

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

Third Reading

Resumed from 16 October.

MR McGOWAN (Rockingham - Parliamentary Secretary) [1.04 pm]: I did not get the opportunity to speak about the way the Estimates Committees functioned, so I will make my comments now. Members of the Opposition had much to say about the conduct of some government members when questioning ministers during the committee hearings and the fact that they might have had prepared questions.

Mr Day: They all had little green folders.

Mr McGOWAN: There is no doubt that a great deal of preparation was done for the Estimates Committees. Inexperienced government members were briefed about the standing orders and how the process worked so that when they attended the hearings they would be fully aware of what would happen and that it would not be the culture shock it could have been. The Opposition could have provided its new members with a similar briefing. There is no doubt that members on this side were well prepared. Most of the government members participating were new members - apart from the member for Peel and me - and they had not been through the process before.

I thought about the complaints levelled by the Leader of the Opposition. I cast my mind back over the past four years and recalled my experience during the halcyon days when the Leader of the Opposition was the Leader of the House and, as such, responsible for organising the Estimates Committees. I remember attending the Estimates Committee dealing with the education budget in the final year of the Barnett Government.

Mr Barnett: The former Premier would not appreciate that term. That is to come.

Mr McGOWAN: I did not realise the closeness of the relationship between the now Leader of the Opposition and the former Premier. I did not realise it was so loving until after they were swept from office. It became obvious that they got along very well and worked very effectively as a team in government. They were obviously great mates.

I remember the committee hearing in which the education budget was examined. I was sitting beside the then opposition education spokesperson - the current Deputy Premier - and I remember that he found it impossible to ask any questions. Government members, including the now Deputy Leader of the Opposition, were asking questions turn about. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition was allowed to ask every second question. I wanted to ask some questions about schools in my electorate, but the member for Belmont told me not to bother because I would sit for an hour without getting the call. He advised me to put my questions on notice because the government backbenchers were asking all the questions. I saw that happen with my own eyes; I could probably prove it by referring to *Hansard*. I am not saying that the Leader of the Opposition organised it, but it happened.

I can present a more damning indictment of the operations of the Estimates Committees under the former Government. I attended Estimates Committee B and, along with the member for Fremantle -

Mr Barnett: We have huge hopes for you.

Mr McGOWAN: The Leader of the Opposition should listen. I was asking questions of the former Minister for Lands, Electoral Affairs and Fair Trading about the final budget handed down by the Court-Barnett Government. The lands portfolio was examined first, followed by the electoral affairs portfolio, and the fair trading portfolio came last. Of course, the finance brokers scandal came within the scope of the fair trading portfolio. The then member for Geraldton - who has, of course, departed this place - was asking questions on behalf of the Government. The then member for Joondalup, Mr Chris Baker, was chairing the committee. We witnessed an arrangement between the member for Geraldton, the member for Joondalup and the minister. The member for Geraldton asked one question after another about the lands portfolio. He covered the topography of Western Australia throughout the different regions, how satellite mapping would work, the cadastral system and so on. I did not think he was a geologist or an intellectual - although he is very practical. He asked question after question about those subjects. Members of the then Opposition started to complain. The Estimates Committee was to sit for three hours, and two hours had been taken up with questions about land.

Mr Barnett: You are asserting that that was orchestrated.

Mr McGOWAN: The Leader of the Opposition should listen to this story.

We started complaining to the Chairman that we wanted to move on to the next division - which was electoral affairs; we were nowhere near examining the fair trading budget. Finally, the member for Geraldton started asking questions about land he owned in Geraldton. As I said, he is obviously not an intellectual.

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The minister was subjected to pressure in the electoral affairs area, so the Chairman of the committee, the former member for Joondalup, started asking questions. When we decided to pursue the line of questioning that the Chair - the member for Joondalup, Chris Baker - was following, he ruled our questions out of order. We were stopped from asking questions on a subject that he raised. We were able to ask questions only during the last 15 minutes. We got only 15 minutes of three hours to discuss the major issue in Western Australia at that time. If the Opposition says that new members being prepared to ask questions is somehow a perversion of the process, it is wrong. The Opposition perverted the process. I saw it with my own eyes.

Mr Barnett: If the member's account is correct, I would say such behaviour is inappropriate.

Mr McGOWAN: It was completely inappropriate. The member should accept my account of matters; I saw it with my own eyes. The member must believe that the former member for Alfred Cove was capable of that sort of conduct.

Several members interjected.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr BARNETT: The member for Riverton referred to me as an absolute hypocrite. When I challenged him, he repeated the comment. I ask him to withdraw the comment.

Mr McRAE: I made reference to the fact that the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that one standard of behaviour was acceptable to him. Today he is saying that another standard of behaviour is acceptable. I withdraw the comment.

Debate Resumed

Mr McGOWAN: I will comment on the police and emergency services budget. The Leader of the Opposition asked a question yesterday about the proposed coastguard. I was not in the House during question time but I believe he asked whether the Government supported the idea. For the interest of members, I will outline the rationale for Australia having a coastguard. My electorate covers HMAS *Stirling* and the bulk of naval personnel in Western Australia. They do a fantastic job and I support them in all they are doing at the moment. Not many people know it, but a ship from HMAS *Stirling* is patrolling the Persian Gulf. It has been there for six months.

Points of Order

Mr OMODEI: During the debate on this Bill yesterday, the Acting Speaker, the member for Carine, called me to order and asked me to refer to the budget. The member for Rockingham is straying from the budget.

Mr McGOWAN: I understand the point being made by the member. He is being childish; I thought he would behave better than that. At page 801 of the *Budget Statements* there is reference to a volunteer marine rescue service. Page 787 has references to equipment purchases and replacement programs for the Police Service. It has relevance to the operation of a coastguard. Page 771 contains a line item about the police operations budget. The Police Service would work quite closely with a coastguard. All those points will be worked into my comments about the proposed coastguard.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The House is debating the third reading of the Bill. I suggest the member draw the debate to a conclusion. If he does not, I will make a ruling. I am sure the member was about to do that.

Debate Resumed

Mr McGOWAN: Significant issues about law enforcement and coastal protection exist in Western Australia. They have been addressed in the budget. The Western Australia Police Service spends a large amount of funds policing the rivers and seas of Western Australia. We will soon see regulations governing the blood alcohol levels of people in control of vessels on our waters.

Mr Barnett: The Premier said yesterday that Kim Beazley, if elected Prime Minister, would spend \$450 million on an Australian coastguard. Is that correct?

Mr McGOWAN: I am glad the Leader of the Opposition raised that. A tender is in the process of being put out for the replacement of the Fremantle-class patrol boats. The vessels are, on average, 25 years old. The Navy has 15 of them. Does the Leader of the Opposition know how many patrol boats are based in Western Australia? None. HMAS *Geraldton* and HMAS *Bunbury* used to be based here. They are now home based in Darwin. I did time at sea on both vessels. I was always struck by the distances the vessels had to travel to get to their area of operations, which was north of Broome. The cost of basing a vessel here but operating it off the northern coast is enormous. I have done that trip. It is a long way and it is very boring. It costs an enormous amount of

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money. Forces used for policing, controlling illegal immigration and fisheries inspection should be dispersed around the country adjacent to their areas of operation. Australia has no forces in the Southern Ocean for these matters. All the patrol vessels have been removed. Australia should not use \$500 million frigates for such roles but should have a dedicated force available. The federal Opposition is trying to make the point that coastguard vessels will be based in their areas of operation.

Patrol boat sailors will not like me saying this but, in times of war, patrol boats should be sent back to port. They should not be used because they are sitting targets. The vessels carry only one mortar, a Bofors gun of First World War vintage and two 50-calibre machine guns. In any serious conflict, patrol boats would be sent back to port. They may be used to transport troops or insertions but the Navy would not put them in harm's way. The coastguard proposal is good for Western Australia. Coastguard vessels for the Philippines have been built recently in the State. Companies are looking at acquiring another contract with the Philippines. It may be for another 16 or 19 vessels. The State has the boat building expertise.

Mr Barnett: Is it an additional \$450 million or the same \$450 million?

Mr McGOWAN: I do not know. I suspect that if Australia had a coastguard, it would not need Fremantle-class replacement vessels. The boats are not used in a warfare role. They can be used for policing illegal immigration and fisheries inspection. The vessels have a crew of 23 officers and sailors. The vessels cannot be put in harm's way. They have to transit enormous distances to get to their areas of operation. Vessels with smaller crews can be located in their areas of operation. Trained military personnel, such as principal warfare officers, can be returned to warships. There would be a much more efficient use of resources.

Mr Day: Would the vessels carry firearms?

Mr McGOWAN: I suspect they would. They would have to. The vessels could be built in Western Australia. We should support the proposal. It is a great idea.

MR BARNETT (Cottesloe - Leader of the Opposition) [1.21 pm]: The budget was delivered on 13 September. At the same time a budget is a political, economic, and financial statement. I will deal briefly with each of these aspects. I will be particularly brief on the political aspect of the budget because I spoke about that yesterday.

In the lead-up to Labor's first budget, we heard about budget deficit blow-outs, forward estimates, Barnett's black hole, and so it went on. Indeed, the media was susceptible to that and largely swallowed the line. After I had repeatedly claimed that the 2000-01 budget was in surplus, it was finally revealed that the budget was \$221 million in surplus. So much for the black hole and the jargon about the deficit. Immediately prior to the budget being presented, the Treasurer wined and dined the media at the Parmelia Hilton Hotel at taxpayers' expense. In the lead-up to budget the most contentious issue - the premium property tax - was selectively leaked to the media in an attempt to ameliorate or modify public outrage. However, that did not work. Therefore, the politics of the budget is that the Government set out to mislead, to contrive and to distort, and to influence the media so that it would not focus on what was really happening. There was a surplus of \$221 million for 2000-01.

The premium property tax became the major political issue of the budget. That tax was contentious, unjust, unfair and un-Australian. I labelled it as those things immediately after it was announced - in fact I labelled it as such prior to it being announced in the budget. The Liberal Opposition pledged that we would oppose the tax, and we pledged to repeal it if it was ever introduced. Even before the federal election was called, two changes were made to the so-called criteria for the premium property tax. Within three to four hours of the federal election being called, we saw a third change. Five days after the election campaign had been called a cabinet meeting was held on the Wednesday night. That meeting resulted in a panic decision to abandon the tax because it was clearly causing damage to Labor's federal election campaign. The Treasurer did one backflip, two backflips, and three backflips, followed by the final and humiliating bellyflop when the tax was abandoned. That was an appalling performance by a Treasurer in just one month. The politics of the budget was exposed. The Premier was exposed for the socialist that he is, and his agenda of political envy was exposed with the premium property tax. The politics of the budget also exposed the Treasurer and Deputy Premier as a fumble-bumble Deputy Premier who is financially incompetent. That is the politics of the budget.

I now turn to the economics of the budget and its financial standing. The budget was based on macro-economic forecasts by Treasury. The first and most important of these was the forecast of an economic growth rate of four per cent. At the time, speaking as an economist, I said that was an unrealistic forecast; and it has already proven to be unrealistic. Access Economics forecast a growth rate of 3.4 per cent. At the time of the budget I said that a forecast growth rate of around two per cent or a little bit above that would be more realistic. ANZ has forecast a national growth rate of two per cent. Within five weeks it is clear that the economic forecasts implicit in the budget have been undermined and discredited. The budget also forecast an average unemployment rate of seven

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per cent for the coming financial year. When Parliament resumed after the election, I said in this Chamber that the Labor Government should be careful because unemployment levels would rise. The numbers have already risen by 15 000, and the participation rate has fallen. The Government will see a sharp rise in unemployment in this State over the next few months. There is no more fat or flexibility in the system, given the decline in the participation rate. That fact gives me no glee, but it is a reality. However, the important point in this debate is that that economic trend for the State was clearly identified by myself and others. The economic policy of this budget indicates a lack of understanding of that economic trend. The Treasury forecasts were clearly wrong, and the Government introduced a policy of increasing payroll tax on employment and increasing land tax on small business. The Government's economic policy direction was ill-founded. That is the second major flaw of the budget.

I now turn to the Government's financial position and some of its financial criteria. This Government adopted what seems to be its sole financial goal; that is, the retention of the AAA credit rating. Why not? During the 1980s the Labor Party lost the State's AAA credit rating, and it has since elevated it to an almost Holy Grail status. That is the Labor Party's choice. What determines whether a State retains its AAA credit rating? First, it is the total level of state debt. Secondly, it is the ratio of state debt to the revenue of the State. That is the key statistic considered by credit rating agencies. Let us look at those two criteria.

During the period of the coalition Government, state debt was reduced by \$4 billion from \$8.5 billion in 1993 to \$4.6 billion in 2000-01. What is the situation now? Labor's first budget shows state debt - I am talking about the total net debt for the total public sector - to be \$4.43 billion. That is not a bad legacy as it saves Labor about \$300 million a year in interest payments, compared with the situation the coalition Government inherited. The net debt for the total public sector in the 2001-02 budget is \$4.43 billion.

Mr Dean: What about the Westrail dividend?

Mr BARNETT: That was already accounted for; the member does not understand.

In the 2000-01 budget that has just been presented the net debt for the total public sector is estimated to be \$5.19 billion. In other words, during Labor's first year - and by its own figures - the level of debt in the public sector is forecast to grow by 17 per cent. That is the reality. That is the debt figure.

Let us consider the ratio of debt to revenue, and the key statistic that credit rating agencies look at. If the ratio of debt to revenue gets to 45 per cent or above, the red lights start to flash in banks and credit rating agencies, and sends a danger signal. After the disastrous WA Inc period, debt was rising at the rate of \$1 billion a year under the Lawrence Government. In 1993-94, the coalition Government inherited a ratio of debt to revenue of 73.2 per cent. That ratio was way out of control so it is little wonder that the State lost its AAA credit rating. It had no chance of holding on to it. By 2000-01, the ratio of debt to revenue under the coalition had come down to 34.6 per cent; not only did the coalition Government halve debt in monetary terms, but also it halved the ratio of debt to revenue and put the State in a good financial position.

What will happen this year under the Labor Government? The ratio will go from 34.6 per cent to 39.1 per cent, and Labor's forecast for 2002-03 is up to 40.3 per cent. Therefore, just two years after the previous Government brought down the ratio from 72 to 34 per cent, Labor has immediately got it straight back over 40 per cent and it is heading toward 45 per cent. The Government's criteria are already at risk in its first budget. Forget the Barnett black hole and the budget deficit. The only reason this problem has arisen is that Labor's pre-election commitments totalled \$1.2 billion, and it has since committed at least a further \$300 million. That is the problem and the fundamental flaw in the budget.

Let us look at the budget savings. Throughout the lead-up to the budget, during the budget speech and following its delivery, the Treasurer claimed that Labor would fund its election commitments by savings. In the budget papers the Treasurer stated clearly - in about the first paragraph - that Labor would make savings of \$852 million over four years and that that would fund its budget commitments. I questioned that at the time because over 60 per cent of all spending of government departments goes to wages, salaries and labour on-costs. If the Government wanted to make large savings, it could cancel programs and stop funding various things. However, ultimately, the size of the public sector work force must be reduced. There is no other alternative. A Labor Government may not do that. I question whether those savings, in principle, will ever be made. After reading the budget, I cannot see where the \$852 million in savings comes from. At least \$400 million, or roughly 50 per cent of those so-called savings, are purely notional. They are savings to be achieved not by cutting programs or retrenching public servants, but by an assumed priority dividend. In other words, every department must cut its operating budget by 1.5 per cent and then two per cent the year after, two per cent the year after that and two per cent the year after that. That is how it is to be achieved. Out of the \$852 million in savings, \$400 million is purely notional.

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During the estimates committee, I asked the Treasurer to produce a detailed account of the \$852 million savings. After all, the Treasurer boasted about those savings in the budget and in media releases. I asked the Treasurer whether he could provide a table that detailed the \$852 million in savings. I was told that that information was being compiled by Treasury and a response would be provided as soon as possible. Five weeks after the budget was brought down, the Premier cannot detail the \$852 million savings to Parliament! Where are they? They are fictional, notional savings. They do not exist. That justifies everything we have said; they are phoney savings.

In presenting the budget, the Treasurer claimed he would produce an operating surplus of \$51.6 million, which is a modest surplus. Page 18 of the *Budget Statements* refers to the priority dividend and states that the Government subsequently extended the dividend by \$50 million a year with the aim of generating a sustainable operating surplus. Even the \$50 million surplus is assumed! It is imaginary. The Treasurer has assumed a priority dividend of 1.5 per cent, plus two per cent, plus two per cent, plus two per cent. He assumes another \$50 million in savings on top of that and he tells people that he has achieved a \$51 million surplus. That is an absolute joke. This budget is a house of cards. The savings are all notional and the budget is fundamentally flawed.

The politics of the budget were bungled. The premium property tax was a farce - backflip, backflip, backflip, belly flop. It was handled incompetently, and the only reason the premium property was axed is that the Labor Party panicked. Five days into the federal campaign, late on a Wednesday night, the Labor Party held a cabinet meeting and decided to can the tax for the self-interest of the federal Labor Party's election campaign. There was no other reason for it. The day before, the Treasurer defiantly said Labor would not change its mind. That was the politics of the budget.

In the budget, the Labor Party assumed a growth rate of four per cent. The Labor Party did not take any notice of me - why should it? However, if it had listened to any other economic forecaster, it would have known that that was not going to happen, and it will not happen in this environment. The Labor Party's assumption about unemployment is naive. The unemployment rate has increased by 15 000 in the past year. The participation rate has dropped, and it cannot drop further. No more people can be discouraged from the work force. The people who have a job or say they want a job do not have that freedom any more. The participation rate has hit rock bottom. As job opportunities dry up, the unemployment rate increases. The cushion has been used up. That is the harsh reality of the way economic statistics work for unemployment.

I refer to the financial components of the budget, because it is a financial statement. Debt figures are rising by 17 per cent this year. After the previous Government dramatically reduced the ratio of debt to revenue - it halved it from 72 per cent to about 35 per cent - it will jump to over 40 per cent in just two years. Given the Government's inability to achieve its forecast savings because they are notional, and given the Labor Party's inability to deliver its election promises without driving the State into debt, there is no doubt that this budget has put the AAA credit rating at risk. This budget is fundamentally flawed. The main component - the savings - is illusory; the savings are not there. The structure of this budget is flawed. The media has been slow to pick up on that issue, and I am sure they will not pick up on it now. However, members will be able to sit back and watch this budget fall apart. It will not last this financial year. I am sure that the Government will blame the events of 11 September in New York, and it will think of another Barnett black hole or something else. However, the budget is phoney and is based on notional savings. After five weeks, the Treasurer still cannot identify where the \$852 million savings are.

MRS EDWARDES (Kingsley) [1.35 pm]: I will refer to a couple of themes that I mentioned throughout the estimates committee. Parliament is an important place. It is an important institution of accountability; Cabinet is not. Cabinet operates in secrecy. To an extent, Parliament can be intrusive and a nuisance to the Government. Its members sometimes ask, "Jeepers, why is the member for Kingsley asking all these questions?" I assure government members that there is a sound reason for asking questions; that is, the matter of accountability. Parliament is an important institution of accountability.

The Labor Party's policy recognises the value of accountability. It states -

Labor is committed to strengthening the checks and balances - particularly the agents of accountability.

Parliament is one of those agencies that keep government and the public sector open and accountable. Yesterday, I identified that that was one of the important outcomes of the estimates committee; that is, as the Leader of the House would say, putting the ministers on the mat. Essentially, it is important to keep the Government honest, open and accountable to the people.

I refer to section 5.1.4 of the WA Inc Royal Commission report, which states -

The Parliament has the first responsibility to promote the realisation of the three goals of openness, accountability and integrity upon which our system of government depends. Because it is the principal institution which carries responsible government into effect on behalf of the public, its role as an accountability agency for the public is one which has particular importance . . .

Under the heading "Parliament as an accountability agency" section 5.4.1 of the report, in part, states -

It is for the Parliament to make responsible government a practised reality. It has a crucial role to play in acquiring and in publicly disseminating information about the actions and activities of the executive and administrative arms of government. In the success it has in gaining access to information, the Parliament itself should play a central role in securing open government in this State.

Access to information is important. If answers are not given to questions that have been raised in Parliament, either through estimates committees, questions on notice or questions without notice, the institution of Parliament no longer plays that role of an accountability agency. Paragraph 3.8.2 on page 3.12 of the WA Inc report of 1992 refers to question time. It states, in part -

Whatever else can be said of question time, it today provides the crudest form of accountability exacted by the Parliament. The manner of its conduct, the apparent acceptance of evasion and equivocation in providing answers, and the governmental manipulation of it for its own purposes, can leave the public with little reassurance that it presently serves the accountability purpose the traditional view attributes to it in anything other than a fortuitous way.

I raise this matter in the third reading debate because during the estimates committee, I raised with a number of ministers the reason that they were not answering some of the questions on notice that I presented. The answers I received were along the lines that the information would require considerable research, which would take staff from their normal duties and ministers were not prepared to allocate the State's resources to provide a response. On Tuesday 25 September, I raised the matter with the Premier in the estimates committee. I suggested to him that the habitual blocking of questions in Parliament, in whatever form, is against the spirit of the WA Inc Royal Commission's report and the concerns raised at that time. I raised with him, in particular, questions about vehicles, salaries and allowances and full-time equivalents. I pointed out to him that, although some ministers responded in the form I have just read out, to the effect that they were not prepared to answer the question at all, other ministers had answered the question. If some ministers can provide the answer, surely the other ministers should provide it as well. There is no reason for failing to provide those answers.

Ms McHale: I think the member for Kingsley will find that those ministers who have large agencies will have greater difficulties in providing answers.

Mrs EDWARDES: I take the minister's comment on board, but it is not exactly true. The Attorney General, who has a large agency, and a number of different roles under his portfolio, has answered every single question. In fact, the worst minister - who is not the member for Thornlie - has small agencies, and habitually blocks the answers to the questions. The way that minister responds is as useful as telling me "two fingers up your nose". I raised with the Premier the fact that some ministers were able to respond while others were not; and I asked him to look into that and to request his ministers to refrain from blocking questions and to provide answers. He indicated that he would take that on board and, in good spirit, examine the circumstances. A large number of questions were not responded to by some ministers. Often they dealt with very simple issues. For instance, I asked the Leader of the House why the question about hand-held mobile phones and the installation of cradle hands-free devices in vehicles, could not be answered in respect of his portfolios. It was amazing that that question could not be answered, because I know the agencies have installed cradle hands-free devices in government vehicles. The answer is very simple - it has been done! Instead of arguing that it would cost too much to respond to the question and require too many resources, the answer should be that it is all done. I find it simply amazing, particularly when, again, this answer had been provided in full detail by the Attorney General.

The question about the office areas being leased by particular departments or agencies as at 9 February, was answered in detail by the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Attorney General, the Minister for Education, the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and the Minister for State Development. All other ministers have replied that it would require considerable research, at too much cost. That is not acceptable. I could go through, question by question, citing instances where some ministers have responded, and others have not. In some instances all ministers, bar one or two, have responded. Ministers need to reflect on the merit of just providing the answers, as opposed to blocking the questions. It is very simple, and there is no hidden agenda. It is essentially about accountability and setting benchmarks. The area of office space being leased is public information, and there is no hidden agenda. The area that was being leased on 9 February, and the area being

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leased when the new agencies are combined, are very important issues. When I raised this in the Estimates Committee with the Leader of the House, I explained that it provides a valuable indication of how the agencies will operate, some of the difficulties they have had in the past and how they are to be overcome, and where some of the savings will be made. It is a valuable piece of public information.

I will put all those questions back on notice, in the light of the Premier's response that he would reconsider the issue of not providing proper answers to those questions, in the spirit that he intended.

I will now raise a number of issues dealing with the northern suburbs. In the health debate in the Estimate Committee, I raised the issue of the lack of occupational therapists in the northern suburbs. It is not acceptable that school-aged children, aged four and over, are not able to visit an OT if they need to in those early developmental years. The money that the Minister for Education is allocating for children with special needs in the education system will be totally wasted if the corresponding response is not received from those who should be providing services in the Department of Health. Those children will not receive the benefits that the Department of Education believes they are. I was pleased that the Acting Commissioner for Health, Professor Bryant Stokes, indicated that he would look again at that, but he indicated that to me outside the committee. It is not sufficient to commit those funds only when there is a waiting list for those services. The children are getting older by that time, and they need the services in those early developmental years.

The other concern raised in the Estimates Committee was the potential delay in the establishment of the Greenwood station on the northern suburbs railway. The delays have occurred as a result of new railcars being ordered. I noted with interest yesterday that the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure indicated that these would now be purchased, but recognised that there was a potential delay in the construction of the station. It was originally to be done in mid 2003 in the estimates, then was put off until September 2003, and it is now likely to occur, if not towards the end of 2003, in 2004. People who have been waiting for the Greenwood station and the extension of that railway, will be disappointed.

The other issue is the disability plan for railway stations, which is in the process of development, and the announcement last week of the upgrade of some railway stations. Whitfords is a brand new railway station, does not need upgrading, and is hardly likely to be considered in the very near future. At some railway stations, including Whitfords, there are parking facilities for cars and bicycles. The Minister for Seniors should be interested to know that there are no facilities for Gopher electric wheelchairs. An 82-year-old pensioner in my area wants to ride to the train station, and leave his Gopher there. He does not want to take it on the train, because at the other end he wants to catch a bus, and he cannot take the Gopher on the bus. Therefore, he has a problem. The response from the railways to his inquiry, was that he could go to Currumbine; however, he would then need to cross two major roads, and he would prefer to use the local train station.

Ms McHale: Can he not park in any of the existing bays?

Mrs EDWARDES: No security is provided for Gophers. Bicycles and cars are provided for, but there is no security for Gophers. While the policy is being developed to provide such security, I would like some trials to be carried out. I offer my 82-year-old local pensioner and the Whitfords train station to be used in a trial, which all people in the northern suburbs would support, before a policy is developed. Perhaps the Minister for Seniors could help with that.

Ms MacTiernan: We thought it was a good idea and we told you so.

Mrs EDWARDES: I know; I want a trial. Let us start the process. I once again raise with the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and the Minister for the Environment the proposal to build a fire station at Hepburn Heights. Any memorandum of understanding between government agencies to protect conservation reserves, which again was a Labor policy and which has not been put in place, will be usurped before it gets under way. I hope that is being seriously considered.

MR DAY (Darling Range) [1.50 pm]: I will make a few comments about a health issue that is important to my electorate and which I unfortunately did not have the opportunity to refer to in detail during the estimates committee process - the much-needed redevelopment of the Kalamunda District Community Hospital. It is a major disappointment to my constituents, and particularly to those who work at or use the Kalamunda hospital, that adequate funds were not allocated in this year's budget to continue the redevelopment process begun by the previous Government. The requirement for the hospital to be redeveloped has been recognised for some years and includes the provision of two new operating theatres, a day procedure unit, two new delivery and recovery units, a new central sterile supply department and a new front entrance to the hospital, as well as improvements to the fire services communication system and the sewerage system. Approval was finally given and \$5.5 million was allocated in the previous Government's 2000-01 budget. An additional \$600 000 was available

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from other parts of the health budget to provide much needed maintenance at the hospital and so on. That would have provided about \$6.1 million for the redevelopment. During the election campaign, the Labor Party made the same funding commitment of \$5.5 million for the redevelopment. That simply copied the announcement made by the previous Government. The Labor Party tried to make it look like a new initiative, as it did with many aspects of its health policy. The new Labor initiatives were announced with great fanfare during the election campaign, when in reality the previous Government had started most of those projects, such as the redevelopment of the Kalamunda, Port Hedland and Derby hospitals and of a number of others around the State. Earlier this year the Minister for Health was not aware that the commitment had been made. Comment was made that it was not an endorsed Labor commitment or something to that effect. That was an unsatisfactory situation. I am pleased the minister finally became aware of the fact that the commitment had been made.

Detailed design work for the redevelopment was undertaken last year. It was about to go out to tender when the election was called and the matter was put on hold, as is normal with these issues. Unfortunately, nothing more has occurred since the election. The budget papers show that \$424 000 was spent on design work for the redevelopment during the past financial year. That is a significant amount of money, but it was entirely appropriate. Now that the design work has been done, the redevelopment should go ahead. Unfortunately, the matter has been on hold since the election while the current Government makes up its mind whether to go ahead with the project. An amount of \$430 000 has been allocated in this year's budget, which is a similar amount to that allocated and spent last year. There is little detail in the budget papers about how that funding will be spent; however, it is indicated on page 131 of the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook* that -

An allocation of \$480,000 in 2001-02 has been made available to commence planning for upgrades at Rockingham, Swan District, Osborne Park and Kalamunda Hospitals. The total cost of these initiatives over the forward estimate period is \$13.5 million.

The \$480 000 is made up of the \$430 000 allocation for the Kalamunda hospital and a token amount of \$50 000, which has been allocated for works or planning to be commenced at Swan District, Osborne Park and Rockingham hospitals. I will come back to that point in a short while. The Government plans to use that \$430 000 allocation to commence planning. That is a farcical situation; \$424 000 of taxpayer money has already been spent on detailed design work for the redevelopment of Kalamunda hospital. If it gets around to it, the Government plans to spend another \$430 000 this financial year to commence planning for the redevelopment. That was how it was put in the budget papers. It is a complete waste of money and it is a farcical situation. The Government should get on with the work that was begun by the previous Government. This Government could gain some credit if it ensured that construction work occurred.

To add insult to injury, the Government has tried to ensure that constituents in the Darling Range electorate have a slightly positive view of the budget by distributing a pamphlet during the past couple of weeks. The pamphlet has a picture of the Premier on the front and is titled "Budget WA 2001". The Kalamunda hospital redevelopment and improvement to water supplies are listed under the section titled "Darling Range". On the second page of the pamphlet under the heading "Honouring our promises in Darling Range" is listed -

Kalamunda Hospital redevelopment (\$5.5m, \$430,000 this year)

That is not an untrue statement, but it is certainly misleading. The Government is trying to give the impression that it is getting on with the redevelopment of the hospital and that it is an initiative of the Labor Party. Both those points are incorrect. The previous Government made the initial commitment. I do not mind this Government saying that it is getting on with the project if it is doing so; however, the reality is that the project is on hold. The Labor Government is being devious; it is trying to mislead my constituents by creating the impression that it is getting on with the job. That is not the case. This pamphlet is being distributed around Darling Range and has three photos of the Premier. I am sure that my constituents will not mind seeing the Premier's face, but he should be a little embarrassed that the Labor Party is seeking to mislead my constituents by suggesting that the Government is getting on with the redevelopment of the hospital when that project is on hold and the Government has no idea what to do about the provision of health services in the eastern metropolitan area.

I also took the opportunity to write to the Minister for Health to find out what he had in mind for the provision of services in Kalamunda and how the \$430 000 in funding would be allocated. I asked him whether a second lot of planning was to be undertaken. It would obviously be farcical if that were to occur. I was pleased that the minister responded in good time, even though his response was non-committal. The minister said -

The proposed redevelopment planned when the Metropolitan Health Service Board existed needs to be reconsidered in the light of this Government's health reform agenda and the needs of the area.

I wonder about the Government's health reform agenda. The evidence suggests that no plan is in place; that there is no real agenda. The Government knows that changes must be made, but it has no idea how to make

Extract from *Hansard*

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Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Tony McRae; Mr Paul Omodei; Deputy Speaker; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr John Day

them. This matter will be taken up by the member for Murdoch later today. It is extremely important that the needs of the outer metropolitan hospitals are not overlooked in the major power play that I have no doubt will occur within the health portfolio when the Government finally works out how it will make changes. At the moment, it has no idea whatsoever. The needs at the Kalamunda District Community Hospital are real. The abolition of the Metropolitan Health Service Board has not impacted on the service needs of the Kalamunda district. The redevelopment should go ahead. It does not matter whether the overall body is the Metropolitan Health Service Board or the East Metropolitan Health Authority; it does not affect the hospital's needs. People should get on with the job, and they should do it soon.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 4516.]