

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 17 May on the following motion moved by Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Emergency Services) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 2203A–E (2023–24 budget papers) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 11 May 2023.

HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral) [12.38 pm]: I make this contribution in the wake of another massive surplus here in Western Australia. Last week, during an economic debate, I made the prediction that on Friday, the day after the budget was handed down—the budget came down on Thursday—we would all wake up and be greeted by the front page of *The West Australian* with a picture of our Premier on a throne, wearing a crown, surrounded by money bags, and perhaps he would be fortunate enough to be rolling in a bit of money. Instead, we were treated to the equally cringe-worthy photo of Hon Mark McGowan with a boom box on his shoulder, wearing a fair amount of bling, a lot of gold chains, with an “I love Clive” heart tattooed on his chest. As cringe-worthy as that image is, it signifies the same thing. I would not say that I was close to the mark but it shows that Western Australia is still doing pretty well. We are in the black. We are in a very good position at the moment. As I mentioned in my contribution to debate last week, the short-term sugar hit we are experiencing right now with the surplus in Western Australia could be very short-lived. We are facing some potentially quite severe economic headwinds coming our way. A document was FOI-ed by the Reserve Bank of Australia last week I think. It shows a prediction by the RBA that by September 2024, there is a 65 to 80 per cent likelihood that Australia will face recession, which is obviously pretty severe. We know that Western Australia is not immune from that equation.

Long term, we know that global energy markets are moving away from fossil fuels and moving away from the oil and gas that we are blessed with here in Western Australia. The long-running iron ore price will go back to its long-running average and we are unlikely to see, at least in the short to medium term, some of the lofty heights we have been experiencing in the last few years with that \$200 range. As I pointed out in my contribution to the debate on the economy last week, I think when we stop seeing these cheesy images of the Premier surrounded by moneybags or where Western Australia is in the black is when people will really start questioning this government and whether it has maximised the opportunities it was given at the time. When we were experiencing those massive windfalls, did the government really seize that opportunity to secure a more equitable share of resources for the Western Australian people? It is my view that the answer is no and I think history will prove me correct on that point. Instead, what we have right now is a Premier who is unwilling to stand up to the bigger end of town. Perhaps the Premier is taking a cautionary tale from Brendon Grylls. He does not have to look too far into the past to uncover what happens to your political career if you stand up to the bigger end of town. Instead of standing up and really trying to fight for a better share of resources, the Premier is taking the easier road and is playing favourites with Western Australia’s billionaires.

One classic example is from back in 2020. I hinted at it last week. I will just expand on that example. Back in 2020, the domestic gas policy was expanded. History has shown that domestic gas policy is actually a good thing. At the time, it was a bit of a hornet’s nest. A lot of resource companies were threatening to pack up ship and move away. History has shown it is actually a very good policy and it is insulating Western Australia from some of the higher energy prices that the east coast is experiencing.

Hon Pierre Yang: Yes, it’s a Labor policy!

Hon WILSON TUCKER: It is a good one, from the Carpenter government, member—absolutely. History is showing that it is a good policy. In 2020, this policy was expanded. Under the new rules, all onshore production would be banned from export. I do not have a problem with that announcement—I think it is a good thing—but when the Premier made this announcement and extended this policy, he also granted an exemption from this export ban to the Waitsia stage 2 gas project. Waitsia 2 is owned by Mitsui and Beach Energy. The Premier’s favourite media tycoon is the majority owner of Beach Energy. This exemption is alarming of itself but more alarming is that Waitsia 2 had not been through EPA approval when the announcement was made. This is a clear sign that the Premier was picking favourites in these projects and their vested interests. On the back of this announcement by the Premier, the Beach Energy share price skyrocketed. Following those jumps in the share price, the Premier was asked what communication he had had with his favourite media tycoon leading up to the announcement. He was asked what communications he had had that led to this exemption in the extension of the reservation gas policy. The answer was a political masterclass in manoeuvrability by the Premier. He did not actually answer the question. After the fact, WAtoday put in an FOI request. It took some time but they got some documents that revealed that the policy exemption was a captain’s call. It came from the top. It was not a bottom-up directive; it was a top-down directive with little to no consultation and public servants had to toil to make the policy fit within the COVID response. That is a pretty clear indication where that policy exemption came from and who it was directed at. That is one recent example. There are certainly many others. I will leave this point for now and start talking about the budget. My suggestion to the Premier is to really stop playing tough with the east coast interests and pandering to the

local audience. If he wants some quick wins and to secure a more equitable share of the wealth that we enjoy in this state, I think he should look closer in his own backyard.

Hon Kyle McGinn: Are you saying don't talk up WA?

Hon WILSON TUCKER: Talk it up, but look closer rather than further away if you want to try to secure a better share of the wealth we enjoy, member.

I will talk about the budget! I am going to start with tech investment. I looked at the budget papers and I could not see a reference to tech and innovation in the table of contents. There are a number of other headings but tech and innovation is not one of them. I think that speaks to the priority of the tech and innovation space in the eyes of cabinet and in this government, which is unfortunate.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Honourable member, you have to actually read the budget papers.

Hon WILSON TUCKER: I did, minister, and I will get to that. I want to prefix my comments by saying I think that the Minister for Innovation and the Digital Economy, Hon Stephen Dawson, is doing a good job in this space. The feedback I am getting from industry is that the minister is engaged. He cares about the sector and is trying to elevate Western Australia's profile in the space. I think this lack of investment in tech and innovation speaks to the priority order of portfolios and the priority of cabinet for tech and innovation investment and direct investment in the industry in Western Australia. In comparison with other states, Western Australia is lacking in investment in this space. Victoria just posted a deficit in its recent budget but it put around \$700 million into tech and innovation. It is building an artificial intelligence precinct, which is a futureproofing move on its part in my opinion. The other states have similar levels of funding. We know there is a lot more capital being splashed around there. The startup and the scale-up industries there are much more mature than the ecosystem in Western Australia. They are further along in those conversations. That is not to say there is no good work happening in Western Australia. There are certainly some good people and some good initiatives happening but the other states are further along in the conversation about encouraging tech and innovation in their jurisdictions.

We saw a recent good initiative by the government back in November with the release of the 10-year innovation blueprint strategy, which is a good thing and it was applauded by industry. It is very glossy. It is very high level. It says the right things and has really good intentions, but we know that if intentions are not backed by dollar signs, they are basically just hopes and prayers. We need to see more tech investment in Western Australia to carry out an implementation of what the government is saying and what the government is trying to do in the next 10 years.

I have a few recommendations. I have raised a couple of these with the Minister for Innovation and the Digital Economy. I will not go into too much detail, but I will state them for the record. The first is an increase in grants and capital for WA startups to stay competitive with certainly east coast startups. A number of grants are available in WA and it is all good. They are doing good things, but they are limited in the size of this pool through the new industries fund and also the actual amount of the grant that is available to an individual business is limited. That means the grants process can be quite onerous for these businesses. These businesses are taking their eyes off the prize as they jump through some regulatory hoops and red tape to get this funding. It takes time and effort. By the time they secure funding, they basically have to go out and seek more funding. They are kicking the can down the road. The WA government funding that is available is limited and gets them only so far. Increasing the funding and the grants that are available to the startup industry is certainly a good thing.

When we talk about funding, venture capital—VC—funds are mostly based on the east coast, and the amount of capital that the industry and the startup space is seeking in WA far outstrips the amount of capital that is available in this state. VC funds and managers come over here and pitch to WA startups and that is not a bad thing, but that typically comes with a caveat. They take that money. It is a bit of a poisoned chalice because the expectation is that they jump ship and move to the east coast. Then we enter this brain drain model that we have experienced for quite some time in WA. We potentially fall into this pattern of the golden goose fleeing the nest. We saw that classic example with Canva leaving Perth and WA and setting up on the east coast, and now it is a multibillion-dollar company.

Another suggestion is that we invest in a chief entrepreneur. Other states have done this. In a sense, it would basically be a sort of glorified cheerleader for the industry, someone who can make the case and make the appeal for WA to other jurisdictions internationally to encourage investment, to encourage companies to set up in Western Australia and also try to get the talent into this state as well. Our Chief Scientist, Professor Peter Klinken, sort of wears that hat a bit and fulfils a bit of that role, but he is only one person. I am a big fan and admirer of Professor Peter Klinken but he is only one person and carving out that responsibility that he wears into a dedicated role would be a positive move.

Shifting gears now, I am going to talk about data privacy. We have been waiting a while for a data privacy act in Western Australia. We continue to wait a while. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia that does not have dedicated data privacy laws to govern the public sector. The need for data privacy was flagged back in 2016, when a data

linkage review report was co-authored by Professor Fiona Stanley and Professor Peter Klinken. It highlighted the need for a data privacy act and the detriment of not having a data privacy act. Trust in the public institution can be eroded if we do not have uniform laws in place and medical institutions face roadblocks in the interoperability of sharing that information between institutions. Since 2016, we have seen some very large-scale data breaches in the private sector and I want to be clear and take a bit of a back step. When I am talking about data privacy or a lack of data privacy laws in WA, I am talking about the public sector in WA. Consumer laws govern the private sector and the largest multinationals fall under the federal jurisdiction and its privacy laws, but there is nothing governing a uniform approach to the classification, sharing and access controls around data privacy within the public sector and how departments operate in this state.

We have seen some large-scale and very detrimental breaches within the private sector very recently, and I will not go through them because I am sure members are across them. They speak to a lack of concern around the data that these organisations contain. We have seen a lack of access control with that data. There were some exposed endpoints in one scenario; that data was accessed and then hackers had control of it and it can end up on the black market. The other aspect is around retention of this information. These private companies are profiteers from this information and retain it for too long, well beyond the means for which they needed it. That increases their blast radius. There is a saying in the industry: it is not if you are going to be hacked but when. They got hacked and then because it had so much information, the blast radius was huge. Statistically, the majority of members in this chamber would have been impacted in some form by one of these several very large data breaches in the private sector.

We know that the public sector in WA is certainly not immune. I am going to read out a couple of cautionary tales and examples of recent years. The details of dozens of passengers on an international flight to Perth, including one with monkeypox, was made public after a nurse at the public health unit at the Department of Health accidentally sent an Excel spreadsheet to one of the passengers in August 2022. Western Australia's biggest art organisations, including Perth Festival, the Black Swan Theatre Company, WA Ballet and WA Opera were subject to a data breach when the email addresses of its customers were hacked in July 2022. The classic example, WA police accessed check-in data from the SafeWA app in relation to their ongoing investigation into the murder of a former bikie boss, Nick Martin. That was in June 2021.

I have counted 14 noteworthy examples and I am sure there are more, but a quick napkin maths calculation shows since 2016 there have been 14 examples of privacy breaches in the WA public sector. Meanwhile, we are still waiting for the Attorney General to release the data privacy act and, until he does, there is the potential for more breaches to occur in WA. Since that report, there has not been much movement. In fact, I do not think there has been any movement in this space up until December 2022. The WA government announced that the new laws were on the way. We saw some hints of that in the previous budget and a few announcements along the way. The new position of Privacy Commissioner was created. The Privacy Commissioner handles complaints and there is also mandatory reporting of breaches to the Privacy Commissioner and a new framework for sharing information between government and researchers. In the recent budget, which was handed down last week, there was mention of a chief data officer as well. The chief data officer is there to help some of these departments manage their data privacy journey and their classification and retention of that data. These are good things. There have been some recent steps in this space and there is a hint that this legislation is coming.

My concern around some of these recent announcements is that the focus is not necessarily on data privacy. It is more on the accessibility of that information between departments and researchers. It does not guarantee that there is more visibility or more transparency for Western Australians. It is basically just streamlining how departments can access and share that information that they have already collected. There is a tension here as there is with most legislation. There is a tension between allowing departments to share information to really unlock the value of that data—and then, hopefully, use that data to serve in the public interest for the public good—and giving more rights and ownership back to the Western Australian people and the end user.

There is one model here that I particularly like and that is the General Data Protection Regulation. That has been heralded as the shiny golden child of data legislation globally. It came out of Europe. Other jurisdictions are following suit. There are similar laws in Japan and California.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

Hon WILSON TUCKER: Before we were rudely interrupted for the break, I was talking about data privacy laws and the lack of such laws in Western Australia. I pitched one model that I thought would be good. As noted in the discussion paper produced after some consultation on this subject by the government, GDPR, or general data protection regulation, is the golden example that originated in Europe and has been adopted, or similar laws have been adopted, by a lot of other jurisdictions. To share some personal experience on this subject, I worked in the United States for Amazon. Amazon has to comply with these laws, as does any large tech company that operates out of Europe and handles information or personal data. Amazon was then, and probably still is, the largest company in the world. It had about 500 000 employees, so members can imagine the complexity that arises in complying

with general data protection regulation. What GDPR is really talking about is the access to, deletion of and retention of information. It is also about being up-front about the use of that information. I worked on a team that was responsible for compliance within our department. I could not hazard a guess at what it would cost a company the size of Amazon to comply with GDPR, but GDPR reflects a growing sentiment around the world that users and residents want more control of and transparency around how their information is used.

I will talk members through a scenario involving the accessibility component of GDPR. If a user gives their information to Facebook, they can make a request to Facebook, which then has to provide that information to the user. That information would include not just Facebook's use of the user's information. If Facebook has shared that information with third parties, it will also have to provide information about the use of the information shared with those organisations. There are a few technical implications of that, but it is certainly very doable.

The other aspect is around deletion. This really gives ownership and control back to the user. Rather than users just giving companies their information and it being a set-and-forget scenario, users can actually request that the information be deleted and the company will have to comply. It is not the sort of situation in which a company can pretend to delete the information and then use it again in six months' time; it is actually a hard delete. It has to be physically removed from their system.

Another aspect is about companies being up-front about the usage. This is about putting in clear terms how that information is going to be shared and used, and how the company could potentially profit from a user's information.

The other really important aspect is around the retention of users' data. Companies really have to justify why they need that information and how long they are going to store it. There was a classic case in WA recently with the State Records Office retaining information collected from the SafeWA app that people used during the pandemic. It is going into the state archives and will be retained for 25 years, which is a significant amount of time. That really highlights the lack of data privacy laws in Western Australia. The police department also uses the archive system. We need to have a good long think about the justification and reasons for retaining that information for so long. To put 25 years into perspective, in 25 years' time I could potentially have some grandchildren, which would obviously make my mother happy. I imagine that in 25 years, some members of this chamber will perhaps have ceased to walk this earth.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: You are not suggesting it is going to take you 25 years to have grandchildren?

Hon WILSON TUCKER: It may. We will find out. Twenty-five years is a long time. In 25 years, the pandemic will be a bit of a blip on our radar. We will think back to that time when we were not allowed to touch anyone or anything and when there were plastic dividers in Ubers so that people sitting in the back seat were physically divided from the driver. That will be something we will have to think about and refresh our memories on. In 25 years, the personal information collected during the pandemic will still be sitting in the state archives. We need to ask why, and how relevant that information will be in 25 years. I do not think there is a good justification for it. This is something a uniform data privacy law would help to address.

I will change gears and talk about housing affordability. This is a burning issue not just in Western Australia, but also around Australia. Subsequent governments put us in this position through policies like negative gearing, which treats the property market like an investor pool as opposed to an essential resource that supports the right of West Aussies to fulfil the Australian dream of owning their own home. Property prices have increased since the 1950s but wages have not kept pace. That has produced a very large delta and has put home ownership out of reach of a lot of young West Aussies. We know that the property market is supply and demand driven. There are certainly bottlenecks right now when we talk about developing greenfield properties in Western Australia. We have a tight labour market. In the construction industry, there are restrictions on accessing materials. There is also a potential lack of access to land to ease supply. This is restricting the development of properties and the opportunity to get them onto the market.

There is an opportunity for the state government to try to be a bit more intelligent about how we use the existing housing stock. We know that we have an ageing population in Western Australia. Due to the size of the state, Perth is one of the most sprawling cities in the world. We also have some of the largest houses. We can put those two factors together. We have an ageing population, potentially the boomer generation, that is sitting on properties with four or five bedrooms and perhaps finding those homes a little unwieldy to manage. Those people would like the opportunity to downsize. We also have young families who are trying to get into the property market but are finding it particularly difficult right now, given the constriction in the supply of housing and growth in prices that we are experiencing. One way that the government could encourage some movement in the existing pool of houses would be to look at abolishing stamp duty and replacing it with a land tax. I know the Liberals in Victoria looked at implementing that policy. Given the result in the recent election, I do not think they will be looking at it too hard right now. But that is not to say that that is not a good policy.

When we talk about abolishing stamp duty in favour of a land tax, we know that the buyer will cop that up-front stamp duty. That is a back-loading of that tax over many, many years. In the short term, that has the potential to

artificially lower house prices and stimulate the market. We have seen state and federal grants overstimulate the housing market, which has contributed to the situation that we have today. There is the question of timing if we were to switch from stamp duty to land tax. Thankfully, I am not a member of the government and I do not have to worry about implementing this policy—that is for minds greater than mine to figure out. There is the question of timing, but that is not to say that it is not achievable and that it is not a good policy for WA. It is the right time to start investigating by looking at existing stock. How do we stimulate the market, encourage resizing, allow for downsizing and increase infill by moving away from stamp duty and implementing a land tax?

Staying on the topic of housing, I will focus on renter rights. With increasing housing costs outstripping wages, there is a growing sentiment among younger Australians—certainly younger West Aussies—that the dream of home ownership is becoming further and further out of reach. It was a hot topic during the recent federal election and there has been a lot of polling to suggest that. The average time it takes to save for a home in WA is about eight years, and that is growing at an alarming rate. The reality that a lot of West Aussies face, particularly those younger than the millennials—whatever the generation younger than the millennials is called—and young families that are trying to enter the property market, is that they will be in the rental market for a long time. In some cases, people are resigned to the fact that they will never get out of the rental market; they are stuck in the rental market. Increasing renter rights is about acknowledging that more and more of us—about 30 per cent of Australians are renting—will rent for longer periods. We want to ensure that these people feel secure in the house they live in and have more rights to modify the house, bring in pets and not be at the mercy of a landlord who can evict them without justification or good reason. The state government has acknowledged that renter rights need to be increased. The Minister for Commerce recently engaged with a few different groups; legislation is coming, and that is certainly welcome. Recently, I met with members of the Make Renting Fair Alliance, which comprises a number of different companies. It has 10 tenets that will give renters more security. They mentioned that the minister has been very receptive. I congratulate the minister for her work in this space. She has been a sympathetic ear to this group. I believe that a number of recommendations have been agreed to in principle by the minister. They will go to cabinet where a decision will be made. It is my understanding that one of the principles that the alliance is fighting for, which the minister has agreed to, is around stabilising rent. This means that as interest rates increase, potentially there will be a bit of a buffer in how landlords can increase rent and at what rate. This will help to ensure that people at the more vulnerable end of the rental market are not turfed out, only to find themselves on the social housing waitlist.

Other principles include dispute resolution—giving natural justice and a right of reply to people who are renting; that is, trying to balance the equation between landlords and renters—and giving people the right to have pets, their furry creatures, in rental properties. I cannot remember the statistic about pets off the top of my head, but a lot of us have pets.

Taking a back step on renter rights, I will read some statistics from the Mining and Pastoral Region. They paint a pretty bleak picture about rental availability. When I quote these numbers, the Mining and Pastoral Region can be extrapolated out to cover the rest of regional Western Australia. The Anglicare *Rental affordability snapshot* looks at people on the minimum wage, those who access various forms of welfare and those on the pension, and what percentage of houses are available in certain areas that are considered affordable and suitable. In Kalgoorlie, 54 per cent of homes are considered affordable and suitable for people on various forms of assistance. That is a pretty good number; it is not too bad. In the Kimberley, it is 19 per cent. It is not so great in North West Central, where it sits at two per cent. In the Pilbara, it is nine per cent, which is not fantastic either. If we average those percentages, that makes 21 per cent; that is, less than one-third of rentals available in the Mining and Pastoral Region are suitable for people on various forms of assistance, which is not fantastic. I am not talking about hundreds of properties; there are not many at all. In some cases, I am talking about two or three rental properties being available in those areas. Perth just hit its lowest rate of rental properties available on the market in 40 years, at 0.6 per cent. When we talk about the dynamic or equilibrium between landlords and renters and renters having to cop it, that equation is not balanced. The reality is that in a lot of cases—I have heard some testimonials—half the time renters are too scared to raise an issue or complain about something because WA does not have no-fault evictions. Landlords can evict tenants without providing a reason and those tenants can find themselves at the back of the queue trying to find another rental. We have all heard the stories of hundreds of people lining up at home opens and throwing in bids well above the listing price. Some people who cannot find a place to live in Western Australia are sleeping rough.

In a recent media article featuring the Premier talking about renter rights, he made a number of good concessions and hinted at what we can expect. He referred to including provisions around pets and of following the Queensland model by limiting rent increases to two per cent per year. Currently, landlords in WA can increase rents every six months. In Queensland, it is once a year. The Premier said that that seemed like a sensible suggestion. However, he ruled out rent caps. I believe that only in Queensland can landlords raise rents by 10 per cent above the consumer price index per increase.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt: The ACT.

Hon WILSON TUCKER: The ACT. Okay; thank you. That was ruled out by the Premier, which is unfortunate. The Premier seems to be reading from the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia rulebook because he mirrored

what it said about not wanting to spook investors. I say to the Premier that this market is heavily geared towards investors. The 10 principles that the alliance put forward seek to rebalance the scale a little bit. I do not think there is evidence from any jurisdiction to suggest that giving renters more rights will spook investors, especially given policies such as negative gearing. I do not think that will discourage people from building properties and putting them on the market. We want to carve out a more sensible and reasonable living environment for people who rent in WA.

The big recommendation put forward by the alliance is no-fault evictions. Currently, landlords can get around price increases by cancelling rental contracts, phoenixing them and raising the rent. We have heard that the rental market is not working as expected at the moment, especially in Perth, which has 0.6 per cent availability. That is pretty damning stuff. The equation is heavily skewed towards property managers and landlords, and no-fault evictions will give people grounds to feel more secure and safer in their living environment. I think that is a good one and one of the more important recommendations. I really hope that the Minister for Commerce goes into bat for this one when it comes before cabinet so we do not see any more captain's calls from the Premier, reading from the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia handbook.

That is it from me, Deputy President. In conclusion, the government has a big opportunity here. It is in surplus. It can use that surplus in a number of ways—as a loss leader; to really look at different ways of diversification; to try to recalibrate the rental market; to make housing more affordable in Western Australia for people who are trying to become home owners; to clear some of the regulatory roadblocks we see in the tech and innovation sector, encouraging more investment here and trying to boost the sector; and to clear some of the red tape that gets in the way of innovation by introducing a debtor privacy act.

HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan) [2.20 pm]: I rise to give my budget reply speech. I want to start by acknowledging some really good initiatives in the budget, which I will highlight as I go along. I also want to highlight some of the lost opportunities to embed enduring and sustainable change. I want to look at this through a few key lenses, including energy, climate, transport, land use planning, homelessness and affordable housing, biodiversity and justice.

Starting with energy, there is really some good and exciting stuff. I must say that I was very pleased to see the announcement of big batteries. I think they are a key part of the transition towards a low-carbon future.

Hon Darren West: Huge batteries, member!

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: They are very huge batteries, in fact. The 500-megawatt battery in Collie, which will have 2 000 megawatts of output, will be the biggest battery in Australia, I think, which is really good, as is the expansion of the battery in Kwinana. This has been one of the missing bits of the transition to a low-carbon electricity grid, and I am really pleased to see them. If there is any criticism of them, it is certainly not their size because they are very impressive; it is just the speed at which they are being rolled out. I do not know why batteries take so long in WA. I am not sure whether the first Kwinana battery is live yet—it is getting very close—but it has taken a couple of years to get to this point. When South Australia rolled out its first big battery, which was the biggest battery in the Southern Hemisphere at the time, it was up and running in 100 days. We probably need a bit of a competition with Elon Musk to try to do that again! The Collie battery is not planned until the end of 2025. There is a bit of a question mark about why it takes more than two years to roll out, but it is certainly a good and really important project, and I do not want to dismiss that.

I am more critical in the energy space of the \$126 million study on transmission, which really feels like it is kicking the can down the road. Undoubtedly, as we transition to a low-carbon future, it is pretty clear what we will need, and a big part of that will be more wind and probably some limited parts of new, large-scale solar. Certainly, lots of wind will be required, and that will be placed largely up in the north west. That is where we will need the high-voltage transmission. The study, I think, will inevitably come to that conclusion. I appreciate that the minister has been trying so far to find a way to put wind where transmission already exists. I note a really good study by Ben Rose shows we need both because often the different bits of wind even each other out. Having some in the north, around Geraldton way, and some around Collie will be a really key part in making sure that wind has the maximum penetration of renewables, and this works very well with solar. I am a little bit concerned about that and about the slow-moving nature of investing in wind.

A month or two ago in this chamber, I highlighted that Western Australia has the lowest amount of green-lighted renewable energy projects coming onstream in the country. Only about one per cent of them are going into the south west interconnected system, and only three per cent across the whole state. We should be doing much more than that. I appreciate that one of the new wind projects, the 150-megawatt Kings Rock wind farm, is here, but we need far more than that. Delaying on wind is delaying the transition we need to be doing. That is probably the missing bit in this space, but I want to acknowledge credit where credit is due—the investment in batteries is a good one, and I am really pleased to see us moving in that direction.

Another key part about energy deserves highlighting. Certainly, a big part of the \$715 million cost-of-living package is the electricity credit that every household will be getting. I could not find the exact number for it, but assuming there are about 1.25 million households, my quick maths shows that \$400 for each household gives us about \$500 million. I think that is probably about right. I am not convinced that giving \$400 to every household, whether it needs it or not, is the best use of precious money. To be frank about it, I do not need a \$400 tax credit, and I expect most people in this room do not need it either. That is a huge chunk of money that I think would be much better targeted to relief for lower income households. The excuse used in previous years is that we cannot do that as a state because it is hard for us to divvy it up but, interestingly, in this budget, we are doing a bunch of extra things that are going to lower income households because it is done in partnership with the commonwealth. I think it would have been smart to have all of that targeted to lower income households and a much better emphasis on that. Ultimately, \$500 million is a very large chunk of money, and just taking it off power bills is not the best way of using it.

I will give an example of that. If we had used it as an investment in an enduring way to bring down household energy costs, how much better could it have been? It could have been a generational change. The \$400 this year is on the back of \$400 last year and \$600 the year before that. So far, we have had \$1 400 in electricity credits, and lower income households will get a top-up of another \$426 on top of that, so they will be up to \$1 826. Imagine if, instead of throwing that money at households, we had invested that in households to ensure that they had enduring lower energy bills going forward. That could be done in a number of ways, but let us take one simple example: insulation. Quickly looking around at a few sources, on average ceiling insulation costs between \$1 600 and \$2 400. We could have put ceiling insulation into every house in the state. I appreciate that we are probably a bit afraid of pink batts, but I think we can do those kinds of projects really well, and they are important.

If we look at some of the recent evidence that has come out, we see that the CSIRO put out an interesting energy-efficiency gas report in the last couple of days. The average house in Australia is less than two star; it is 1.8 star. It is literally closer to a tent than a properly insulated house. If we are serious about household energy bills and the low-carbon transition, that is the kind of investment we need to be making. With the money we are throwing around, we could have targeted low-income households and made sure that every single one of them had insulation in its ceilings. The evidence is that 68 per cent of Australians who consider themselves financially comfortable already have insulation, but only 45 per cent of Australians who are under financial pressure do. Most poorer households do not have insulation, so this is a really interesting opportunity. If they had insulation, they would see that the insulation cost would pay itself back within five to six years, and it would reduce their heating and cooling costs by between 40 and 50 per cent each year for every year. We will not have those \$400 credits forever because the iron ore boom will not last forever. We could create a housing stock in this country that will see energy bills come down in perpetuity, and that matters, because the average energy bill in Western Australia is about \$2 000 a year. Members can see already that we will be saving more than that \$400 or \$500 each year by investing in these kinds of things. For me, this is the smart stuff the government should be doing, rather than the simple, easy path—throwing money out in those easy ways.

The interesting point is that we are starting to see some of this happen now. The federal Labor Party talks about a \$1.3 billion budget commitment for energy efficiency retrofits in Australian homes. Federal Labor has been in power for just over a year and it is already doing this. The ALP has been in power in this state for six years now and it is still not showing any leadership in this space. In fact, Western Australia will be the only Labor state that will not have a seven-star rating for buildings in place by next year. Every other Labor state will; we are the only state that is delayed. I do not know why we have to be the laggard state that waits a while on these key things that would save households money and make households better. This is some of the lowest hanging fruit that should have been part of this budget, rather than the government just throwing \$400 at every household.

While I am on the theme of energy efficiency, I cannot help but talk about streetlights. I am perplexed by where the 44 per cent proposed cost increase by Western Power came from. Members who watch the news closely would have heard today that the increase was rejected, quite rightly, by the energy regulator. A 44 per cent increase would have been outrageous and would have cost councils such as the City of Stirling, for example, \$2.5 million in increased streetlighting charges. It would have been \$1 million for the City of Perth and \$500 000 for the City of Kwinana. What is happening in Western Power for it to put forward these kinds of bizarre increases?

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: You have to think of it like an ambit claim from the unions.

Hon Martin Pritchard interjected.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I like the unions! It is interesting that in the budget the streetlight tariffs were projected to increase by only 4.8 per cent across the budget forward estimates. Today's announcement is that they will instead go up by 7.4 per cent. That is a problem, because streetlighting costs should be going down. If we invest in the right kind of streetlights and convert the incredibly inefficient mercury vapours that make up more than half the streetlights to LEDs, streetlighting costs should come down. There are 278 000 streetlights across the Western Power network. About 150 000 of those, over 50 per cent, are still mercury vapours. If we converted those

across to LEDs, Western Power estimates that the streetlights would use half the power and create about half the emissions they currently do. The 95 000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions that come from streetlights every year would drop to between 45 000 and 54 000 tonnes a year. This would be a smart investment that would bring down costs. I know Western Power's annual report says that it is doing it, but it clearly is not if it is looking at putting up streetlight charges by that much, because it makes no sense. Those costs should be halving, not going up. I do not know what the plan is. Why is there not something in this budget that states that Western Power needs to work with local governments to swap out streetlights to LEDs as quickly as possible? Local governments want to do it. The Western Australian Local Government Association wants to do it. There is plan after plan from local governments wanting to do this. Do members know why it is not happening? It is not happening because of the way the Western Power tariffs work. Government regulation policy is stopping another key part of the transition that, once again, will reduce emissions and reduce costs for households and local governments. That is another key factor that is missing from the budget.

WALGA put forward a really good proposal as part of its budget submission around the urban canopy grant program. Its proposal was for \$20 million over four years to plant 60 000 trees to help address the urban heat island effect and to cool our streets and bring back biodiversity. It is a very important thing to do. Unfortunately, WALGA's proposal was watered down considerably, and instead of \$20 million over four years in the budget, there is \$3.75 million over two years. Instead of getting 60 000 trees, it will be 10 000 or 11 000 trees. If that was divided by local governments across WA, they would get about \$30 000 each, but even if that calculation was done in just the metropolitan area, it would end up being about only \$100 000. I do not understand why we are underfunding these kinds of programs. Members have talked in their replies to the budget speech about this state's huge surplus. It is just weird penny-pinching on something that we all know works and we all know needs to happen. All we will have now is a competitive process between local governments with not enough money to go around. There is no reason not to get on and do this.

We all know that Western Australia has seen declining tree canopy cover, especially across Perth. We have the lowest canopy cover of any capital city. Only 22 per cent of local government areas have the required recommended canopy cover—lower than any other capital city. We have more work to do. I do not understand why we are not doing that. It is not as though we cannot afford it. It is not as though local governments do not want to be part of it. This is just an opportunity that is going missing. The economic case for it is strong. I will quickly give some statistics. The evidence is that leafy streets uplift property values by, on average, \$17 000 a house. An investment in planting trees adds between \$3 and \$13 for every dollar spent maintaining those trees, and each tree will contribute to \$117 000 worth of wellness over its life span. Let us invest in this and do it properly. I hope the next budget will ramp up this funding because local governments want to do it. I think everyone in Perth wants to see it happen. There is no opposition to this; people want it. Let us get behind it and do it. It is a really important investment.

The next issue I want to talk about is electric buses. This was a pre-budget announcement. A media statement on Sunday, 23 April, was titled "Bus fleet goes electric with \$125 million State investment". I will give a bit of background. According to page 608 of the budget, the bus fleet contains 1 870 Transperth and TransRegional buses. I have looked for more specific data on this. The best I could find is that about 1 150 diesel buses and 500 gas buses in Transperth run up extraordinarily huge fuel bills of around \$40 million a year. That announcement sounds quite exciting and is something with which everyone would agree. The initial proposal is to spend \$22 million buying 18 new electric buses and charging infrastructure at Elizabeth Quay. With a \$125 million commitment from the Albanese Labor government, it will be \$250 million in total to deliver 130 new locally built buses.

One of my favourite quotes about budgets is from Brent Toderian who says that the truth about a government's aspirations is not found in its media statements; it is found in its budget. That media statement might give us the impression that our bus fleet is going electric, but if we dig a bit further, we find that unfortunately that is not the case. I assume that those 130 buses are across the forward estimates for the next four years, with 18 in the coming year. I asked a question about this a couple of days ago. From that question without notice we see that WA buys, on average, about 90 new buses a year. Last year we bought 87 diesel buses and two electric buses. The year before that we also bought two electric buses and we bought 96 diesel buses. This coming year—I could not get a direct answer for this, and I appreciate the government probably feels a little bit embarrassed by this—we are still going to buy 72, I assume, diesel buses and 18 electric buses.

Across the forward estimates there will be 130 electric buses, but we will still be buying 230 diesel buses. There was nothing about those 230 diesel buses in the media statement, just as there has been very little about the broader decision, announced in 2020, to buy 900 buses across the decade. It is likely that 600 of those will be diesel. Why? I know we are doing sectoral emissions reduction strategies, but if we are serious about bringing emissions down—the government has set a good, robust target of 80 per cent for its own emissions—why are we still buying diesel buses at twice the rate, maybe even three times the rate, that we are buying electric buses? There is no reason for this. I appreciate that the government does not want to admit to it and it certainly did not in the questions. Most buses on Perth's metro routes only do 80 or 90 kilometres per day. This is perfect for running electric buses.

Sydney and Brisbane have committed to all-electric bus fleets. Again, there is no reason why we cannot do it. It is not explained. There is almost a sense of trying to hide that we are still buying diesel buses at a much greater rate than electric buses. This is one of the key things that the budget should be doing because it would save us money. That huge fuel bill will come down. That is a good reason to speed this up. I hope that we see new announcements going forward that are not about buying more diesel buses than electric buses, as we are currently, but only see electric buses going forward, because that is what the evidence demands.

A huge part of the budget is the broader transport budget. The media release on this one stated that the “2023–24 state budget drives jobs with a \$13.6 billion transport and infrastructure investment”, with \$2.5 billion of additional money. This is a really important part of the budget. Where will this huge \$13.6 billion across the next four years on transport infrastructure go? I did my best to break it down. It looks like there is about \$6.5 billion of it, so almost half of it, going on roads. There is about \$5.9 billion of it—so in the high 40 per cents—going on the Metronet program. I tried to work out the cycling and walking part, the active transport bit, which is really important. I note that this is the first year, when I have looked at the budget, when there is no fact sheet and no media release around cycling and active transport. I can only dig deep into the budget where there is a line that says, “In partnership with Main Roads and local governments, the Department is enabling \$310 million of investment over the next four years.”

“Enabling” makes me think that it is not all going to be state money. I suspect a decent chunk of that is what local governments will spend, not the state. What I could find that was being spent on active transport was on the PSP—the principal shared path network, which are the bike freeways for the lack of a better word—which has been halved this year, down to \$12 million. Next year it jumps back up to \$20 million, for a total over the next four years of \$72 million. That is on page 603, for those who are following along. Then there are the Department of Transport grants, which are around \$5 million a year. If I total those up over the forward estimates, there is about \$21 million there. Then there is the big cycling bridge, which is \$49 million this year and then \$20 million each year afterwards, although most of that \$69 million is federal money. My total for active transport this year, that I could find, was \$45 million this coming year or around \$160 million in forward estimates. If that is correct—and again, on page 603 of the budget—then 1.2 per cent of the transport budget is going towards active transport. If we took the whole \$310 million, which I assume includes other contributions from local and federal government, it is 2.3 per cent of forward estimates.

There is a really important point here and that is—what every transport expert in the world will say—what we invest in our transport network is what we will get in terms of our mode share, in terms of the split between what we want to get. Do we really want an active transport share that is going to be stuck between one and two per cent? That is up there with the worst-performing active transport rates on the planet. Rates of cycling participation jumped up during COVID but now, unfortunately, we are seeing them fall. We are seeing kids riding to school at declining rates because we not funding a proper active transport budget. That is a real tragedy. It is a tragedy for our city in so many ways, for the form of our city, for the health of our residents and the health of our air. There are so many reasons why we should be funding active transport.

New South Wales is a really good example of why it does not have to be this way. It recently released a very good *Active transport strategy*, and I would encourage everyone to have a look at that. It is very clear that it wants walking and bike riding to be the preferred way to make short trips and it wants to double the number of walking and bike riding trips. In Victoria, I took a trip to VicRoads to look at their control centre. One of the takeaways for me was that one of their key aims at VicRoads, the equivalent of our Main Roads, was to get people out of cars, give them the choice to get out of cars and onto other forms of transport. I think that is what is lacking in this budget. Too much of it is going towards projects that are car dependent or the Metronet project. I think Metronet has some of its own issues, although I am a supporter of a complete Metronet, rather than the projects we are getting at the moment. I will come back to that in a minute. One of the real dangers of Metronet in its current form is that too much of it is around enabling sprawl.

Last year in my budget speech I spoke about the \$100 million Tonkin Highway upgrade as an example of using transport infrastructure funding to subsidise sprawl. That was quite up-front. The government said, “We’re putting in this road to open up land for 100 000 new homes.” It was up-front that there was a \$10 000 subsidy for each house on the fringe. In this budget, my frustration is that this kind of subsidising roads that encourage sprawl is continuing. An example I want to talk about this year is the EastLink project, which is on page 599 of the budget. It is a project that will create another route between Perth and Northam. Part of it is for freight movement and projected growth in local population. What local population? There is not a population out there that needs this. What will happen if this road is built is that projects like North Stoneville will be enabled, projects that should never be approved because they are problematic in so many ways.

Main Roads has spent \$15 million so far just on planning for this project. It plans to spend another \$5 million this year. These projects end up having a life of their own. If this North East Link project gets built, enabling more sprawl out into the Perth hills and north Stoneville, this horrible cycle of Perth being the longest and most sprawled city

on the planet will just get worse. We need to stop it, and it starts now by defunding the budget for those kinds of projects that will enable sprawl to extend further.

If we are not careful, this will also apply to Metronet. If Metronet is only about projects like the Morley–Ellenbrook line, the Yanchep rail extension and the Byford rail extension—all up, they are projects worth about \$1.2 billion—Metronet will become too much about enabling property development further out on the urban fringe at a time when the percentage of new housing on the fringe is the highest this state has ever seen. In fact, we are now at a point at which less than 30 per cent of new housing is in the current urban footprint. Over 70 per cent is on the urban fringe. That has to stop. Ultimately, that follows where we are putting it and where we are investing. One of my key frustrations about what is missing from this budget is that there is still no money to invest in any kind of mid-tier feasibility study, be it for light rail or trackless tram, for the central subregion. Every local government—more than 15 local governments are now in a consortium—has said to the government, “This needs to happen. If you want us to do density and get people where you say you want them, you need to invest in transport in this region, too”, but there has been nothing. They are not even asking for it to be built; they are just asking for a feasibility study to be done and to start the planning so that they know where it is going to go and they know where they can put density and apartments. That is just good planning, but it is entirely missing. The danger is that we are spending billions on the Metronet public transport system, which, instead of transforming the city and making it denser and better connected, will just add to the sprawl and make the longest city in the world even longer and more car dependent.

There is another project in the Main Roads budget that I want to talk about because I think it deserves a special highlight—that is, the Fremantle Traffic Bridge project, otherwise known as the Queen Victoria Street and Swan River Crossings project. This project has not started. There is nothing on the ground to indicate that this project has started, but somehow \$57 million has been spent on it. I remember when this project was first proposed—I think it was in the early days when I was mayor or just before—and the total cost for the project to be built and completed was \$70 million. Somehow we have managed to spend \$57 million just on plans that I suspect are not even going to result in something being built because they are too expensive and complicated. This was a \$230 million project a few years ago under this government, but now it is officially a \$280 million project. Even though the website has said for a year now that it is under construction, and there has been no sign of construction, I suspect that this project will now be worth well north of \$300 million. This is a \$300 million project that nobody in the community supports. The Fremantle council does not support it and the East Fremantle council does not support it. It is an extraordinary amount of money to spend on a project that everybody thinks is appalling. It is a bland bridge. Some of the ideas around the entrances to the bridge and some of the other work are literally like something out of a 1960s Los Angeles playbook. This project needs to be paused and started again. I appreciate that \$57 million has been spent on plans for it. I suspect that that is \$57 million that has been badly spent. I know that my community would be very happy to see that project paused and go back to the design table, and I suspect that that \$280 million or \$300 million-plus project would become a lot cheaper as a result.

I want to move on to a very different area, and that is housing and homelessness. I want to start by acknowledging that there are some really good elements in this space and I was pleased to see the extra \$511 million for social housing and homelessness measures in this budget. It is a good step. I also think that the \$450 million increase in the social housing investment fund is good, as it will increase the total number of social houses to be built to 4 000. About 1 000 homes a year will be delivered. It is a really good start. I want to acknowledge the good work on raising that number. Unsurprisingly, I say that this should have happened in the first term of this government, not just in the second half of its second term, but we are where we are. It is good to see. Unfortunately, where we are is that we have a social housing waitlist that now has over 19 000 applications, or over 34 000 people, with about 8 000 on the priority waitlist, which is the highest it has ever been.

Building new social houses alone is not going to be enough. We have a really severe housing crisis in this state. The evidence is that the housing shortage in Western Australia is going to be the worst in the country. Although there is a 10 per cent rule for most things in WA, 25 per cent of the housing shortage will be in WA. We need to get building, and building quickly, but we also need to get smarter in how we use our budget to get people into houses in other ways. I think there is a missed opportunity in this budget to provide some incentives right now to free up some of the housing we have. I will give members three quick ways we could have done this that would have been low-cost budget initiatives.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Honourable member, I will tell you one way to get more housing—that is, get your Greens mates in the Senate to support federal Labor’s housing policy. That will build houses in Australia and Western Australia.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I appreciate the interjection. I think we all agree that new housing needs to be built. Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members!

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: If the member had been in the chamber when I spoke previously, he would have heard me say that building houses, even the houses proposed under the federal scheme, alone will not be enough to meet demand. No-one would suggest that that is true. But there is a real opportunity, and this is a key part of the budget. We have many empty homes in this state; in fact, 118 000 houses were empty on census night. That is interesting. There were one million empty houses across the country, which is extraordinary. I appreciate that many of those houses would be second homes or holiday homes that could and should be used for long-term housing. But the question is: how do we incentivise that? This is where I think there is a really important role for government. It needs to ask how it can incentivise those people who have a second home or a holiday home to bring them onto the market to meet some of that demand. Similarly, how can we incentivise owners of short-term housing and houses on the Airbnb market to bring them onto the long-term market? There are about 5 000 holiday houses in Perth alone and 20 000 across the state that could be brought back onto the long-term market.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Except that we keep demonising landlords and the use of residential investment as a wealth creation tool. Everybody attacks landlords to the point where landlords are getting out because they are sick of it. I agree with you, absolutely right, it is really good point, but whilst we demonise landlords continually there is no incentive for them to put them back into the market place.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: The comment from Hon Dr Steve Thomas, for those who did not catch it, was that we need landlords to be willing to do that and that we need to see them as partners—I think that is the point the member makes—and I agree with that, because ultimately if we are to deal with the worst housing crisis this state has seen, we need people who leave homes empty or have them on the short-term market to bring them back into the long-term market. The last numbers I looked at said that there were only 1 700 homes available for rent in this state. Whole suburbs—many suburbs—had zero houses for rent. We have a crisis of huge proportions and people are being forced to sleep in cars.

Hon Kate Doust: There are actually more now based on your party's position.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: Can I just say —

Hon Kate Doust: I mean, seriously, I cannot believe the hypocrisy coming out of your mouth. You should be embarrassed; you really should be embarrassed.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: Hon Kate Doust, I will push back on that very strongly. One, I am not in the federal party, and the key point I am making —

Hon Kate Doust interjected.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: No, I am not in the federal party room.

Hon Kate Doust interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot): Members! Could you just take your seat for a moment, thank you, honourable member. We all know how debate is conducted in this place. Please do not make Hansard's job more impossible than it is on a Thursday afternoon. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, if you address your remarks to me, it will probably help.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I will happily do so. There is a key point here. I appreciate that there has been a bit of backwards and forwards about the federal housing investment fund. The point I am making is that I think there is agreement here. I hope the housing investment fund is expanded, and my Greens colleagues are pushing for that \$10 billion to become much more and for there to be more housing. I think we all agree that that is what needs to happen. The truth of the matter is that that fund would not have built any houses yet, and will not build any for several years in the future. The point I am making here in my contribution to the budget debate is that we need to get smart on how we get houses back into the market now because we have a real crisis on our hands. I hope we can all agree across the chamber that there is a crisis and that we need to get smart solutions. Building lots of houses will be part of that, but another key part will be getting the houses we already have into the market, and that is a really important thing. I come back to the Airbnbs and short-term rentals that need to be incentivised to come back into the market. The same applies to vacant houses. There are 118 000 of those. We need as many of those as possible back in the market.

Then, there needs to be a key bit around rent assistance. The price of rent has jumped up hugely in this state over recent times. This is at a time when the national rental affordability scheme is being wound down. I hope there is some really strong advocacy by my state colleagues to their federal counterparts to extend NRAS because that is a key that would help renters stay in their houses right now. There should have been more state assistance in this budget, again, to help renters stay in their houses because, from memory, rents have gone up 17 per cent this year. There have been huge jumps. Where is there any support in this budget to help renters? There is not. This is a lost opportunity to help people stay in their houses. The worst thing we can have is those people forced out onto the street. These ideas could help address and solve this housing crisis right now.

We all agree on the longer term. I agree with Hon Kate Doust that we need to build more houses. The debate happening in the federal Parliament is about how many houses. My Greens and Labor colleagues agree on building more houses, just not the quantum. I agree with my Greens colleagues that the quantum should be up and there should not be a cap of \$500 million a year; it should be well above that. I hope there are successful and collaborative negotiations that see that happen and see even more money spent because that would be the very best thing. That brings me to the end of my bit on housing.

I now move to a different topic, which is another really serious one, and that is youth justice. There is a false economy happening right now in the youth justice space. We saw that play out in the most terrible terms over the last week with the damage done to Banksia Hill Detention Centre. Instead of this idea that the best way to deal with the crisis in youth justice now is to spend more money on simply toughening up and strengthening Banksia Hill, why not take the advice of every expert around that says that we need a separate remand facility and we need facilities on-country that can keep these kids closer to their communities? We are not seeing any of this happen, unfortunately. Instead, there is just a slow spend on Banksia Hill going forward. I am looking at some of the numbers in the budget for the ongoing initiatives for Banksia Hill Detention Centre. It is depressing to look at how slow the spend is. There is \$7 million as part of ongoing initiatives this year, the same amount next year and then \$4 million or \$5 million in the out years. This is a crisis. Obviously, these numbers will be out already in light of what has happened in the last week, but this is not the solution. The solution is in investing in appropriate facilities for young people with appropriate wraparound services. Only then will we start to get things back on course in a way that saves the state money. We have created a very expensive headache, an unsustainable problem in our state, through the way we are dealing with youth justice. Merely throwing more money at youth detention at Banksia Hill, a broken Banksia Hill, and unit 18 at Casuarina Prison will not fix it. We need smart thinking. A key failure of this budget is that it has not done that.

I also want to talk about something else that is missing from the budget, which is compensation for stolen generations survivors. A question came to mind in the light of a petition that came to this place and of the fact that we have huge budget surpluses, with \$4.2 billion this year and \$3.3 billion next financial year. There were recommendations in the *Bringing them home* report, and recommendations 3 and 4, about compensation schemes, have not happened here yet. The petition calls on the Legislative Council to set up a parliamentary inquiry into stolen generations compensation schemes and part of me asked: would it not be better just to avoid another inquiry and just get on and fund it? We are certainly one of the last states that has not done this. It would be a great travesty of justice if stolen generations survivors in Western Australia were the only survivors in Australia who were not properly compensated, given the budget surpluses we have. I cannot think of a better time for us to progress this important work for justice in this state.

I am almost at the end of my speech. There are a couple of other issues. There is a whole bunch of stuff that I could have gone into, but there are a few quick things I want to highlight. There does not appear to be much new in the biodiversity space in the budget. I am looking at page 696 of budget paper No 2 and it is interesting that there are fewer recovery plans for our critically endangered species and ecological communities. For some reason the numbers are in decline, and that concerns me. During estimates process I will certainly ask questions about why we are seeing that.

I have other concerns that certainly deserve highlighting. I know many people in the community are concerned about what looks like increased logging of jarrah and karri sawlogs under the guise of ecological thinning at a time when we need to be getting out of it. I have questions about the \$36 million in the budget for an ecological thinning program. What will that mean for logging and forest health in this state? I think there will be plenty of questions on that issue as well as we go forward.

In conclusion, if I were to write a report card on this budget—I put my old university lecturer hat back on while I was writing this—it would say —

Dear Mark

In 2023 you have delivered another budget that could best be described as safe and cautious. It is a budget full of little steps when bigger ones were often required. In fact, most of this budget feels a lot like a last year's budget reheated. It lacks fresh ideas and has little innovation, and there certainly is no clear narrative about where it seeks to take the state.

Too often, the budget seems more interested in wanting to give the impression it is doing something than properly funding and actually doing it. As a state government with both unprecedented revenue and an unprecedented parliamentary majority, you could be driving the big changes needed to both set up WA for the century ahead and care for the most vulnerable in our community, but, despite this opportunity, this budget does not adequately do either. It is a budget more inclined to invest in business as usual, even though WA knows it has to change.

If WA was not facing increasing unsustainable urban sprawl, a housing crisis, a youth justice crisis, a climate crisis and a biodiversity crisis, it might be an 8-out-of-10 budget. But we are facing all those issues and the budget fails to adequately respond to any of them. As a result, this budget gets a pass, but barely, as it fails to grasp the challenges with us now and ahead of us.

Needs to try harder—5 out of 10.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [3.11 pm]: Colleagues, on that note, I will try my best to arrest my downward cycling circadian rhythm, and move from somewhere soporific to somewhere more enthusiastic. That is not an open invitation for unsolicited and unruly interjections.

Several members interjected.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: It is nice to be assisted here—collegiality has broken out! This is a signal moment in the history of the Legislative Council.

I rise to make my seventh speech on the budget.

Hon Peter Foster: Who's counting?

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I can absolutely assure the member that I count every single day and I have counted every single budget. Some budgets are more memorable than others, and not always for the reasons that might be reflected in the headlines on the gargantuan size of budget surpluses, with this budget being another example of that. What struck me about this budget is its strange sense of bellicosity and the almost irreducible tendency towards irritability that emanates from the Premier who is also the Treasurer.

That sort of irritability and focus on fights was addressed by my colleague Hon Dr Steve Thomas in his lead response to the budget, particularly as it relates to the GST. I make this observation to the Premier; Treasurer and anyone else in cabinet who might consider listening in. This budget will earn the government some cheap headlines at least initially but do not discount embedding enmity across the Nullarbor, because that might be reciprocated with interest in a way that even the assurances of a federal Treasurer on a very brief visit to Western Australia cannot assuage in the long term. I would not boast about Western Australia being the envy of the nation to poke other Premiers in the eye when, effectively, the results the government has posted in its budget, frankly, do not derive from any personal endeavour of the Premier or any government policy setting; they derive completely from luck. It is not a bad thing to be lucky. I think Napoleon once said he would prefer a lucky general over a professional general. Luck is a good thing to have. I do not decry the Premier his luck, but I warn him against his hubristic tendencies to effectively assume that the state of the books in Western Australia is the result of his own superior intellect and political acumen. He is a politically astute and clever person, no doubt. I would not in any way disagree with that assertion, but he is not a masterful Treasurer and the results that he posts and boasts about are nothing to do with him. They are to do with a strange trick of geology, our natural resources endowment, that we can only benefit from.

Furthermore, I think the Premier is dangerously imperilling the GST deal that was delivered for Western Australia by former Prime Minister Scott Morrison. When the Premier enters into what I will call “unique” arrangements with the resources sector around the co-funding of signature projects, I find the murkiness around the governance and administrative arrangements of those particular deals somewhat unsettling. Although I understand, potentially, the involvement of the more monolithic organisations in the resources industry, smaller resources companies, with much lower market capitalisation, have also been tapped on the shoulder to make voluntary contributions. How voluntary? I do not know. I do not want to spend too much of my contribution focused on this issue, but it strikes me as one of the most unusual set of arrangements that a Western Australian state government has entered into with an industry. It may well be to the benefit of Western Australia in the long term, but I find it difficult to reconcile why the government needs the assistance of the Roy Hills or the BHPs when it is bragging about posting record surpluses.

I find the GST problematic because the government has now given the state Premiers of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia an added reason to be antagonistic towards Western Australia and its financial relationship with the commonwealth. I think it is deeply, deeply unwise. I hope my fears do not come to pass but I suspect that they will.

On budget evening, there was a vignette, which was addressed by my colleagues Hon Dr Steve Thomas and Hon Nick Goiran, of the Premier having a very strange interview with James Carmody of the ABC. It centred on the economic truth of Western Australia; that the record surpluses delivered are the result of royalty income largely from one dominant geopolitical economic entity, our principal trading partner, China. I think the journalist, Mr Carmody, was attempting to illustrate some potential vulnerability of the Western Australian economy because of that reliance. The initial answer that the Premier gave was very reasonable, but after two or three follow-up questions, the Premier seemed to just drop his bundle. I could not understand why the Premier of this state, the author of another record surplus —

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: “Recipient” might perhaps be a better word.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: — perhaps “recipient” would be a better description—would storm out of that interview in a fit of pique. However, it reminded me of a point the Premier, when he was opposition leader, and some of his colleagues made during the election campaign about the over-reliance of Western Australia on its mineral resources and the need to diversify our industrial base. I have reflected on how successful we have been over the last seven budgets in diversifying, in any meaningful sense, our economic foundations or our foreign markets. There have been some advances, but, largely speaking, we are in the same position now that we were in seven or eight years ago when this was an intensely problematic strategic risk that a sensible Western Australian government needed to deal with. One way in which the then new Labor government, led by the Premier, attempted to deal with this matter in its first term was to establish an Asian engagement portfolio. I think the first minister was Hon Peter Tinley and that Hon Bill Johnston might have held the portfolio at some time—I am not sure of the sequence of appointments. But that portfolio was killed off, without a trace, in a strange, strange way. There was a point at which broadening our engagement with the rest of the world, and particularly within South-East Asia and more broadly within Asia, should have been a sensible focus of Western Australian policy, but that is no longer the case.

Obviously, since the border reopened post-COVID, Western Australia has been privileged to receive a range of ambassadors and heads of mission from Canberra—foreign representatives who have been doing their best to familiarise themselves with the part of Australia that provides 50 per cent of Australia’s earnings. Most recently, I was invited, as an opposition member, to attend a lunch in honour of the Italian ambassador. In a jocular fashion we discussed the possibility of opening a trade office in Europe—a new one in Milan. I thought that would not be such a bad option. I would support that, on the condition that we got to send our three Italian ministers of the Crown over there to run the show, if only to open some opportunities in cabinet for other gifted members of the caucus to get a career leg-up. There has been an unfortunate stultification of some talented individual members of the Labor government from making any progress, in spite, it has to be said, of some rather—I am referring not to the Minister for Emergency Services, but to ministers in the other house —

Hon Stephen Dawson: What about an office in Ireland? I would happily staff that.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I would send the minister there, too. I will do whatever it takes to encourage a bit of progress and the unclogging of the supply chain of talent in the Labor Party, because I think it is quashing its best people. I will reflect on the opportunity for growth, transition and progress in the justice portfolio a little later. I will focus my remarks predominantly on two main portfolio areas, being transport and the justice system overall. Those members of the government who were on the morning shift would have heard my contribution earlier today.

Several members interjected.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Here we go! I made some abbreviated remarks about the management of the Metronet project. I do not share much of the world view or political inclinations of Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, which should be well understood, but one area on which I am in agreement with him is that there is nothing transformational about Metronet. I think it is valid to extend public transport networks to areas where people want to live and can afford to live, so I am not an opponent of “sprawl”, as I think it is rather condescendingly described. What I object to is the enormous, untrammelled and almost unhinged capital expenditure on a project that will require significant amounts of subsidisation to keep operational. Something strange has occurred with Metronet. Earlier in the day, I reflected on the initial concept of Metronet in 2017. The Labor Party released twin media releases on 6 February 2017. The first is quite amusingly titled, in retrospect, “Liberals’ METRONET ‘analysis’ shows why they cannot be trusted”. There are some zingers in this. One dot point states that Liberals produce fake news. I do not think that is a phrase that members of the current government would be very enthusiastic about uttering, but they were uttering it in early 2017. The fake news to which the media release from the then shadow transport minister and shadow Treasurer referred was apparently that the Liberal Party had said something mean and nasty about the financial implications of the Metronet project. They said, “Hang on, you can’t trust the Liberals; listen to us. We’ll tell you what Metronet is. This is what it is.”

The media release states —

... METRONET includes four new rail lines, the removal of four level crossings, two new stations and upgrades.

The release helpfully specified the individual project components, which included the Thornlie–Cockburn Link, the Yanchep extension, the Morley–Ellenbrook line, the Byford extension and some crossing removals, signalling and the like. That came in at a sum of \$2.935 billion, and included a commitment to procure, rather than manufacture at that stage, 78 railcars at a cost of \$410 million. This was stage 1. I repeat that descriptor: it was stage 1 of Metronet. That was an ambitious plan. That was an expensive plan. Yet, to all intents and purposes, it was a reasonable plan. It was a plan that the government had a mandate to deliver. Labor campaigned on Metronet and was voted in. This is what the public thought they were going to get, and they were going to get those discrete project elements within

six years. That was the commitment. Seven budgets ago, in the government's first budget, the scope for Metronet was \$3 billion—that is, the delivery of those project components at a price tag of \$3 billion more or less.

I now move to the document tabled last Thursday. There has been an escalation in Metronet's overall capital cost. It is not \$3 billion; it is now at least \$11.5 billion. That is an enormous expansion in the size of any infrastructure project, let alone any public transport project, in Western Australian history, and it has largely occurred unremarked. There has been an expansion in that capital cost even over the last 12 months. For example, Bayswater station—which, I might add, was not included in the original Metronet stage 1—was projected to cost \$227 million in the last budget, but last week we discovered that it will now cost \$334 million, an increase of more than \$100 million, and take an additional 12 months to deliver. We discovered that the troubled high-capacity signalling component of Metronet, which was presented to us as costing just under \$450 million last year—a project subcomponent to be delivered by the 2025–26 budget year—had blown out by nearly another \$130 million in the last 12 months to be approaching \$580 million and will be delivered probably a year late. In 12 months, the Morley–Ellenbrook line has blown out by \$550 million—in 12 months!—taking it to a capital cost of \$1.65 billion. Indeed, the Thornlie–Cockburn Link, which was costed in 2017 by the Labor Party in opposition at \$474 million and revised significantly upwards in the last budget to \$880 million, has increased in cost by a further \$130 million to come in at the princely total of \$1.1 billion, which is to say nothing of the enormous expansion in cost, the almost trebling in cost, of the Yanchep rail extension. It was first proposed to cost \$386 million but last Thursday its price tag was revised up to \$982 million, just shy of \$1 billion.

What accounts for this rapid capital expansion? There are two obvious points to make, but I will make them after I deal with the excuses that have been provided. There is a tendency of this government that is dispiritingly akin to someone who is 35 years of age and still grumbling about their parents being the source of all the problems in their life. It is a failure to accept the responsibilities of governing—a backwards-looking tendency, a rear-view orientation. At no stage has the state government disputed the fact that the capital cost of Metronet has expanded from \$3 billion to \$10 billion last year to now more than \$11.5 billion, but it says the reason for that is COVID. Labour shortages are the reason. The increase in material costs of steel and concrete are the reason. The war in Ukraine is the reason. There is a never-ending, inexhaustible supply chain of excuses why the cost of Metronet has ballooned. Were all those contingencies foreseeable? Obviously not; not all of them. Did the government make a series of decisions throughout the course of COVID and throughout the course of the obvious tightness in supply chains and labour market shortages? Did it miss the fact that Russian troops were massing on the Ukrainian border? In fact, that was disputatious territory going back at least to 2014. No, it did not. Those are not the reasons for Metronet's capital expansion; they are excuses. The reason why Metronet has blown out from \$3 billion to now more than \$11.5 billion is because the government decided to expand the scope and the scale of Metronet.

Hon Shelley Payne: A plan for the future.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: That is a good interjection. I agree; there is a need to plan for the future. But this expansion of the metropolitan rail network of about 70 kilometres in rail track represents, in the metropolitan context, a doubling—not exactly, but effectively—of the length of the network in the context of plummeting patronage. Patronage declined for obvious reasons during COVID. However, it is not much of an achievement to say that 90 per cent of patronage has recovered compared with pre-COVID levels when patronage is still well under where it was five years ago and well under where it was 10 years ago. People are not using the network and their reasons for that are possibly varied. When I have asked questions in this house on a number of the occasions about whether the government has a strategy to recover lost passengers, I effectively get a Kevin Costner, *Field of Dreams* answer—that is, “Build it and they will come.” They will not; they are not coming. That is an unfortunate thing. There will be for a very long time a need to subsidise public transport beyond what would ordinarily be expected or what might ordinarily be considered reasonable. Already in budget paper No 3—I am recalling this fact off the top of my head so I can be corrected—the operating subsidy payable to the Public Transport Authority in the forthcoming 2023–24 year will be \$1.2 billion. That includes the bus network as well, but a large component of that subsidisation can be attributed to the rail network.

Hon Martin Pritchard interjected.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Indeed. These are all laudable things, but they come at an economic cost. Member, it might be a superior public policy outcome, for example, if the government established a flat fee structure or a two-zone cap but did not unnecessarily, prematurely, expand the network at the same time. I think we would probably have a more sustainable system if the government had managed these factors and variables in a more responsible fashion. The member makes a very interesting point, because we do not have linear aggression that attributes certain components of that subsidisation against the operation of the system or policy decisions. That kind of information might be worthwhile extracting during the budget estimates process if that is possible. However, a forecast figure of \$1.2 billion is just the subsidy. It overlooks the recurrent costs in running the system if expanded. It will need more staff; it will need more rolling stock and the like. This is an expensive process. If the operating subsidy, taken in

isolation, is expected to be at least \$1.2 billion or \$1.3 billion in the forthcoming budget, what will it be in 2026–27, when the Yanchep rail extension is up and running, when the Morley–Ellenbrook line is functioning and when the Thornlie–Cockburn line is built? We do not know to what degree future budgets and future discretionary financial capacity of governments will be restricted by what I think has been a premature and irresponsible expansion of Metronet. We know that we are operating in uncertain political —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Sandra Carr): Order! Members, I note that Hansard is having difficulty hearing the honourable member. If we could, please, keep the conversations down. Thank you.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Thank you. We do not know the full consequences and the likely full operating subsidy that will be required to keep Metronet running in four or five years' time. If it is approximately \$1.2 billion or \$1.3 billion now, it is reasonable that it will be \$2 billion by the end of the decade, and this is a high-side estimate. If indeed that is the case, the government needs to have a conversation with the public of Western Australia about what that means it cannot do. Potentially, it will not be able to fund some school upgrades, provide temporary cost-of-living relief or the like. Conceptually, Metronet is very interesting. Yes, the government needs to invest in public transport infrastructure. Yes, it needs to plan for the future, but it needs to make those investments prudent, plausible and sustainable. I suspect and greatly fear that the government has made an unsustainable economic investment and done so prematurely. I fear that Metronet is the project that will eat future budgets.

Metronet is also perhaps premised on a particular world view. I do the member no disrespect because he is out of the chamber on urgent parliamentary business, but it underscores a narrow sense of economic working life and assumes that people will use Metronet just because it is there. It focuses very much on a certain class of worker, who is not the traditional working-class worker, frankly. You do not see tradesmen using Metronet. You do not see builders using Metronet. It is very much tailored to the laptop class of knowledge workers—not entirely, but largely.

Hon Martin Pritchard: Retail workers.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Possibly with that exception, member.

Hon Darren West: Accountants and public servants.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I doubt very much accountants, but tradespeople are completely absent.

I make this point because so much of the apparent benefit of Metronet is a great unlocking of land supply. Housing is an issue that two previous speakers have reflected on. I absolutely distance myself from some of their solutions, as I think members opposite do, but apparently there are 8 000 hectares of developable land around so-called Metronet precincts. The unfortunate thing is the private sector is not investing in it. Perhaps the economics of that investment or concept need to be reconsidered because, frankly and maturely, I think it is in everybody's interest that investments in projects like Metronet are as successful as they can possibly be. I think that the minister responsible has potentially undermined that success by biting off more than any government can reasonably chew at this moment in time. Metronet is one to watch.

I mentioned as well my interest in the justice portfolio. It is not so much an interest as a responsibility. I am attempting to make a very broad assessment of some of the challenges evident on the broadest possible reading of what the Western Australian justice portfolio constitutes. My guidepost for evaluating the performance of the government and the system generally was in the campaign commitment given by the Premier and the government in the lead-up to the 2021 state election. The commitment was that the McGowan government would keep Western Australia safe and strong. That was an effective campaign slogan. It resonated with the anxieties of the time, and it did so extremely effectively. No-one needs to tell me, personally, how successful that was. Now, with the dust somewhat cleared, is it time to take a rational, mature and objective view of whether that campaign slogan has been fulfilled. I have talked about the failures in the health portfolio, and I will relieve members today by not reflecting on those failures at length in my intended contribution. The focus is on safety—the safety of the person in their home, in the streets and in their community; their access to justice; their fair treatment under the law. These issues have attracted and seized my attention.

It is always dangerous to make cute political analogies to explain complicated concepts. That said, I will chance my arm a little bit. If the justice system in Western Australia is comparable to an aircraft, I would say that the aircraft is losing altitude and a number of warning lights are going off simultaneously, but there is time to correct and regain altitude. That might mean putting egos aside and paying due care and attention to what those warnings are attempting to tell us. Quite obviously, all this is feigned to be in the compartmentalised portfolio of corrective services; it is nevertheless a matter of community safety and falls under the administration of the Department of Justice as an umbrella organisation.

I understand that the riot at Banksia Hill Detention Centre last week was the fourth riot since the new year. The Premier disclosed yesterday that the most recent incident will likely result in a \$30 million damage bill. Staff have been egregiously injured; it is a dangerous work environment for those staff. I will not spend any time on the Premier's rhetorical flourishes in relation to this matter, but I will underscore a guiding principle because I think

if I do not underscore it, I will be accused of not supporting it—that is, those juveniles in that facility deserve to be there. Unequivocally, they deserve to be there. I do not know their personal circumstances, and I will not presume to know their personal circumstances, but I know that they are there for a reason, and I know that they are there because they have hurt and injured people. If I am to give any bias, my bias will always be with the victims of crime and not with the perpetrators of crime. Frankly, I think the conversation about the individual circumstances of those juveniles, whether they do or do not have foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, is a rhetorical distraction because the clear evidence points to this: the government has lost control on the fourth occasion, a 14-hour riot. Lawful authority there has been undermined as has the capacity to rehabilitate some of those individuals. The responsibility to provide a safe, or safer, working environment for those public servants who work in that facility has not been fulfilled. It cannot be evidenced in this budget and I think that is greatly to the government's discredit. We should ask ourselves whether that is the only warning light going off. Sadly, it is not.

Another warning signal can be seen in the police budget. On page 404 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, is a table that relates to the rate of offences against the person measured per 100 000 people. That has increased from an estimated 810 offences per 100 000 people to 905.6 offences per 100 000 people. The note annexed to that table says quite starkly that that increase in overall offences is due to an increase in non-family assault offences. That indicates clearly to me that public safety is being compromised. When we delve a little deeper into those figures, as I did today—I have taken these statistics from the Western Australia Police Force website—a range of selected offences against the person are up 16.7 per cent on a five-year average. This is not something that has happened in just the past 12 months. This has shown an increase in criminality, an increase in danger, an increase in public threat and immeasurable deterioration of community safety in Western Australia under the McGowan government. This is another red light flashing, screaming for attention in the cockpit of justice. Is it the only one? Sadly, lamentably, it is not.

My colleague Hon Nick Goiran in his very erudite contribution on this budget reflected upon his fears about the rule of law in Western Australia, and I think they were points well made. I will not go over the same ground as he did, but I will reflect on some other issues that trouble him, and me, equally greatly. I will commence with an analogy made by the ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in an address he gave in 2012. He compared the legal system in Australia, and indeed in Western Australia, with having a Rolls-Royce. It was the Rolls-Royce of justice systems. However, he said —

... but there is not much point of having a Rolls Royce in the garage if you can't afford the fuel to drive it anywhere. You can sit in it, polish it, admire it, boast about it, lend it to rich friends or hire it out to people who can afford to drive it, but you can't use it for its basic purpose, which is to get you from A to B. We might be better off trading our Rolls Royce for a lighter more fuel efficient vehicle.

That is an interesting comparison. Members do not have to listen to me on warning lights in the cockpit of the plane of justice; they can reflect on the Rolls-Royce analogy provided by no less a person than the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Hon Wayne Martin.

How then are we to measure the efficiency or accessibility of our court and tribunal system in Western Australia since no less a person than the ex-Chief Justice has suggested this is where we should focus? If members are inclined to look at the budget papers for the justice portfolio, page 419 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, has a table of outcomes and key effectiveness indicators. I refer to the intended outcome, “An efficient, accessible court and tribunal system”. Therein is a series of metrics. At the Supreme Court, criminal time to trial is budgeted for 39 weeks, the actual delivered the year before was 54 weeks, and the estimated actual will be 45 weeks, so there is an expansion; there is a blowout in time. The District Court criminal time to trial in the 2022–23 budget was for 32 weeks, but the estimated actual will be 70 weeks—more than double—yet the justice system is funded for only the 32-week target, a target that blew out by 100 per cent. No funding is attached to achieve that formidable, heroic turnaround—none—that renders the numbers presented in a budget document risible beyond belief, because the government is attempting to do better with the same or flatlined resources than it did last year, without any explanation as to how it might do it. It is completely and utterly implausible.

On 18 March this year, the weekend version of *The West Australian* contained a heartbreaking story about a lady named Amy Scott. I have had correspondence with Ms Scott previously. I will not read in those private exchanges but I will reflect on the public remarks made by Ms Scott. Her son, Nate, was killed in terrible circumstances in June 2020, along with his stepsister. Despite an individual being charged, that case has not gone to trial. There has been a range of trial delays. The most recent, but abandoned, trial date for May has now been put back to December. Members here, particularly learned members of Parliament, understand that the wheels of justice turn slowly. Principles of natural justice, due process, must be abided by. All parties to a case must be given equal opportunity to present their best case. However, that principle has been stretched beyond credulity in this matter. The article in *The West Australian* states —

“It’s really hard to put into words how it feels,” Ms Scott said. “It just feels like my son doesn’t matter to anyone in any kind of power, or in the court system.

Her grief and anguish is palpable and I think that resonates with all good-spirited people here. I wish that we as a chamber could say to Ms Scott, this mother, that of course Nate's life matters, as does his half-sister. However, I do not think any reassurance we as a chamber could provide would actually provide the reassurance.

I understand some of the reasons for the trial delay on this matter at a rational level, but, emotionally, they are very hard to square away. I might be accused of cherry-picking or being selective here, but this is evidence of the emotional and economic anguish and frustration felt across the entire community because our legal system does not have the capacity to deal with things in an accessible or efficient manner. It is not because the constraints on the system have not been previously identified, particularly with criminal matters.

Certainly over the course of the previous Barnett government—I think around 2014 to 2016—there were troubling signs about the efficiency of the legal system and the availability of courtrooms to hear cases. I recall the now Attorney General made some legitimate criticisms of the management of the system at the time. However, the problems relating to the example I just gave have not just recently re-emerged; these emerged, at least publicly, two years ago in 2021. The Law Society of Western Australia called this scenario a crisis. The Attorney General responded by convening a crisis meeting. For the two years since that meeting was held in, I think, June 2021, members of the opposition attempted to elicit what the outcomes of that meeting actually were and whether it would result in the freeing up of additional resources or create more courtrooms. We do not know.

An answer that I received to a question recently was that \$500 000 was provided to the department to explore a variety of options, presumably to prepare some sort of cabinet document. However, that cabinet document does not appear to have materialised; indeed, if it did materialise and was presented, it has not resulted in any increased funding. This is an unacceptable scenario in Western Australia. I think it is contemptuous to on the one hand boast about the size of these surpluses, and on the other provide absolutely nothing to make the legal system, which we all rely upon, more accessible or efficient. The justice system is deteriorating in front of our eyes, and not because learned people have not attempted to call it out—indeed, a number of them repeatedly have. However, back to my cockpit example, it is another of the warning lights that are going unactioned. How much longer can the government ignore them? I do not know.

Hon Darren West: Nine minutes and 20 seconds.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: It will not be the last time I will reflect on this matter, Hon Darren West, because I think even the member would agree that it is serious.

There is a maxim that I think Hon Pierre Yang will know: justice delayed is justice denied. Justice is inexplicably, unjustifiably and lamentably delayed in Western Australia. It is, therefore, being absolutely denied to the people of Western Australia at a time of apparent financial supremacy. I cannot comprehend why the justice portfolio gets effectively none of the \$4 billion. It does not feature in the forward asset investment program of this government at all. If it does, it is a rounding error.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Could it be poor ministerial representation, perhaps? Just putting it out there.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: That has been put. What I will say about the Attorney General, possibly with the exception of an ex-member of this chamber, Hon Alannah MacTiernan, is that Hon John Quigley is probably the most storied member of the Western Australian Parliament. He is absolutely a man of intelligence and ability. I suggest that he has a maverick quality—some eccentric dimension that does not always render him a reliable parliamentary performer or minister. I cited ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Hon Wayne Martin for a reason. Four years ago, that very same individual, at the request of the Attorney General, presented him with an evaluation and review of the Criminal Property Confiscation Act 2000. Members of this chamber who were here in the previous term might recall Hon Aaron Stonehouse's advocacy on this particular matter. Although there was a process pre-COVID of duchessing—some diplomatic entreaties between executive government and the crossbench—some of the issues that those individual crossbench members advocated were entertained by cabinet ministers. That might have shaken out in the form of additional resourcing or an agreement to support amendments on bills and the like. However, to do the Attorney General credit at that time, he thought there were some perverse outcomes from the operation of that particular act. At taxpayer expense, he undertook a review of that act. That review landed on his desk four years ago!

Hon Stephen Dawson: Woke us all up!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: There you go—all the techniques!

I do not know whether the Attorney General has opened the document.

Hon Stephen Dawson: You should ask him a question.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I have asked him many! I will take that in a constructive way, minister.

Unfortunately, the Attorney General is not in a position to answer questions today, as he was not yesterday. I will just say that it is not for want of trying or an absence of curiosity. I wish him well, and I am sure he will come back

to full strength. Once he does, by golly do I have some questions waiting for him! However, will he answer them in a way that is acceptable? It might be a galaxy away from what I am actually intending the outcome to be, but that would not be unusual.

Is this particular example unique? It is not a burning issue in the minds of the general community, but I think it is symptomatic of the way that the Attorney General conducts his portfolio affairs. This chamber—indeed, a committee of this house in the previous term—had its feelings assuaged about the government’s commitment to rectifying certain shortcomings in the Guardianship and Administration Act. This is an issue I have spoken about in the last few months. I think there were up to 90 recommendations in that report, which is now almost a decade old. The Attorney General promised that he was drafting legislation and would fix that, I think by the end of 2018, or that he would introduce legislation to that effect by 2018. He did not. It is not that the Attorney General has an absence of energy. In fact, I think the problem is that he has a surplus, much like his boss. But he does not have a good sense of prioritisation or proportion, and he has no real, genuine commitment to follow through on issues to which he has attached himself previously or given a commitment. I think this is actually how a budget is judged: What does the government not do? What opportunities does it give up because it either has not had the imagination to deal with them or thinks it can get away with not addressing them?

Although this is not specifically a budget matter, one of the priority issues that I think has been shamefully mismanaged by the government is the new women’s and babies’ hospital. It is very much a lost opportunity. So much lost planning over the past few years has gone into a site that the government abruptly turned its back on. That is not to say that the government might not have some decent reasons for that. I know the Fiona Stanley Hospital facility better than I want to know it, and I do not think it is as unconstrained as has been made out. I would think that the one key portfolio to get right to demonstrate the government’s priorities would be health, and it would be devoted to people who are going through the most vulnerable period of their lives—indeed, the commencement of their lives. This was one thing the government needed to pick and stick to, but it walked away from it without any justifiable explanation and without any consultation with medical experts. In so doing, it has blown money—at least \$1 million from a PricewaterhouseCoopers study, and that is not to talk about some of the unknown consultancy fees that the state government is shelling out not only to the big four consulting firms, but to others, because corporate skill and acuity has been denuded in the public sector of Western Australia as a consequence of its political purge in 2017.

Colleagues, this is a disappointing budget. The headline figures are impressive, but it is a box of chocolates with nice wrapping and nothing nourishing inside. It is a shameful, squandered, missed opportunity. Again, I implore the government to do better with its limited time.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Lift your game!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Lift your game!

Hon Kyle McGinn: Show us one of your budgets that was actually half good.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I did not write one, but Hon Kyle McGinn is a member of the government and he bears responsibility too. He will look back with some measure of regret that this was the government’s golden opportunity and it fluffed it. Bad luck to it!

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Peter Foster**.