

PUBLIC SECTOR — CORRUPTION

**1091. Ms M.M. QUIRK to the Treasurer:**

This question is about an issue that is dear to my heart. I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to ensure that there is confidence in our public sector by implementing stronger financial accountability measures across government. Can the Treasurer advise the house of any attempts to hinder or obstruct this government's strong and rapid response to corruption within the public sector?

**Mr B.S. WYATT replied:**

I thank the member for Girrawheen, as somebody who is certainly very interested in this topic, for that question.

I think it is fair to say that all members support good government; all members, despite our disagreements from time to time, want to see corruption in the public sector ferreted out, disclosed, prosecuted and appropriately punished. The activities of Mr Whyte, and potentially others, that we have heard about recently, are ones that I think would have shocked us all. We are determined to not only deal with those, but also get to the bottom of the environment in which corruption may thrive. There are a range of reasons that is the case, and the Auditor General has highlighted some of them.

Back in 2012, the former government commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers, with the Department of Treasury, to undertake what is termed a "value for money audit" into the Housing Authority. These things cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, but they generally give a fairly good series of recommendations to government; they also highlight weaknesses, in particular, around governance and other reasons within that agency. So I wrote, it being a document that was prepared by the previous government, last Tuesday to the Leader of the Opposition requesting her permission to have that document released, to which the Leader of the Opposition replied on Wednesday. I want to quote this —

... I firmly believe that high levels of integrity should be maintained across the public sector at all times, and that policies and procedures should be consistently evolving to appropriately manage risk and deal with reports of corruption or other forms of misconduct.

I therefore request that the Director General, DPC officially provide to my office copies of the requested documents, in line with long standing convention, so that appropriate consideration can be given to their release.

I thought that was reasonable enough. I wrote back on Thursday to the Leader of the Opposition and said, "Fine. That is what we will do." On Thursday afternoon, a copy of that document was dropped off at the Leader of the Opposition's office, 40 metres from where I now stand.

That was on Thursday. Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday—all that time I am assuming the Leader of the Opposition is giving, and I quote, "appropriate consideration" to that document. Members cannot imagine my surprise when on radio this morning, when the Leader of the Opposition, after saying she was not going to release this document for the broader consumption of the public of WA who funded this report, was asked, "Why is it you won't do that? Have you read it?", five days after she was given it, and I quote again, "appropriate consideration". She said, "No, I have not." Then when she was asked why not, she replied, "Well, because it is gathering dust in a vault from seven years ago." That vault was the Leader of the Opposition's executive assistant's out the front of her office. Apparently in those five days, the Leader of the Opposition could not bring it upon herself to read the document and make a decision about whether that should be released. Every day that we, the Premier or myself, have made a response or tried to make a response to this issue, the Leader of the Opposition has critiqued it: It is not good enough; more needs to be done—more inquiries, more reviews. The Leader of the Opposition was given the opportunity to read a report, commissioned by her government, and she says, "I'm not going to read it. Why do I care what's in it?" What is the point of the royal commission that the Leader of the Opposition is demanding if she is not going to read anything?

The Leader of the Opposition then went on to say this in her response—it was an extraordinary interview. For someone who is not good on detail, it was highlighted. The Attorney General was quoted in making the point that he believes that 90 per cent of the funds that were misused are likely to have been misused during the lifetime of the previous government, to which the Leader of the Opposition responded —

He has provided no proof of that ... he has provided no proof of it ...

Again, I suspect if the Leader of the Opposition read the odd document or two she might also have read the transcript of the police prosecutor. I quote, according to my notes —

There is further investigation that is being undertaken. The commencement of this operation was a covert police investigation, and that investigation, of limited span, is what has resulted in the charges currently before the court. The operation now moves to an overt evidence-gathering stage, and there's evidence to

indicate a further 20 to 25 million dollars between the period of 2008 and the present date, facilitated by the false invoicing of the Department of Communities, so that's in addition to what's currently before the court.

It is not the Attorney General; it is what has gone in the transcript in open court. I suggest that if the Leader of the Opposition read the odd document, she might find these things.

This is the final point she made, again, because the interview was a train wreck—when you are under pressure it is amazing what you say. When the question was asked: “Well, you haven't read it”—I think those journalists who asked the Leader of the Opposition this were stunned by the answer to the questions: How come you know there is corruption? Why have you given it to the CCC, but in those five days of appropriate consideration why have you not read the document?—this is what the Leader of the Opposition said —

But, but well Nadia, I've been given an understanding by people in my office, who have read that report and were part of it ...

Part of the report? Part of the Housing Authority? Part of the corruption? I do not understand what that means, but I suggest that that alone might even warrant the fact that the Leader of the Opposition might want to pick it up and read it herself.

The final point the Leader of the Opposition made, again to highlight the problem that the Leader of the Opposition has with detail, is this —

Well, I'll tell you what ... the way to fix this problem is to actually give the Auditor-General more funding to perform more audits and the Government isn't doing that.

Wrong again. Since 2007–08, the Auditor General's budget has been cut only three times; that is, in 2012–13, 2015–16 and 2016–17. On average, the Auditor General's budget under this government has risen by about 10.8 per cent, and due to the decision made by the Premier just recently, I suspect it is probably going to increase a bit to do some forensic audits.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition: it is easy to go out there and run a cheap line—it easy to do that—but if she is going to have some substance to what she is and who she is, read documents, get involved and contribute, because at the moment the cheap line and the lack of substance is there for all to see. The members for Dawesville, Riverton and Kalgoorlie would have read that report; any MP who is doing their job would have read that report before simply saying, “We're not going to release it.” Release that document and let the people of WA make their own decision on it and help the government respond to what has clearly been a substantial case of corruption.