

ALBANY HOSPITAL — FUNDING

572. Mr P. ABETZ to the Minister for Health:

Being a fairly new member to this place, I had trouble during the estimates committee hearings understanding why the opposition was critical of the government's commitment to build a \$135 million hospital in Albany. Has the minister been able to find out what degree of financial commitment the former government gave to building the Albany hospital leading up to the last election?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

Did Hansard hear that all right? I just wanted to make sure that Hansard got that question properly on the record. Yes, the member for Albany was very interested, both in his capacity as a committee member and as chairman. He kept talking to me about Albany Regional Hospital, and strongly suggested to me that the Labor Party had made an enormous commitment to Albany hospital and the things it was going to do. I kept telling him that, whatever he said about commitment, it was not in the budget. I am going to detail what that commitment meant.

Mr P.B. Watson: We have got press releases in Albany!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! Members to my right might want to hear the Minister for Health's response, but the way they are going, they will not hear the minister respond. I know the member for Albany is interested in the answer to this question. I give the call to the minister.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I suspect that what has happened is that since the member for Albany made those comments, he has done a bit of research himself.

Mr P.B. Watson: I have!

Dr K.D. HAMES: He would have looked to find out in fact what commitment was made and discovered that there was no financial commitment by the Labor Party, other than by press release—that was it!

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I went to the Treasurer and I said, "Look, it wasn't on the budget". The Labor Party had not committed to it in the budget.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Dr K.D. HAMES: Not only was it not in the budget this time; we could not find it mentioned in three budgets in a row.

Mr E.S. Ripper: It was in the *Pre-election Financial Projections Statement*!

Dr K.D. HAMES: I went to the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Health and asked if they had any record of the financial assessment of the cost of building Albany hospital so that I could find out what work the Labor Party had done to come up with the figure—there was nothing; it was a guesstimate! The \$160 million figure was a guesstimate.

Mr P.B. Watson: What was yours based on?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Mine was based on a report produced after a full assessment had been done by the Department of Housing and Works.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Albany!

Dr K.D. HAMES: Did the Labor Party have any up-to-date records of what it was going to cost? No, it did not! What happened was that we were getting close to the election and the polls were showing that the member for Albany was in big trouble! And why? For three elections in a row the member for Albany had promised that hospital, and still it was not there. I looked at the budget to see what funding had been allocated, and \$51 million was all that had been committed by the former Labor government to building this new hospital. I have a copy of the press release that states that it is going to build the hospital.

Mr M.P. Murray: It was in the forward estimates.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie-Preston, that was not necessary. I formally call the member for Collie-Preston for the first time.

Dr K.D. HAMES: The press release announced that a new hospital was to be built in two stages and that work would get underway in October—straightaway. Then the press release referred to stage 1, which was a new state-of-the art building. It was going to be all these things; in fact it was going to build a new hospital.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Collie-Preston!

Dr K.D. HAMES: Then we get to the next page of the press release, which states that the Premier had said that work on the replacement hospital would start in October, expanding the mental health unit, which is only eight years old—the first stage was to expand an existing building! The press release continued, stating that that work would be completed by mid-2009, and it would take the number of beds to 13. Further, the press release stated that, following the construction of the new critical care and surgical complex, the maternity unit would be relocated to the area that formerly housed the day procedure unit. The maternity unit would not have been new in the new hospital either; it was going to be part of the existing hospital, and would be situated alongside some new birthing suites. The press release also stated that the maternity ward and the nursery were to be significantly upgraded—still the same building though!

Having said all that, we have been trying to find the \$100 million that the Labor Party stated in the press release would be in the budget. The former Treasurer said it was in a *Pre-election Financial Projections Statement*, but I have not been able to find it, although I would like to see it!

Mr E.S. Ripper: It is there; \$51 million was added—the member for Mandurah can show the Minister for Health the document. There it is!

Mr T.G. Stephens: Now eat your words!

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Dr K.D. HAMES: That does not change the fact.

Mr E.S. Ripper: There was money in the budget and there was additional money in the *Pre-election Financial Projections Statement*.

The SPEAKER: The minister gave the Leader of the Opposition the opportunity to make an interjection and he took it. I ask the minister to come to a conclusion with his answer so that this question time can proceed. It has run for almost three-quarters of an hour and it has not made satisfactory progress from my perspective. I give the minister the call.

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: This amount of money was just a last-minute election promise.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I formally call the member for Albany for the second time.

Mr J.M. Francis: It's the third time.

Mr D.A. Templeman: You said there was no record of it!

The SPEAKER: It may have been fortunate or unfortunate the member for Mandurah was on his feet at the time and able to deliver that document to the minister, but I formally call him for the first time. The minister has the call.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I did not say it was there; what I said was it was in —

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Go back and read *Hansard*! What I said was that I found no evidence of it, and certainly this was another of the Labor Party's election promises for the third election in a row.

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: There are two issues involved in that: firstly, will \$100 million build a new hospital? No, it will not! That was only stage 1 of the new hospital, and a lot of that was going to be —

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Albany!

Dr K.D. HAMES: The member for Albany knows, and he admitted when he first started asking this question, that it was by press release—only by press release.

Mr E.S. Ripper: It was in the PFPS; you've got the evidence in front of you! You can read it!

Dr K.D. HAMES: That does not cover the full cost of a hospital. We have allocated \$135 million.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. Templeman: You didn't look very hard!

The SPEAKER: Yes, the member for Mandurah did not look very hard, and I formally call him for the second time! I urge the minister to conclude this answer.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I am sorry, but they just keep yelling out! The reality is that in three elections in a row —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Albany has had ample opportunities in this place to make interjections other than the ones he is making at the moment, and I formally call him for the third time.

Dr K.D. HAMES: A third time!

The SPEAKER: I give the call to the minister.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I will wind this up, if I get the opportunity, by saying that for three elections in a row the member did not have the money for this commitment. We have put the money in to build Albany hospital, and we will get on and do it.