

## **ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE**

### *Consideration of Tabled Papers*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [5.07 pm]: I will resume my remarks from before question time. I had made the point that we have a budget document that is essentially full of debt, deficit and disaster. On the other side, we have a statement from the incoming Labor government that talks about Western Australia in terms of a vision for a successful state, brimming with opportunities for everyone. What starker contrast could we possibly have to put to the state?

A lot will be said about this budget because there is a lot to say. Some of that is characterised in terms of thought bubbles, smoke and mirrors, and a financial wreck. It is a budget of desperation and lost opportunities. As members on my side of the chamber have already pointed out, a number of extremely substantial problems relate to the kind of financial mismanagement that we have seen over this long eight years of conservative government. I do not have time to go into them all in detail, but I will press on and see how far I can get. Job insecurity and job losses are a major factor in this budget. Contrast that with the Labor vision for a prosperous state and the promise, which government members know, on the basis of our record, will be delivered with a substantial number of new jobs created with a newly diversified economy in Western Australia.

Members on the other side have talked about diversification for eight years of inaction. Nothing has happened and the state's fortunes have plummeted as a direct result of their failure to act. This budget is about job insecurities and job losses. It is a budget about household charges that have gone up way, way above the level of inflation. That is another broken promise. Members will remember FFFC—fully funded, fully costed—which has now been exposed for the lie that it is. Part of that promise was to maintain increases in household charges to the rate of inflation and that has not happened. Household charges have gone up well above the inflation rate. As previous speakers on my side of the house canvassed in some detail, we also have record levels of deficit and debt. That is serious, not in and of itself, but because of the way that the deficit and debt are structured. The government is now in a position that every household in Western Australia can well understand; people do not have to be economists or experts to understand that recurrent expenditure cannot be funded out of debt. It is a very precarious state to put us in. We have already lost our AAA credit rating and we are heading only down from where we are. Fortunately, we have only nine-and-a-bit months to go, so the end is in sight.

This budget is also about privatisation. This is the government's slash-and-burn strategy for getting itself out of trouble. It will not work, for reasons that I will explain in a moment. It is also a budget about reductions in services. Reductions in services are being made right across the length and breadth of this state and across the broad spectrum of portfolios in which people have a right to expect decent levels of services that are readily accessible and affordable. These services are being cut. This is a budget with no plan to diversify the economy. There is lots of talk, chatter, glossy pamphlets, tweeting and general carry-on from a government that has no idea —

**Hon Sue Ellery:** TV ads and bus shelter ads.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** As Hon Sue Ellery says, there are advertisements on TV and on the back of buses and bus shelters about diversifying the economy, but there is no action to put any substance to that rhetoric. As I have said many times in this house, I invite members on the other side of the chamber to stand up and correct the record if we are wrong. Tell us why the budget is a good thing; tell us why it is okay to have these massive levels of debt and deficit; and tell us why it makes sense to privatise. Members opposite have not been able to do that yet. I have watched question time after question time in the other place to try to answer this question and it is simply not there because the government does not have an answer; the answer does not exist. The plain and simple fact is that it is not a good plan for the government to privatise assets in an attempt to buy its way out of trouble. There is no plan to diversify the economy and there is clearly no plan to create jobs because all we have seen is record levels of unemployment. How does that happen in a state such as ours that is so well practised at the boom and bust cycle? For heaven's sake, we have been doing it for a couple of centuries, yet this government pretends that it has been caught on the hop by factors that are out of its control. It is absolute arrant nonsense and it will be exposed as such as we get closer to March next year and the election that will see the government thrown out so fast that members' feet will not touch the ground.

In short, this budget reflects on an unstable, unsound and unreliable government. Those are the themes under which I will group my comments for the next 45 minutes or so that are left—unstable, unsound and unreliable. Before I get to my substantive points, let me say that if we look at a budget document, we can see what sort of society the government wants Western Australia to be. We can basically get two things out of a budget document: we can see what sort of society the government wants, and we can see what sort of society we will get as a result of the measures that the budget introduces. This is how I think I can summarise both those aspects of

budgets in what we saw in the budget papers last week. What sort of society do the conservatives want in this state? I think that they basically want a society in which people keep out of each other's way. That is why there is all this talk about cutting red tape, rationalisation, cost cutting and functionality, and about streamlining generally. Of course, that is not what is actually happening; people are effectively being driven apart. The government sees itself as the regulator of a community in which people are essentially kept out of each other's way. I do not think that that is a worthy object. It is not what I believe in. I believe that we are stronger together and we are always and already related to each other. The sort of economic plans that a government brings down should be about bringing people together; they should be about reinforcing a sense of community, not about driving people apart because of the inherently divisive underlying atmosphere of insecurity and instability. What sort of society do we get from the budget? Again, I think there is a very clear answer: it is a budget in which a significant proportion of our community is left behind. I note that the Western Australian Council of Social Service pre-budget submission this year was called "Leaving No-one Behind." That is exactly the outcome of this budget. The growing disparity between those who have and those who have not is widening by the day with these kinds of economic measures in place. When the government is running a high-debt, high-deficit economy, it is inevitable for that gap to widen. We have been shown a body of work that becomes more extensive by the day because the more the disparity widens between those who have and those who have not, the worse the outcomes are for the community in any number of measurable factors. These factors range from rates of imprisonment to the use of substances of dependence, drug addiction and rates of mental illness across the whole range of social ills that we ought to be working in a collaborative way to reduce, diminish and ideally eliminate.

That is the long and the short of the budget. Budgets are about money, but they are also about values. They are about what matters. They are about what the government sees as its priorities. In the case of this budget, the answer is that the government is sadly deficient on all three points.

I cannot help feeling that the Premier is in an invidious position at the moment. If members listen to his rhetoric on economic management, they can hear that there is a very real sense in which he appears to have been hijacked by extremists in his party. If I have time, I will go into some of the history of, for example, the privatisation debate in which the Premier is on record as making quite vehemently forceful statements opposing privatisation, particularly of utilities. Yet the Premier seems to have been driven into a corner by the right-wing extremists in his own party. Of course, he knows quite a lot about that. An article was published in the *Subiaco Post* on 1 December 2007. I do not suppose that many people cut the article out and kept it, but I did. I come back to it periodically and I came back to it this week with a sense of pleasure that I kept a record of this article because it is particularly pertinent for a couple of different reasons, only one of which I will mention now. This article was in the *Subiaco Post* on 1 December 2007, and of course honourable members will remember that at that moment Hon Colin Barnett was actually retiring, so this was sort of his swan-song article.

In this article he is reported as saying —

"I'm disappointed that the Liberal Party has been taken over by hard-line rightwingers.

That has surely come home to roost, has it not? Not only has the Liberal Party been taken over by hardline right-wingers, but also the entire state and the entire budget has been taken over by those hardline right-wingers. No wonder the Premier does not look terribly happy these days. It must be a very difficult position to be in to have his whole political career, and his whole economic and political philosophy, hijacked by extremists in his own party so that, even as the leader of that party and the Premier of the state, he is consistently voted down on those things. Of course, I do not need to go into any details about those hardline right-wingers. We saw it in this very chamber a few weeks ago when we saw the member for Southern River mount the most extraordinary performance, which indicated just how far to the right the Liberal Party had staggered. I noticed as I pulled into the car park this morning that the member for Southern River has a Q in his numberplate and I wondered whether he objected because it reminded him of LGBTIQI.

**Hon Lynn MacLaren** interjected.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Or IQ, as Hon Lynn MacLaren says.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** Seriously, is that the level that you have descended to?

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Yes, it is actually. I thought that because I was deeply offended by what the member had done; I do not think I will ever forget it. The Attorney General has probably forgotten it already because it is probably par for the course in his life; he is used to dealing with people like that. I am not and it was profoundly shocking to me, as it was for a number of people on this side of the house. So, yes, I did indeed think that. I saw it in the reversing camera in my car as I was pulling up. I did not leave a dent in the numberplate, though; it was not me!

Let me move on to the unstable, unsound and unreliable themes. I have said a bit about unstable; that is what I have been talking about. Let me go to unsound. I do not know whether to call it a privatisation agenda. At

moments it feels like an agenda, because it feels like we have had an announcement that things are going to be privatised. We have had this asset divestment program since the 2013–14 financial year. We have had a couple of budgets that have appeared to contain a list of things that would be privatised, but then everybody sort of disappeared into the conservative party meeting rooms and came out with nothing, so nothing actually happened. That is not true. We did sell Perth Market City. I think that is probably the only asset that has been divested in recent years. Nobody quite knows what has happened to the TAB. I am sorry that the minister with responsibility for the TAB is not in the house at the moment; I understand that he is on leave from the house. It would be interesting to know what has happened to the sale of the TAB. As I said earlier, I did a word search for “TAB” in the budget papers and it is not there. I do not know quite what that means.

What has happened to the sale of the Forest Products Commission? I can have a jolly good guess about that. I remember when the current Leader of the National Party was the Minister for Forestry, which I do not think he is anymore, said—this has to be one of the most extraordinarily bad opening statements for a proposed sale of an asset—that if the FPC had been a private company, it clearly would be in receivership. That is great! That is going to look really good on the proposal for sale document! Good luck with that! That may explain why it has again dropped off the for-sale list. We are never quite sure whether this is a policy announcement or, indeed, as has been said by many of my colleagues, a privatisation thought bubble.

There has been, and I am quite sure there will be in the future, all sorts of fancy economic footwork around the whole topic of privatisation. Some people are profoundly ideologically opposed to privatisation. Other people oppose privatisation on what seem to me, as a non-economist, to be more pragmatic grounds; they will argue that privatisation simply does not work because it results in a worse economic return to the state than having a non-privatised asset. Other people are in favour of privatisation because they think it is more economically beneficial to the state. At the far extreme, there are people who are ideological privatisers; they privatise because they want to keep the state as small as possible. That is a kind of small-state philosophy. There is a broad spectrum of opinion about the whole question of privatisation, and all sorts of fancy footwork is played out in articulating those positions. But for me it is very simple and it goes like this: if the answer is privatisation, the wrong question is probably being asked. Nowhere is that more relevant than when considering what the budget papers say about privatisation. Clearly, the question in the government’s mind, to which the answer is to privatise everything, is: how on earth can we get out of this mess? I do not know that it can make any sound economic decisions if it is looking for an answer to that question. That is a question that, in my mind, should never arise amongst economic ministers. Nevertheless, it has arisen, and I am quite sure from all the talk that we hear that that is how the question has been framed and how the “policy” to privatise various assets has been arrived at.

I think that makes the government’s privatisation much more the thought bubble that others have suggested it is than any kind of sound economic policy. Again, we have to ask ourselves why the government wants to preside over an economy in which various key assets are privatised. I think the answer is that what goes along with this radical right-wing agenda for the management of assets in the conservative parties at the moment is this idea that it is okay for government to vacate the field. The best evidence that could be found is probably that members of the government at the moment believe in small government.

We on this side of the house believe that what is needed to provide government of a state such as Western Australia is robust government and a public sector that is thriving and flourishing. That is one area that I think will receive a very sad account in the history of this state, with the last five years involving the winding down and the disempowerment of the Western Australian public sector. That is one of the tragic consequences of these eight years. It will indeed take the Labor government some time to build that back up, because of course when a government starts downsizing to such a massive extent, expertise is lost from the state. Everybody in this house knows that we have lost an enormous amount of brain power from this state over the last seven or eight years, and it will take us a while to get that back. We will get it back. Labor governments have done that before, because a vibrant public sector is something we believe in very profoundly. The current government does not believe in it and it has been happy to wind it down.

We are seeing the government vacate the field. We are seeing the government position itself to act as though it is just another player at the corporate table. It seems to me that that has led the government to bring down the veil of secrecy over many of its operations. It thinks it is okay to operate like the board of a private company. How often do we hear government ministers talk in Parliament about the fact that they will not either provide information to us or, more generally, put it on the public record because it is subject to commercial-in-confidence provisions? What an absolute nonsense for a government of a state such as Western Australia to claim that. It seems to me that the only way we can make sense of this and the only way we can build a story that tells us with any degree of coherence what the government is trying to do is to believe that it does not want to be a government; it just wants to be another player at the corporate table.

I think it was announced today by the Leader of the Labor Party—certainly, I heard him talk about it on radio this morning—that Labor would put in place a measure to show just how seriously we take this matter by establishing a commission of inquiry into this veil of secrecy that is now dogging all government actions. For those members who want further information about this, I refer to an article in *The West Australian* of 29 January 2016 titled “State secrets—what the Government isn’t keen to tell you”. This is not a Labor Party document. It is the statewide newspaper that states —

The Barnett Government has invoked commercial confidentiality as a reason to not answer questions from the media and in the Parliament on at least 30 occasions, raising questions about its claim to be an open and transparent administration.

The refusals are across a range of portfolios and include details related to some of the State’s most high-profile projects ...

The article goes on at some length and Mr Piper has given us a list of the 32 state secrets going across a range of projects from Perth Stadium to the East Perth power station and everything in between. This is the smoking gun that shows that my accusation about this small government policy resulting in this desire to be seen as just another player at the corporate table is, in fact, true. It is a very bad thing for this state to have a government acting in this way. This is not how elected governments are supposed to conduct themselves. Elected governments are supposed to lead in a number of different ways. They are not supposed to be just corporate players at the table dealing with other corporate players. I will go one step further and suggest that if the government is indeed a corporate player, it would have been laughed out of the room by now. That is the sorry state to which the government has brought Western Australia’s reputation as an economic entity. Certainly, when we compare the actions of the government and the extent to which it has failed to step up to provide the leadership that the community of Western Australia expects of it, that lends weight to my argument that this government is a disgrace and is acting in a way that would not be tolerated by the corporate world in applying the standards of accountability and of transparency.

I am proud to be part of this team that has today announced it will enact such a significant measure soon in our term of office, which will start in March next year. The government is vacating the fear of leaving us with what can be described only as a confusing mess. There is no doubt that what we have on our hands is a shambles. We have a Premier who is no longer able to talk about what he believes in. I make that statement on the basis of things said by the Premier in the past. A few years ago the Premier was reported in *The West Australian* of 7 March 2013 as having said —

“The reason that you would retain the energy utilities in government hands is the energy utilities are major engines of economic growth in this State and only through ownership of utilities can you guarantee supply and reliability of supply, particularly in a State like WA which has a small, isolated grid that cannot be connected to the other States,” ...

That was said three years ago. There does not seem to be anything equivocal about that statement. There is no ambivalence about it or any conditionality attached to it, and there is nothing about “if the budget continues the way it is” or “this is for the foreseeable future but of course things could change”. There are no riders placed on that comment. It seems fairly clear cut to me. I reckon we could cut and paste that comment into the campaign currently being run by a large section of the Western Australian community and found at [useyourpower.com.au](http://useyourpower.com.au). It would sit very nicely there because that is exactly the grounds of Labor’s argument for not selling Western Power. The Premier has articulated it beautifully—I would pay for that one. That is great.

In three years the state’s finances have declined substantially, so let us see whether the Premier, who after all is an economist and used to teach economics so we would think he was fairly au fait with the way things go, has gradually altered his view, as he would be entitled to do so. Let us fast-forward to 9 February 2016 when *BusinessNews Western Australia* quoted him as saying —

“Western Power also is critical to the development of Western Australia ...

“If you look at South Australia, a weak economy, it has basically sold all of its assets, they have nothing left to sell, they have nothing to build their future on.

“I’m not going to let Western Australia get in that position.”

Do you or do you not think that that adds weight to my theory that he has been rolled by the extreme right wing of his party? Hon Sue Ellery is nodding her head in agreement that my suggestion is probably right. The Premier was not the only one with this view at that time, although sadly for him I think he is the only one left.

Today is a momentous day because legislation for the privatisation of Fremantle port was introduced in the other place with, as I understand it, the full support of the National Party, which is confusing in the extreme. This only adds to this shambles created by the Liberal–National government with the Nationals now appearing to support the privatisation of Fremantle port because it did not object to the legislation in the other place. On

15 December 2012, the *Kalgoorlie Miner* quoted what the former Treasurer Troy Buswell had to say about the sale of ports —

But Mr Buswell said privatisation [of ports] “quite simply isn’t going to happen.”

“Our ports will remain state-owned ports,” ... “It’s a fact there are some private operators that currently operate in Fremantle Port, some of the stevedoring businesses, and that happens in ports right around the State, but they are still public ports and there is no intention to privatise the Fremantle Port.”

Again, I cannot see anything equivocal about that. It has no riders placed on it. It is a clear statement of intent, which now has been totally overturned in this budget because it now looks as though we are going full steam ahead to privatise both Western Power and Fremantle port. How unsound is that? How much clearer could it be that the government has no idea what it is intending to do or the reasons for doing it? The government does not have a good record on this score. In fact, if we look at the record of Liberal–National privatisation attempts, we can refer back several years to the privatisation of Westrail Freight Pty Ltd. What a sad story that was. I will not go back over the whole shambles that Westrail Freight became, but I note that in 2014 a standing committee of the other place produced a third report titled, “The Management of Western Australia’s Freight Rail Network”. Of course, that was a government-controlled committee, as we would expect it to be, but my interest was sparked by the quote that that committee chose to introduce chapter 1. The quote is by Tore Ellingsen, who was the chairman of the Economic Sciences Prize Committee that awarded the 2014 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences to Professor Jean Tirole in October 2014. This guy probably knows what he is talking about and the report quoted him as follows —

What sort of regulations do we want to put in place so large and mighty firms will act in society’s interest?

That was enough to spark my curiosity about the outcome of this inquiry into the sale of Westrail Freight. It is, as I said, a government-controlled committee, so in the chair’s foreword we find some very carefully couched criticism of the sale of Westrail Freight. In relation to the sale of Westrail Freight’s business and the leasing of the infrastructure, we find in the chair’s foreword phrases such as “not allowed the government’s vision to be realised” and “loss of the vertically integrated business arrangement”. We also find some comments about the Railways (Access) Code, which did not allow the Economic Regulation Authority a role in setting access prices. The code is described as ineffective. Remember, this is a government member speaking as the chair of this committee. Finally, we find phrases such as “lack of transparency around lease instruments, lease variations, and the obligations of both parties to the lease”. That sparked my interest even further, so I read on.

In this committee report we find that the sale of Westrail Freight was botched in a spectacular way. This report is this government’s record of privatisation. It is a very poor record on which to base an agenda for the future. I want to draw the attention of members to a very interesting section in this report. I will not have time to go into it in any great detail, but it is in chapter 3, at paragraphs 3.9 to 3.25. I am drawing attention to this section of the report because it goes into some detail about a key problem of privatisation. Where do I situate myself in terms of those four arguments I articulated earlier—that spectrum of opinion about privatisation? I have a profound philosophical objection to privatisation, if it goes along with an agenda to have small government, because I do not think that small government is good for people and communities. Robust, vibrant government is capable of owning vital state assets. I think they can be managed very well and for the benefit of the community. On the whole, I would probably situate myself in the category that is just off the extreme end of what might be called a left-wing perspective on the issue, which is that there is a key tension that cannot be resolved with efforts to privatise. This is the key problem. The goal of business is to maximise profits and the goal of government is to maximise the public benefit, and I do not think that those two goals can be reconciled. I cannot think of an example, certainly in terms of the government’s current agenda, where I can look at what is being proposed and satisfy myself that both those goals can be realised.

If we proceed with the sale of Western Power, we will see it go into the hands of a private business whose primary object is to maximise profit, and that profit will be maximised at the expense of the public interest. That is my great fear about privatisation. This section of the committee report goes into that argument in some detail. It is headed “Government provision of infrastructure as a public good”. What a great argument to find in a report of a committee of the other place controlled by government members. This is, unfortunately, the voice in the conservative parties that is being silenced by what is happening at the moment, with this takeover by extremists. This argument goes over three or four pages, and it does not sit uncomfortably with the philosophical position of many people on my side of the chamber. It is about the importance of maximising public good in the provision of market services. It is about the extreme risk to the public good that is always run in the process of privatisation creating a monopoly. I do not understand why conservatives cannot see this fundamental flaw in their privatisation argument. I do not understand why it is not more apparent to them, because it sticks out like the proverbial to me, that the very essence of a competitive marketplace is competition. When a monopoly is privatised, how can we ensure that market forces apply to it? The answer is that we cannot, and that has been

demonstrated over and over again, and it was certainly demonstrated in the previous attempt by the government to make a success of this when it botched the sale of Westrail Freight. It is all here in black and white for members to take home tonight in the quiet that we now have on a Wednesday evening, because we do not sit, so they can get their heads around the reasons why the government's plans will not work. I have not got time to go into this now but I recommend that members, particularly those on the other side, spend some time with that really quite illuminating report from the Economics and Industry Standing Committee in the other place. The government's early attempt to privatise was a spectacular failure, and I do not think that we have any reason to believe that this attempt will be any more successful.

Let me go on to the third category of criticism that I wanted to consider. I have talked about unstable and unsound, so let us move now to unreliable. The FFFC—fully funded, fully costed—broken promises have meant that no-one can ever believe a word that comes out of the mouth of any member of this government, whether they are in the Liberal Party or the National Party. Hon Stephen Dawson referred earlier to the cutting of the Best Beginnings program. I asked a question in the house yesterday about why that money had been removed. Of course, I got the stock answer that we now get. We all know that part of the internal tension that has riddled the conservative parties of this state for the last year or so, and is finally coming to a head, is around the royalties for regions program. In the way that it is currently structured, royalties for regions is exactly what we have always criticised the multinational companies, particularly in the north west of this state, but also in my electorate, for doing over many decades. We have had a lot of practice with this. We know what is wrong with running royalties for regions as, essentially, a pork-barrelling operation. That is why the next Labor Premier has committed his Labor government to running royalties for regions so that it actually delivers services and resources on the ground for people in regional Western Australia. It is an unequivocal promise to keep the royalties for regions program, but to run it in such a way that it delivers real services.

If members opposite doubt that what I say is true, look at what they have allowed to happen to the Best Beginnings program because of the way the government is using royalties for regions. I am not putting words into anybody's mouth, but I can absolutely guarantee that members will never see a Labor government program delivering such an essential service have to cut back its level of service because of lost funding from royalties for regions. That is an absolute disgrace, and every member of the National Party should be ashamed, embarrassed and above all furiously angry that their Liberal colleagues in this tired and grumpy government have allowed this to happen to royalties for regions, because that is exactly what has happened to the Best Beginnings program. Not everybody will be familiar with Best Beginnings. Its page on the Department for Child Protection and Family Support website states —

Best Beginnings is a home visiting service for families of new infants.

I am not quite sure what a new infant is, because I am not sure what an old infant is, but presumably this means a newborn. The website continues —

It involves regular visits to your home by caring, trained professionals who provide support, advice, information, connections and practical help. The program is structured according to your needs. The aim is to improve child health and wellbeing, parent and family functioning and social support networks.

It is a genuinely multi-agency delivery service. That is terribly important. The Liberal–National government is not very good at this. It is very, very good at thinking in silos. I remember when Hon Peter Collier was given the portfolio of Aboriginal affairs and he came in here and said that it would all be different from then on because it was an end to silo thinking for the delivery of essential services. What did we see last week? How much money has the government spent on the whole question of the future of remote communities? It put aside \$150 million but how much has it spent? Not one cent. I tell members that that is not a sign of a government that has changed its way of doing things. It cannot move because it is frozen; silos freeze things. It is impossible to take action when multi-agencies have responsibilities. That is why Best Beginnings was so good. It worked because it was a small program and it was being run by the best people in the key agencies. We can see from what I have just read out but also from the promotional material that we would expect a large proportion of the people using the service to be Aboriginal people. We can see that because all the pictures in the pamphlet are of Aboriginal families.

Yesterday I asked why funding to Best Beginnings was being cut and I was told —

The funding provided by royalties for regions for a proportion of this service was on a fixed-term basis and will not be continuing past the 2017–18 financial year.

When I say that we have had decades of practice at this, I mean that this is what companies such as Alcoa and BHP Billiton have been doing throughout the state for years. It has been great that they have done it; they have provided a lot of good infrastructure. Certainly I do not think that we would have been able to school people in the Kimberley and Pilbara, certainly for a period during the 1970s and 1980s, if it had not been for the

infrastructure provided by big multinational resource companies. That money has been very welcome. But one of the problems that we have always had, certainly in the south west, is that although Alcoa has been very generous, it was never into providing recurrent funding. It was always up to government to provide recurrent funding, because, guess what? That is what governments are supposed to do. This is why we cannot redesign our brief to be just another player at the corporate table. We have to fund recurrent services. The government did not do that with Best Beginnings and now the guts are being taken out of it.

This is not insignificant because this was one of the Liberal–National government’s few programs that were working in that it was providing early intervention services for people at risk. The part of the answer that really distressed me was not the information about royalties for regions, because we can fix that. From next March, that will be fixed because Labor will deliver to the state a royalties for regions program that works and delivers real services and resources in regional Western Australia instead of this charade that gets dressed up and has big openings and then gradually dwindles to nothing over the next few years. The bit that really made me upset and angry in this answer was this. It is about the earlier intervention and family support strategy, which is supposed to step in and take the place of Best Beginnings where it is being defunded. The minister said that strategy —

... works with families whose children are most vulnerable to poor life outcomes, including being removed from their parents’ care and/or entering the youth justice system.

I am sorry, but that is not what Best Beginnings was supposed to be about. Best Beginnings was about providing family support to give a child, guess what, the best beginning that we as an affluent society could give it. All of a sudden it has been subsumed into a program that is about preventing young people entering the youth justice system. That is fine. Of course, we need those programs. We need more of those programs and they need to continue to be funded, expanded and targeted. The research needs to be done; we need to be working on evidence-based outcomes. That goes without saying. But it is not appropriate for the government to tell us not to worry about Best Beginnings because it has this other program over here that is about helping kids who look as though they will enter the youth justice system. That is not what Best Beginnings was about. The figures that were given to me yesterday show that an enormous number of families statewide were using this service. I saw something very similar in the United Kingdom just over a year ago, which was fantastic. That program is being rolled out across the UK now is probably the best example I have ever seen of multi-agency cooperation. It costs a lot of money, but what really interested me was the genesis of the program in the UK.

The genesis has been provided in Western Australia from exactly the same source. The genesis was the Commissioner of Police, or whatever the British equivalent is, doing what our Commissioner of Police has done and saying that he knows who these families are and that he can take us to their front doors and show us where the at-risk newborns are who need a Best Beginnings program. That is how this program in the UK started. We do not need to reinvent the wheel, because that program is up and running and has been expanded massively over the past 12 months or so, interestingly, by a conservative government. Members opposite should get over there and talk to their colleagues, find out how to do it and come back and roll out some decent programs in the last few months that are left to them; otherwise, they can sit back and we will be there in March.

The questions I asked about this program in the UK were: How do the people on the ground delivering the services work? How do they respond to the program? Do they see it as an imposition on them? Do they find it difficult to work across agencies? From what I have seen, governments find it almost impossible to do it. The answer was that it had breathed new life into the delivery of all these services. For instance, someone acting as a truant officer used to have to go into a house and tell parents that their son has not been to school for a week, and they would see the dysfunction in the house. They would see that a fist had been put through the kitchen door or the stove had blown up or there was no working refrigerator. They would have to say that they were sorry that they could not deal with all these other things as they were there only to talk to the parents about their child attending school. Now that person can say they can see why that child is not attending school and that they clearly need proper resources and access to help to access a range of things. That person can then go out and get in the services to fix all these other areas of difficulty and struggle.

The people delivering the services on the ground have been re-empowered by the development of this program. I think that Best Beginnings was running like that and it was a fantastic program. It is to the government’s shame that it has allowed royalties for regions to be rolled back. It has used royalties for regions in exactly the way it should not be used, and that program will be diminished as a result.

In the last few minutes remaining to me, I am just going to —

**Hon Ken Travers:** I think they will give you an extension.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** That would be lovely, but I know we have important business to get on with, so I will wind up in the next couple of minutes. The government has brought down a budget that shows how unstable, unsound and unreliable this government is. We now have a toxic mix of uncertainty and insecurity in the

community. The government's only narrative is that we would not be in debt if we had been given more money. It just does not work. Blind Freddy can see that it does not work.

The government still maintains it does not have a spending problem. It is happy to talk about a downturn in revenue as though a downturn in revenue from the government can just be fixed by selling stuff. It does not work. A tradie selling his tools to pay his mortgage does not work and nor does a government selling key assets to buy itself out of trouble. The Western Australian community has been very poorly served by this government for the last eight years. The government has clearly been taken over by extremists. It is time that we returned to a government with vision and that is exactly what the Mark McGowan government will deliver to this state come March 2017.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Samantha Rowe**.