Clerk and his staff. They worked hard to make it work as well as it could. However, there is a fundamental issue and from my observations of nine years of estimates committees, dual committees do not work in a Chamber of 57 members.

**MR D'ORAZIO** (Ballajura) [8.52 pm]: As one of the new members of this Parliament, I compliment the estimates committee process. For someone new to this Parliament who does not understand exactly how it works, the estimates process was a real eye-opener for me. I was involved in the process on Wednesday and Thursday mornings. I had no notes and no green folder - I do not know what members opposite were talking about. Even opposition members would know that the discussions that occurred on Wednesday and Thursday at those committees were constructive. I left the committee believing that it was a great thing that Opposition and Government members targeted issues rather than scored political points. I thought that the division on regional development, which finished two hours early, and the division on health on Thursday had a general consensus on both sides in that members asked questions on issues. The member for Murray-Wellington was present when a deal of discussion took place, about which I was very impressed. It took me an hour and 25 minutes to ask a question when you, Madam Deputy Speaker, were in the Chair. That was disgusting but I will forgive you for that! However, there were so many issues in the health portfolio that the questions could have gone on for another day. There were many questions that I was unable to ask.

I was impressed, despite minor political point scoring by the members for Kalgoorlie and Murdoch, that members understood from where they were coming and targeted the issues. Some of the issues were far bigger than the politics in this Chamber because they were about delivering services to the community. Even in the regional development division it was great to see members opposite asking questions that highlighted some of the great initiatives that have occurred in this State. I tell members that I did not know that some of these initiatives existed. I was rapt that I could go into a session like that and come out with some knowledge of what is going on in this State. I believe it was a great process. The process on the Monday or Tuesday probably was not as good but that was due to faults on both sides of Parliament.

Mr Omodei: Don't your ministers talk to you guys?

Mr D'ORAZIO: Absolutely. I recall leaving the committee on Thursday feeling exhausted after completion of the large health portfolio. I had only asked some questions. I hate to think how the minister felt after he had been grilled for such a long time. I congratulate the minister. He did a fantastic job given the range of different issues addressed. Some were of particular interest to me; for example, visiting medical officers. One of the terms of reference of a parliamentary inquiry refers to that issue, so I was eager to obtain as much information as possible. Members opposite were keen to address specific issues and we all had a go at getting answers.

Mr Omodei: I had a few questions you could have asked for me.

Mr D'ORAZIO: I had a long list of questions in the health area, but I asked only three.

Members cannot complain about not having the opportunity to get the information they wanted.

Several members interjected.

Mr D'ORAZIO: The member should be honest.

Mr Johnson: I am. I had great difficulty with the Premier.

Mr D'ORAZIO: We finished two hours early on Wednesday. We had no more questions to ask the Leader of the House.

Mr Johnson: That happened when we were in government.

Mr D'ORAZIO: I do not want to keep answering interjections.

I thank the ministers and the departmental heads. Some of them were given short notice of very difficult issues, but they handled the situation well. They gave members of Parliament an insight into a number of issues that would not be available in day-to-day dealings in our electorates.

I was happy to learn that Morley is to have a dental clinic. That is great news; it will be a great benefit to the region. It was even better to hear that it will be located on the Morley High School site. I was also happy to

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learn that bus shelters have been included in the works program. My senior citizens want bus shelters. Members opposite removed them, but this Government will put them back.

Several members interjected.

Mr D'ORAZIO: Absolutely!

I again thank the ministers involved. I also thank members opposite. Some of their questions enhanced the discussion. As a new member, it was great to be part of the estimates process. Next year I will be even better prepared and, as a result, I will get even more out of it.

**MR TEMPLEMAN** (Mandurah) [8.58 pm]: I also congratulate the chairmen and the parliamentary staff. I will not discuss the process; that has been well debated tonight. However, I will make some comments about a couple of issues discussed in Estimates Committee B, particularly those relating to education. I congratulate the Minister for Education for his answers to a number of questions about teacher incentives and the Government's investigation of scholarships to encourage teachers to go to those areas that have in the past been difficult to staff. That is very important.

Our future teaching work force was also mentioned. That is an important issue. Our teaching work force is very experienced. That is wonderful, but we must think about the future. The average age of our current work force is increasing. We must consider new ways to encourage new graduates to become teachers and to provide an excellent education for our young people. We must also develop strategies to encourage more men to enter our primary teaching work force in particular. It is important that we have that role-model aspect in our schools. Unfortunately, many primary school students will never have a male primary school teacher in their seven years of schooling. That is unfortunate because we need to ensure students have those opportunities. I also support, as the minister indicated, looking at ways of encouraging more male teachers into our primary schools.

I also make a brief comment about the Peel region. Some specific issues were raised in the estimates committee hearing about the Peel region. I commend the Minister for Peel because he made some very important comments about the Peel region and Mandurah, particularly about the issues that face the people in that area, such as the high unemployment rate among young people. He also acknowledged that the development commission will refocus on the social indicators, which show some challenges and stresses. I am pleased that during his visit, the Minister for Peel widely canvassed issues with many stakeholders in the community of Mandurah. He has addressed those issues and is well aware of them. He is also aware that we will need to fight hard for funding in the Peel region and in Mandurah in the future, so that some of the challenges that were mentioned during the committee hearings will be addressed.

I was excited to be part of the estimates committee process. I compliment all those involved. As the member who just spoke mentioned, I look forward to being prepared and well versed for the committee hearings next year.

Question put and passed.