

APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 1) 2003
APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 2) 2003

Second Reading - Cognate Debate

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MR R.N. SWEETMAN (Ningaloo) [3.47 pm]: I was going to seek the leave of the House to have a cognate debate with the member for Roleystone!

I continue my remarks about the Gallop Labor Government's 2003-04 budget. I will return to some of the issues about wealth creation at a later stage of my presentation.

I downloaded details about the budget allocation for the greater part of my electorate, the Gascoyne region, from the Internet on Monday afternoon before I left Carnarvon. I provide to the House information about and a critique of the expenditure in my electorate. The highlight of the budget allocation to my electorate is \$1.2 million for the Carnarvon Regional Hospital. The Gascoyne Health Service covers the upper Gascoyne, the Shire of Shark Bay, Carnarvon, Exmouth and Onslow. However, Onslow will be reassigned from the Gascoyne to the Pilbara region on 30 June, and the Gascoyne Health Service will lose one of the communities it services. There has been much controversy in the Gascoyne Health Service, particularly since the election of the Gallop Labor Government. One of the coalition's election commitments was the expenditure of just over \$9 million on a major revamp of the Carnarvon Regional Hospital to service the requirements of the Gascoyne community and cater for the future needs of the Gascoyne region. It was deemed that nothing short of \$9 million would be satisfactory to provide expanded services for the people of the region. Unfortunately, the coalition Government was not re-elected, and we have had to make do with the very minor and modest allocations to the Gascoyne Health Service since the election of the Gallop Labor Government.

I can recall being a part of the community forums and public meetings that were held, initially to protest about the rationalisations that were taking place in Carnarvon Regional Hospital. There was a concerted move to put the permanent care unit - the elderly people - into a general ward, and to combine that with the maternity ward in the one block at the hospital. While from an administrative point of view there would be some economic savings in doing that, the practical issues ultimately held sway. It is simply not appropriate to combine these wards. I cannot recall in my lifetime, even when we had a very basic hospital in Carnarvon, when the maternity ward was combined with a general ward of the hospital. There has always been a separation of the maternity ward and the permanent care unit, as there has always been a separation of the children's section of the hospital and the general ward. That is very practical, because there is less likely to be cross-contamination. People in a general ward often have various complaints and infections, and the risk of contamination is very real. I was very pleased that we had a minor victory over the Department of Health, and I guess also the minister's office, in that we were able to win concessions from the minister and the Government to not amalgamate all those services into the general ward. As a consequence of that amalgamation not going ahead, the anticipated \$500 000 for the refurbishment of Carnarvon Regional Hospital was totally inappropriate, and we were able to get further concessions in the budget and will now end up with \$1.2 million. I hope the tendering process is at an advanced stage and that these facilities are improved and upgraded in the near future, recognising that our visitor season in the Gascoyne is now under way.

There is an appropriation in the budget of \$460 000 for a sobering-up shelter in Carnarvon. I recall that four or five years ago there was a line item in the budget for a sobering-up shelter for Carnarvon, but unfortunately that fell by the wayside because there was a lot of controversy within the Carnarvon community as to where the sobering-up shelter should be sited. The police and many of the allied health people believe it should be sited as close to the police station as possible to assist in the administration and care or even the shepherding of people into that sobering-up shelter, and even watching them as they depart from the shelter. There has been argument and counterargument for a long while, and I hope that this appropriation of \$460 000 is an indication that everyone has settled on a site, because all the information relayed to me to date suggests there is not still a single site that everyone has agreed on. I hope I am proved wrong on that issue. If there continues to be controversy about the site, I hope that budget item will remain and will be rolled into subsequent years.

I find it interesting how the Government publishes the figures. The media release states that there will be a \$1 000 million boost in new money over the next four years to improve Western Australia's health service. I know that is a general allocation to the health service statewide. It is interesting that it is not \$1 billion; that does not sound enough, so the Government calls it \$1 000 million. We never hear the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure say in this House that the Perth to Mandurah rail link will cost \$1 600 million, because everyone may get the message a bit clearer that it is simply unaffordable and is becoming demonstrably more so every year that goes by. I guess in future we will probably need to learn something from this Government - that is, that we will refer to the horrifying items in the budget in small numbers and to the more pleasant ones in the budget in larger numbers. I recall what was said about the figure for the Northbridge tunnel. My memory is that the

figure was about \$382 million. I recall also the number of times that figure was trotted out and how it was said that it was a disgrace to waste public funds on a tunnel that we effectively did not need. Now that the tunnel has been completed it is clear that the engineers and city architects got it right, because it has altered the traffic distribution around the city and made the traffic flow a lot better. It has made it easier for industry and commerce to do business from one side of the city to the other. I guess now that that project has been completed we can say it is one of those projects that was done none too soon. It was justified on price, and even with the benefit of hindsight it all stacks up. It is an essential piece of infrastructure that we required. However, these people hated it. Every time people came to my electorate and saw something that perhaps was not done or was not done to their liking they would say, "Why not just cut two metres off the Northbridge tunnel and we can fund it all", as though that was a heinously expensive project and a scandalous waste of public funds.

Mr R.F. Johnson: The member for Perth demonstrated at the end of the tunnel on opening day.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: He demonstrated, did he?

Mr R.F. Johnson: He will not say a word about it these days. I cannot find one person in Western Australia who thinks the tunnel is a bad thing.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: I do not think the House needs to hear all the information as to how he might have demonstrated. Sometimes we can get too much information. We will let it go at that.

Another item in the Treasurer's media release is an amount of \$75 million over four years as a consequence of the Gordon inquiry recommendations. There is no indication in the Treasurer's media release about whether any of that is new money. I assume we can take the Premier and the minister at face value and that \$75 million still has \$67 million of new money contained in it. I would hate to think they would reassign money from other projects or from committed consolidated revenue to make up that \$75 million. I seek some clarification from the Treasurer about where the community development officers will be stationed; and if the Treasurer is unable to respond at the end of the second reading stage, then I will certainly raise this in the estimates. The media release states -

"In the Gascoyne this year, it will mean three new child protection workers to improve the Department of Community Development's capacity to help protect vulnerable Aboriginal children and women, and a development officer to facilitate therapeutic rehabilitation programs targeting perpetrators of sexual abuse and violence.

I spoke to some of the community development people the other day. To date it is their understanding, or perhaps their expectation, that these extra staff will be placed in Geraldton and they will work from the regional centre servicing not just the mid west but also the Gascoyne and the agricultural wheatbelt area. I would be very concerned if that was the bottom line and these extra three people were stationed in a Geraldton office and had to try to deal with situations on the ground in Meekatharra, Mt Magnet and Cue, and in Aboriginal communities such as the Pia Wadjari, the Burringurrah and the Yulga Jinna outside Meekatharra, and in Carnarvon, where there are quite significant problems, not just in the Mungullah Aboriginal community on the outskirts of Carnarvon but in various places across town and certainly inland. I have already cited the Burringurrah community as probably being the epicentre of particularly child abuse. I know that for a long time kids were doing their bail placements or were being remanded into the care of guardians in the Burringurrah community, and some horrific stories have trickled back over the years as a result of that policy. I know that for a time it was discontinued, but I do not know whether it is still a discontinued policy. If these officers are to be placed anywhere, they need to be placed as close to the action as possible so that they have the best chance of intercepting and curtailing this disgraceful behaviour. An Aboriginal community supervision officer also will be introduced to expand supervision agreements with indigenous communities. I presume that means that additional supervision, organised from the courts through the Department of Justice and particularly juvenile justice, will be provided in the Burringurrah, Pia Wadjari and Yulga Jinna communities.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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