

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Annual Report 2001-02, Tabling

MR J.B. D'ORAZIO (Ballajura) [10.13 am]: I present for tabling the annual report for 2001-02 of the Public Accounts Committee.

[See paper No 174.]

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: As chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, it gives me great pleasure to report to the Parliament on the committee's activities for the past 12 months. It is clear that from the minute the Public Accounts Committee was appointed, it was up and running. During the past 12 months, the committee has undertaken two major inquiries, both of which were controversial. The first inquiry was into the use of visiting medical practitioners in the Western Australian public health system, and the second inquiry was into hospital trust accounts. These issues have attracted substantial interest from the media and the community.

The committee has been extremely busy. The two inquiries have involved 41 deliberative meetings, 51 formal evidence hearings and evidence from 98 witnesses. I thank my fellow committee members - the deputy chairman, the member for Stirling, Monty House; the member for Murray-Wellington, John Bradshaw; the member for Roleystone, Martin Whitely; and the member for Bunbury, Tony Dean. The committee has worked extremely hard. What has been an absolute pleasure is the fact that the committee has been apolitical; all members have worked well together. It is interesting that when a number of people are in the same room, they seem to see issues in the same light. Even though members of the committee have different political perspectives, the issues confronted in these inquiries have crossed political lines and have needed to be addressed.

The inquiry into visiting medical practitioners, which has now been completed and the report is currently being written, started as a small issue and looked at a small part of the health system. Unfortunately, it is impossible to deal with only one small part of the health system. The inquiry into visiting medical practitioners in the public health system has virtually become an audit of the health system. It has been a complicated and detailed inquiry, which the report will hopefully show when it is brought down in the next few weeks. I thank all staff members who were involved with that inquiry, because the report into the use of visiting medical practitioners has involved an enormous amount of activity. Committee meetings have been held outside Perth. The committee undertook extensive travel. This issue could not have been dealt with had the committee not visited regional centres where visiting medical practitioners are greatly used. The committee undertook travel to Broome, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Albany and Bunbury. In recognition of the fact that other States of Australia had already looked at the process of using visiting medical practitioners, the committee also undertook visits to Victoria and New South Wales. The committee visited not only metropolitan Victoria and New South Wales but also country areas, because members wanted to see what had been done in country areas. That entailed a fair amount of travel and a number of meetings, but in the end it enabled the committee to get a good grasp of the various problems that have occurred and the solutions that have been adopted elsewhere in Australia.

The inquiry into hospital trust accounts is ongoing. It has pleased the committee that a number of changes have occurred as a result of our inquiry into this issue. That is a credit to the people involved. In the end, the health system will be better for the work the committee has undertaken over the past 12 months.

The committee has also hosted various delegations. The Kenyan Public Accounts Committee is this morning visiting Parliament. The Western Australian committee has also held meetings with members of the provincial South African Legislatures of KwaZulu Natal and Mpumalanga. That visit was rather interesting. It is great to meet the members of other public accounts committees from around the world, and to see how they operate. Interestingly, they operate similarly to us but have various degrees of control in the running of their Governments. It is important that the Public Accounts Committee act as an overseer of government programs and expenditure. That is no different from elsewhere in the world.

The committee has also hosted two information sessions for the Treasury budget process. I hope those sessions were informative for the Parliament. Those sessions proved informative for members of the committee because they helped us understand the budgets that are brought down, and provided us with a better, in-depth knowledge of the processes for formulating the budget.

I thank all members of the committee. I also thank the committee staff, who have done an absolutely fantastic job. I would like to thank Linlee Davies, Jovita Hogan and Alf Opie, whose professionalism and dedication ensured that the committee, through its deliberations and hearings, was able to achieve its aims. I particularly wish to thank the principal research officer, Stefanie Dobro. Although Stefanie has moved on to the upper House committees, she did a fabulous amount of research to make sure that the committee was always in the best possible position to deal with the evidence placed before it. More importantly, she supported all the members of

the committee, and made sure that our deliberations and processes were second to none. I thank her for all her hard work and commitment, and it is a pity that she has left us. She will still have some involvement in the completion of the visiting medical practitioners report. Without her help it would not have been possible to reach the stage we are at today. I welcome on board our new principal research officer, Andrea McCallum. In the short time she has been with us, she has made it clear that she will be a very great asset to the Public Accounts Committee. I look forward to working with her in finalising the public hospital trust accounts report, and presenting it to Parliament.

I also thank all the members of the committee. As the chairman of the committee, I found it an absolute delight to work with them. I thank them for their diligent hard work and their inquisitive minds. The issues we deal with are very complicated, and it is great to have members of the committee who are so diligent, understanding and perceptive. It gives me great pleasure, as chairman, to bring to this Parliament the first report of the Public Accounts Committee. Hopefully, in the future, the committee will present some reports that will make a difference to the running of government in this State.

MR M.P. WHITELEY (Roleystone) [10.22 am]: I echo the thoughts of the member for Ballajura. I became interested in politics because I am interested in public policy and making this State a better place to live for all of our citizens. I have been involved in two forums of this Parliament - the Public Accounts Committee and this Chamber. I wish I was able to spend more time with the Public Accounts Committee and less time in the Chamber.

Ms M.M. Quirk: So do we!

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: Would the Whip allow me to spend less time in this Chamber? I will hold her to that promise!

Committees allow us to put aside party affiliations, and the theatre of Parliament, to concentrate on what we are really here to do - to deliver good government. I congratulate all members of the committee. We have members of the Liberal, National and Labor Parties working together. It would be a nonsense to pretend that party affiliations do not exist, even in the Public Accounts Committee. Nevertheless, 95 per cent of the energy in the Public Accounts Committee goes into the area of good public policy, while only about five per cent goes into the theatre of politics. In this place, the figure is 50-50 at best. Far too much energy and effort goes into the theatre of politics, and not enough into the development of public policy. I realise that, in a Chamber of 57 members, there are limitations on the amount of time that can be spent in committees, but I would like to place on the record my belief that, if somehow we could re-engineer the Parliament, and spend more time discussing things in an open, frank and bipartisan way, rather than standing up and delivering set pieces, the business of politics in Western Australia would be done better. I congratulate my fellow members and the staff of the committee for their efforts. The staff are highly capable and dedicated people who have done fantastic work.