

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

669. Mrs EDWARDES to the Premier:

I refer the Premier to the Australian Labor Party election policy paper, “delivering a better government,” which states -

Labor will change the structure of Government to facilitate . . . clear lines of Ministerial responsibility and accountability . . .

The recent transfer of the road safety portfolio has resulted in the Minister Assisting the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure having responsibility for public transport but only buses, not trains, and only in the metropolitan area; road safety, although the Office of Road Safety is still administered by the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, and will eventually be administered by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet; contractual arrangements between Transport and WA Government Railways Commission, but not trains; regional, but not metropolitan, taxis; and school buses, but not the purchase of the buses. How can the Premier reconcile this election commitment with his practice when in government?

Dr GALLOP replied:

Yet another issue that this Government inherited was the 46 government departments in Western Australia. Many of those departments were underpinned by complex legislation, which made it hard for any Government to bring about change. The opportunity was presented to the previous Government to deal with this issue. Of course, it walked away because it was too hard. The previous Government put many of the issues facing Western Australia into the too-hard basket. We are battling with the question of waste management in Western Australia. Why do we have to deal with it? It was put in the too-hard basket. We are having to deal with the issue of Alcoa. Why do we have to deal with that? It was put in the too-hard basket. All the issues relating to social reform in Western Australia were also put in the too-hard basket. We have begun the process of having a clear line of accountability between ministers and the departments, of which there are now 23 instead of 46.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Dr GALLOP: Let me now move to the question of road safety. The Government's view is that road safety should be a whole-of-government question. We discovered that the road safety function was intermixed through legislation with a range of other government functions. We will extract it and have a whole-of-government road safety function with a minister -

Mr Day interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order member for Darling Range!

Dr GALLOP: The answer to the question is that, had the member been a little more diligent in the way that she dealt with these legislative issues with her National Party colleagues in government, we might have had a much simpler structure, which would have enabled us to take out the issue of road safety without all these complications.

Mr Barnett: Why are you taking it out?

Dr GALLOP: Because we want a whole-of-government approach to road safety.

Mr Barnett: It has to do with your minister's driving record - nothing else.

Dr GALLOP: I, as Premier, took administrative action months ago on the matter of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. Sorting out the Department of Transport and taking road safety out of it is an inheritance from the previous Government, because of the way it handled these matters. The Opposition can continue to be under the misapprehension that somehow its government of this State did not involve all these complexities and complications, but the truth is that it did. The present Government is sorting them out.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Barnett: Humphrey Appleby would be proud of you.

The SPEAKER: Order, Leader of the Opposition!

Dr GALLOP: The irrelevance of the current Opposition in respect of public administration matters is no better illustrated than by the question.