

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Tuesday, 19 September 2017]

p10b-18a

Chair; Mr Zak Kirkup; Mr Mick Murray; Mr John McGrath; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Matthew Hughes; Mrs Lisa O'Malley

Division 14: Communities — Services 9 and 10, Seniors and Ageing; Volunteering \$84 909 000 —

Mr T.J. Healy, Chair.

Mr M.P. Murray, Minister for Seniors and Ageing.

Mr G. Searle, Acting Director General.

Ms V. Harvey, Acting Assistant Director General, Strategy and Policy.

Mr L. Carren, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr B. Jolly, Interim Executive Director, Regulation and Concessions.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: Good morning. This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day.

It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number.

If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 29 September 2017. I also acknowledge that today is International Talk Like a Pirate Day. I look forward to the estimates, on our first day, dealing with that for some time. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Dawesville.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I refer to page 248 and the net cost of service under "Payments to Individuals". I note that for the benefits and concessions received by seniors, the 2017–18 budget target is greater than the 2016–17 estimated actual. What are the key drivers of the growth in costs?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Thanks for the question. The variance in this cost is due to the increase in the number of cardholders expected to receive the seniors' cost-of-living rebate. This will result in increased payments in 2017–18 compared with 2016–17. That is the main driver of the increase. As we know, the number of baby boomers who are going into this area will certainly increase and the cost that comes along with that will carry on for quite some time. The forecasts show that the number of people getting into that area will continue to increase costs.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I understand the attrition of the ageing population but, in light of that, is the agency or the minister looking at any other long-term options to try to manage the expenditure growth?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: What the member says is right and as people are living longer these days, that cost is with us for longer, so it is a problem. We are looking at it very closely, along with the federal government, which recognises this issue of the aged and the longevity of people. In a few years, I think more than 2 000 people a year in Australia will live for over 100 years.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Hopefully, many will be in my district!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I do not think the member for South Perth will get there but —

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I have had a hard life!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It is an issue that we have to deal with and I understand the question because if we do not start to look at it now, we will have a problem in the future. It will catch us if we are not aware of it, so it is a very good question.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Is the government or the minister considering any potential or future cuts to concessions or rebates on the Seniors Card, or can that be ruled out?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I will not rule out anything but the budget is done each year and we will cut our cloth to the budget—to the money that comes in. We will work with that. I am a very strong advocate for the aged and I probably fit some of the criteria when we talk about the aged. We know we have to have some focus in this area—more than some—to make sure that people live out their later years in comfort.

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Mr J.E. McGRATH: My question also relates to page 248, “Delivery of Community Services, Grants and Resources.” I refer to the total appropriations for the delivery of community services, grants and resources. Is the department offering services to Western Australian seniors who are the target of card fraud, identity fraud and scams? If yes, what are these programs?

[10.10 am]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I do not even have to look at my notes. We are very concerned about common complaints that come through about scams, card fraud et cetera. One of the scams that we are working on and trying to help people with is the phone scams in which older people get confused and say yes when they probably should say no. There is a relentless drive by these people trying to stitch up older people. I am sure they do a lot of research before they try to defraud elderly people. We are working, again, on a program to assist seniors in that area, whether it be card fraud or any other fraud around the place. My department is focussed on that, and we will make sure that, to the best of ability—we know that each week there is a new scam; even now there is a scam hotline I think run by the federal government—to make sure these people can be assisted. One of the regular complaints, although probably not concerning large amounts of money or time taken up, might be about a phone scam involving only \$50 or \$60 in real terms but causes the elderly to become very stressed. I am sure every politician who has been in this room will understand that an elderly person can get a bill that they do not understand; they do not even know that they have been scammed. They do not understand that. Along with the federal government, we need to make sure that we are hard on those people who are instigating the scams. We cannot do it by ourselves. It has to be done in conjunction with the federal government.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Is the minister aware or has it been raised with the minister by his department that the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures now show that WA has one of the highest rates in the country for seniors becoming victims of things like card fraud, identity fraud and scams?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: As I have said, we are aware of those things, but I am not aware of the numbers. As I said previously, it concerns me, and we are putting a focus on that. I talk for every politician in this room about the number of aged people who come through our doors asking whether something is a scam. There is an old adage that says if it is too good to be true, it is usually a scam. Many scams are very sophisticated. Sometimes not even a phone call is involved, but a bill is posted to elderly people and they pay it because for those in that age group, that is what they do; they pay the bills. We in Western Australia will work very hard to make sure we reduce the incidence of scams.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Does the department have any figures or statistics on this that would ring some bells at the departmental level?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I will handball that to my director.

Mr G. Searle: Thank you, minister. The primary responsibility for fraud and scams rests with the consumer protection agency, not our agency. If there is a particular issue with seniors in that context, I expect the department to raise it with us, but it has not at this stage. The primary responsibility is a consumer protection one, not one for our department.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Minister, does the department have a process for deciding which areas to prioritise for offering services to seniors? How does the department determine which area it needs to put most resources into?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That is a difficult question. At times, we have to put out spot fires in various areas, so we have to move resources. Again, I pass that on to the director.

Mr G. Searle: The minister is absolutely right. The reality is that we respond to matters of urgency. There are some matters that the minister has asked us to start investigating, particularly around elder abuse, which is an issue that is growing in our community—awareness is growing. One of the things we are looking at on his behalf is whether we need an equivalent of the working with children card to apply across a range of other activities so that one card suits multiple purposes. They are the sorts of things we are looking at as almost pre-emptive responses to things at the minister’s direction.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Is the minister talking about a working with elders card?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Again, that is not exactly the way we see it, but we have to make sure that elderly people are protected. We talk about elder abuse. Elder abuse is not always about scams; it is about family issues. Sometimes we find out about that far too late; therefore, we need a process in which people are comfortable enough to ask for help. That is where our encouragement will be. With regard to targeting, if people do not have the confidence in our area, they will not come out and ask for help. Sometimes people do not even understand that they are being abused—whether it be physical, mental or financial. I am sure most people here would have had one or two people come through their doors and spoken of a family fight, and said, “My brother has done this”, and “Mum didn’t know that.” Those sorts of things happen. It is a bit difficult to say who can be helped and how. Working with children is far

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simpler, whether it be at a football match or other sporting event, and that is quite different from in-house issues. I think we have to work more on helping elderly people gain confidence so that they use the hotline and talk to staff in the department. That is something I am sure the director general will work on.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I refer the minister to page 235 of the budget papers collaborated by the third dot point on the bottom of page 237. The budget papers note the rise in Western Australia's ageing population. How is the state government responding to the challenge of ensuring that older Western Australians can live well and age in place in the communities in which they matter and belong?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: That was a well-read question!

Dr A.D. BUTI: Unbelievable; I thought of it just like that. It is incredible!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Thank you very much for the question, member for Armadale. It is always difficult for a state government to respond to the challenges in front of it with a very, very small budget. We know that the previous government spent money here, there and everywhere. However, we are starting to get results in the short term we have been here in that we are responding to the challenges of ensuring there are age-friendly communities. It is interesting to note that just recently, Western Australia was recognised by the World Health Organization as an international leader in the field of age-friendly communities. We intend to build on that. It is not a matter of once we get there, we stop. Some areas really on the front foot are places such as Melville, which is recognised nearly worldwide for the work it is doing. Government departments are disappointing at times. I better be careful who I criticise; they are sitting around me! We spoke with Main Roads about slowing the traffic and increasing the walk lights time in which people can walk from one side of the road to the other. It was so difficult that it became, "No, we can't do it." I think we can do simple things to make our age-friendly communities far better. If shops are on the other side of the road from an aged-care home, why should those people not get another couple of seconds to get across the road?

I have seen people struggle with a walking frame or something like that. That type of thing is so simple to fix. My view is that that can be done and adjusted to ensure we have age-friendly cities. I will use Melville as an example again. The information services in its library are second to none. I recall this because I was on a cross-government committee, under the guidance of Margaret Quirk, that looked at that. I congratulate the City of Melville. Western Australia was recognised, through an award, as one of the best. Do we stop? No, we do not. We will keep working towards that.

[10.20 am]

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I refer to services and key efficiency indicators on page 248 of the *Budget Statements*. In reference to the recent cuts to Seniors Card rebates and concessions by the state government, I wonder whether the agency or the minister is aware of any hardship that has resulted for our seniors.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The additional \$1.6 million the member is talking about is due to the signing, after the budget, of an extension to the early childhood education and care national partnership. I will ask the director general to respond. I have just lost my line there.

Mr G. Searle: The reductions in seniors' benefits are very recent. They have not yet flowed through to individual seniors in a practical sense, so it is too early to tell what the actual effect of those changes will be.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: In light of the fact that the minister previously refused to rule out further budget cuts, will the government be taking stock of any hardship incurred as a result of these cuts when considering future cuts that might be made to the delivery of seniors' rebates and concessions?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: As I have said previously, I cannot talk about the next round of budget responsibilities that come out of that. We are certainly aware that some adjustments had to be made in this budget. We have tried to spread that right across the field. Some people are not taking to that too kindly. It is actually a surprise that questions about where the money has gone are coming from the other side. Sometimes I wonder whether there was a pile of money in the courtyard and it was just burnt in the middle of the courtyard because I do not know where half of it went! In saying that, we have to be responsible. If some people are finding it tough, we need to organise them to use the hardship utility grant scheme to get some financial help and relief from the stress that has caused them. I will probably say it 100 times here today: the budget is tight. It was not of our doing that the budget problems arose. I will have to remind members opposite about that a few more times as the day goes on. We are mindful of the pressures that come into all groups right across the board.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the third dot point from the bottom of page 237. My question is not dissimilar to the member for Armadale's question. Can the minister advise what changes are being considered to ensure services, concessions and benefits for seniors in regional WA are well targeted, given the continuing growth of the state's population aged over 60 years?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The government is committed to supporting the growing number of aged people. I have spoken about that previously. I will be repeating some of the things that I have already said. Western Australia is recognised as one of the leaders in that area. In the six months of this government, there have been numerous meetings around the place to listen to the concerns of people in the age groups—in the northern, southern and eastern suburbs. I intend to keep those meetings up so that we know what the real issues are. Sometimes we are filtered in government; we do not actually get down on the ground and get dirty to find out what exactly the problems are. To me, there is nothing better than meeting people who have the confidence to say, “It’s this”, and then one starts to get a feel for that and the government will provide those services accordingly. We are continuing with the seniors’ cost-of-living rebate, although there are some changes to the card. We are working through that. Most people understand that. To be quite honest, the number of people coming through my door is not as bad as I first expected. People accept that maybe that was a bit generous. It has to be remembered that for many seniors there have been no changes to the federal government’s concession card. Seniors will be listened to. We will try to assist on many occasions. We spoke about the spot fires before. We will target that. We will make sure that we try to make people’s lives as comfortable as possible within the constraints of the budget we have.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will the minister commit to consulting with regional communities before making any changes to services, concessions and benefits for seniors in regional WA? I guess I also refer to the likes of the fuel card, which does not increase along with the consumer price index.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I certainly will be consulting with people in regional areas. I do not think the political scene has previously done that overly well. Some of the issues put out there by the previous government were imposed on people. The consultation sometimes missed the point. As I said, I am a grassroots type of person; I like to get out there and talk to those groups. I will be doing that. In fact, I will be going on a bit of a road trip soon. I hope to see the member around the traps. I am not quite sure where he lives yet. Most country National Party politicians have moved into the city.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I live in Katanning.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I get a bit lost about where regional services come from—for example, when rubbish bins are picked up and those sorts of things—compared with those in the city. People do not quite understand that their trolley has to be wheeled about six kilometres to the nearest gate. That distance gets a bit far for a person aged 65 or 66. In saying that, we will give a commitment that we will be out there looking at and working with communities to make sure we understand not only the city issues, but also the country issues.

Mr M. HUGHES: My questions related to elder abuse and the concessions on page 237. I think the minister, in replying to the questions put to him by members of the opposition, has adequately answered my questions about the ways in which the government is seeking to protect seniors from elder abuse.

[10.30 am]

The CHAIR: Is there a question the member would like to ask and a reference page number?

Mr M. HUGHES: No. The questions that I wanted to put have been answered.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I refer to page 239, “Outcome, Services and Key Performance Information” in relation to the machinery-of-government changes and the amalgamation of a range of agencies that the minister now oversees. I am curious to understand the tenure of the minister’s chief executive officer. As part of those amalgamations, how long does the chief executive officer have left under his contract, and when will that expire?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Firstly, I will expand on the machinery-of-government reforms. We have to do that before we talk about contracts et cetera.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Sure; I will wait.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am very pleased to say that within two months of taking office, the state government took its first steps with changes to the machinery of government. This was not received well in some areas, but it is something that had to be done. I have a couple of notes here about the changes. We had 41 departments compared with 22 in South Australia, 20 in Queensland, 10 in New South Wales and seven in Victoria. It showed that we had to have change. It was very good to see the Premier, Mark McGowan, announce that very early in the piece so that people knew where we were headed. Has it been received well in the community? Yes, very well. I talk to local governments now and say it is about time they also looked at making changes. I spoke to one local government the other day that had 16 committees. It was a very similar situation, with all these duplications, and they come at a cost. We are bringing it back. The workload for some of the public servants and the management of those changes will be difficult, and, as we move forward, there will be different changes along the way. However, I have not heard one person from the business community—at Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia meetings, or in town, out of town or anywhere else—criticise these changes. In fact, people have praised the changes. One of the biggest grizzles that we hear in here is about red tape. We hear complaints

about red tape all the time and how things are being held up by departments because they have to go from one department to another. We are very keen to make sure that is removed. The previous government also had an agenda of removing red tape. I think in some cases it did, and I am not being critical about that, but it probably did not go far enough for the business community to have the confidence to say, "I can get that through in three months, which previously took me 12 months." We still hear about how things are being held up because of the involvement of different departments, and, in many cases, one department after another working on the matter. To be able to bring them under the one banner and into the one room is good for Western Australia.

As far as contracts for people are concerned, I am not down to that level, so I will hand over to Mr Searle. It is a difficult matter. Before I hand over officially, some people might not want to take the contracts that have been offered, and others will take them on. However, as this change progresses, we do not want to tie people into something for two or three years or maybe the full term of government when it is quite obvious that the job will not be there. Would Mr Searle like to say anything? I understand that it is a very difficult one for Mr Searle, but I am sure that his professional attitude will guide him.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: He has had about four minutes to think of an answer, so here we go.

Mr G. Searle: Thank you, minister, and thank you, Mr Chair. I am currently operating under an extension of my housing contract, which expires in October next year.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Has the director general informed the minister or the government that he is not intending to pursue an extension of that contract or resubmit himself for director general of this agency?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I had a bit of trouble hearing that.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Given the extension of the housing contract, has the director general informed the minister that he will not be extending his contract with the government?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That is up to him to decide. My workings already with the director general have been absolutely professional.

A government member interjected.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I am referring to the machinery-of-government changes on page 239. He is a public servant, mate.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Are you listening to me?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I am sorry, that was the chorus to my left.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: He is absolutely professional. It is his right to talk about contracts and to work out where he wants to go into the future. It is absolutely his right, and we have had some brief discussions, if you like, on those issues. However, I will not put him on the spot again; he just filled in that little gap. I am very pleased with the way he has handled the situation and we will leave it at that. It is very personal, and we should be careful with those sensitivities.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I will rephrase my question. As sensitive as the answer might be, I appreciate the minister's guidance on that matter. Have there been many people within the agency who have informed the minister or his director general that they will not be continuing with the agency as a result of the difficulties, as the member cited before, with those amalgamations?

The CHAIR: This question is not directly related to the previous one. Is the minister happy to answer, otherwise we will move to another question?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It relates to part of the machinery-of-government changes, Mr Chair.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Personally, no, but within the departments, there probably are some people not continuing. We are still in the process of change, so work will need to be done on those areas. If a person does not want to be there and they want to leave, that is not my business or the business of the department. That is a personal decision and I do not think we should be discussing people's lifestyles or what they want to do in the future; we should leave that well alone. If a person was working for the member and they wanted to leave, would the member have a general inquiry into the matter? No, I do not think so. We may ask why and how and if we can assist that person to stay in the job, and we have worked through those matters, but we are not going to have a public inquiry about a personal position.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: My question relates to page 237 and the fifth dot point from the bottom, which is about volunteering and states —

The social, economic and cultural value of volunteering in Western Australia is estimated at \$39 billion per annum.

How is this figure calculated and what is the forecast change in this number over the forward estimates? In other words, will we see a decline in the number of volunteers, given the generational change, or does the department expect that there will be more volunteers out there?

[10.40 am]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Volunteering is a major part of the Australian way of life. On last count, it was worth approximately \$39 billion per annum to our state—a huge amount. Last night, member for South Perth, we were at the Western Australian Football League's awards, which recognised its volunteers. What they did not say at that event was that for the volunteer of the year award it received 2 000 applications. That is only a small part of the volunteers involved with football. They were the volunteers who people wanted to be recognised. If I recall rightly, they said that there were about 40 000 volunteers for football in the country and the city—a huge number of people. Imagine if they all went on strike for a day. The whole thing would fall over and football would stop. That is just one area of volunteering.

When we look into whether there will be more or fewer volunteers, we are working very hard to increase those numbers. When I first read the list of portfolios I have—seniors, ageing volunteering and sport—I thought it would be a bit difficult, but the synergies are very, very close. A lady has been timing athletics for over 40 years at the old Perry Lakes stadium. People like her are worth gold to our state. They reckon that she can get down to within half a second of an electronic time of a person's run; she is that good at her job and she has been there that long. When we look at volunteering, we have to encourage volunteers. One of the problems we have when people retire is that they take off and do a lap around Australia and a bit of fishing, but they then become bored. If we do not stimulate them to come out and volunteer in the community, we will have problems keeping volunteering up to scratch.

The number of volunteers in Australia is unique. It is quite different from many other parts of the world. Volunteers in Japan are virtually organised by corporates, whereas Australian volunteering is something people do if they want to do it. In Japan, volunteering is part of people's jobs. That concerns me. I see some of that happening in Australia with the corporates. People do corporate volunteering, but they will not contribute to day-to-day volunteering in the future. That is a bit of a concern to me, because I do not think that is the way we should go; we should be encouraging everyone whether it is grandfathers or younger people into that volunteering area. We have to make sure we keep people volunteering. Nothing pleases me more—as I am sure the member for South Perth knows with his sporting background—when I go to a junior football match than seeing the 15-year-old and 16-year-old kids umpiring, running the boundaries and doing the flags. They do it not because they want to be footballers, but because they love to be involved and so they volunteer at junior football. There are so many areas people can volunteer.

I talked about the older people who have been around for many years. Under that, "The Economic, Social and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia" report came out in 2015. If the member for South Perth has nothing to do this weekend because the Eagles are not playing, he might want to sit down and have a read of that report.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I am trying to nail the minister down here, but it is very hard to nail him down. I asked how the figure of \$39 billion was calculated. What predictions does the department have going forward about what that figure might become? Looking back, what was that figure at the start of the previous term of government? In other words, can the minister paint some sort of picture of whether more or fewer people are volunteering, and what are we looking at into the future? How did we come up with \$39 billion?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: As I just said, the economic impact of volunteering report 2015 explains that to some degree. On the \$39 billion, of course, there are no lag times in these reports, and they certainly carry over from a couple of years ago. The census and other agencies pick up a lot of this information, so there is always a lag time. We did not come into government and within six months run around and find out that the figure was \$39 billion. The figure was already out there and there are reports we can look at. I suggest that the member for South Perth read that report this Saturday afternoon.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Is the minister's departmental chief sitting alongside him happy that we are getting plenty of volunteers, that there are no problems in the community and that there is no need for any programs to get more people into volunteering? What sort of science or evidence does the department have to say whether we have a looming problem in volunteer numbers? When I go out, people say to me that baby boomers are not the greatest volunteers; the previous generation was better. Are future generations going to be as good at volunteering as we have had in the past?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I will hand over to the director general to give a bit more depth to the answer if that is what the member is chasing.

Mr G. Searle: I thank the honourable member for the question. It is clear that a range of service organisations particularly are struggling compared with where they were placed a generation ago—whether we look at Lions,

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Rotary or any of those sorts of groups. However, last year, the state government invested nearly \$1.5 million to try to support volunteer activities, ranging from 15 volunteer development services across the state—six in the metropolitan area and four in the regions—to over \$600 000 for Volunteering WA to provide sector support for community-based organisations, grant funding to Thank a Volunteer Day, with 62 of those events run around the state, and sponsorship of the WA State Volunteering Conference. We are very concerned about the need to create an environment in which volunteers are recognised and valued by our community for the role that they play, and people are encouraged to use their spare time to provide value back into their community. We probably think that it is an undervalued resource, but one we need to ensure is appropriately recognised.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Can I just add a bit to that answer. When we look at volunteers, sometimes we look shallowly at our own space. When we think about people who are justices of the peace or firefighters, volunteering is very broad across the state and it is a very big umbrella that we put out.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Surf lifesavers.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That is right. It is from one end of the state to the other. As the director general said, we will work on programs to assist them. As usual, I will tell a story. I visited a volunteering group and I asked members how they did things and how they organised their volunteers. Sometimes we cause problems in volunteering groups by giving people a job but not telling them exactly how to do it, when to do it or when they can knock off. The first Saturday, the volunteers come out and they will work from eight o'clock and do their bit around whatever club they are at, but no-one tells them when they can go home. They feel a bit embarrassed about that. By three o'clock, they have just about had the bomb, and are looking for a beer, but they are still there. Next Saturday, they do not come back. I think this is a great story. One of the clubs told me that they give their volunteers an A4 piece of paper with their job on it, and tell them that when they finish it, they can go. The volunteer then knows exactly what is needed and how to do the job, and there are no arguments about people doing each other's jobs—people tend to get a bit protective of their area. Volunteers have a sheet and the club members have a running sheet and once the work is done, the volunteer can go home. People honestly feel a bit embarrassed about saying that they are going home if there is no cut-off time. Those are the types of things that we, as a government, can help different groups with to encourage volunteers to come back. There are many different ways to do that. As I said, there is a very broad spectrum of people—from Kununurra to Collie—who volunteer.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 237 of the *Budget Statements* and the third dot point from the bottom of the page. The “Ageing in the Bush Report” released in 2015 by the WA Regional Development Council identifies the creation of age-friendly communities as one of the key elements for holistic support and care for older people. What funding has been committed each year over the forward estimates to support regional Western Australia in the development of age-friendly communities?

[10.50 am]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am well aware of some of the problems about ageing in country areas. Some of the smaller communities are not able to put up an aged-care home because the numbers alone will not sustain the aged-care home.

“Ageing in the Bush” is something that, yes, we are well aware of. Yes, we are working on that to make sure that we can allow people to stay in the environment they have lived and worked in all their lives. I have seen family groups split up if mum has had to come to Perth for care because it might be 200 kilometres away. She will not get visits from the family, and those sorts of things are very concerning to me. We will work with and alongside the groups out there. I have said I will be doing the road trip. We really want to understand each community. I am sure the member understands that every community is treated as a village; each one has a different want. If we take a broadbrush approach, sometimes we miss people. It is very hard for a government to get down to each individual, so that is not what I am talking about. In communities where we have to work to make sure those people can stay there, we will be doing that. To answer the member's question on the finance line item, I will move over to —

Mr G. Searle: It looks like I win!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I did look both ways!

Mr G. Searle: Thank you, minister. Thank you, Chair. I thank the honourable member for the question. A significant number of things are in place for funding seniors in general. A couple of those things are very specific around regional Western Australia, particularly the regional public transport discount that is available to Seniors Card holders and, as was earlier mentioned, the Country Age Pension Fuel Card that is currently available. There is no specific funding other than those targeted at regional communities, but the minister said that the new government is about to embark on a number of discussions with people in the bush and will guide its policy development based on those discussions.

The CHAIR: Any further questions?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, if I can have some latitude here, my question relates to the royalties for regions expenditure on page 224 of budget paper No 3, ageing in the bush and a regional aged-care accommodation program. Originally \$46.3 million was allocated, and now for 2018–19, there will be \$500 000; for 2019–20, there will be \$3 million; and for 2020–21, there will be \$19.2 million. My concern is that six aged-care projects throughout the regions have now basically been put on hold, and those figures in the out years will be applied. I am concerned that one of those projects has been jeopardised and we have lost federal funding of potentially \$10 million. I would just like the minister's response. As to the \$19.2 million in the forward estimates, was there any potential to bring some of that forward—bring \$10 million forward—to acquire the federal funding that was up for grabs?

The CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to respond? It is outside of —

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I will just be very brief on this one. I understand the question, but that is not in my area. The finance for royalties for regions is under Minister MacTiernan. I expect the member will put a question on notice to her.

The CHAIR: Any further questions?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No, that will do, thanks.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: The minister and director general have already answered this in a reasonable level of detail. However, I refer back to volunteering on page 237 of the *Budget Statements*, which of course notes the huge value of volunteering to Western Australia. Are there any other new initiatives the minister would like to expand upon that are helping volunteering in WA go from strength to strength?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Again, I thank the member for the question. It was great to see that not so long ago the member was running forums to assist people in the aged-care and volunteering areas. That is the type of thing we are talking about when we talk about having that connection with the community. I congratulate the member for Bicton on doing that. I think it is a sign of her being a very good member in the future. If we do not hold things like forums, we do not understand what is actually needed. The problem is where to start on where we are going. Eighty per cent of Western Australians aged 15 years and over—maybe the member for South Perth understands this—volunteered in 2014. That is what I mean about that lag time. That was a statistic that was pulled out in 2014. Think about that just by itself—80 per cent is tremendous. Whether the volunteering is in disabilities or other areas, I think we must support them. We must work through and support them down the line in that area. I encourage all members of Parliament to be out there holding forums such as those of the member for Bicton because we get an understanding. We can help by having the pamphlets and booklets they need for different areas to get out and connect with their communities as volunteers. We are also forming a volunteer reference group so that the lead bodies can come in and give us some advice. With the reference groups, the lead bodies sort of tie it up so that it becomes manageable by the departments. If we think about who can volunteer and what they can do, I have previously said that there are no boundaries. If little Johnny from down the road goes and mows Mrs Brown's lawn up the road, he is still a volunteer. Should we encourage that and should we assist those sort of programs to come in? Yes. They are really useful at the grassroots. To think that 80 per cent of people volunteer—I do not think we will ever get to 90 per cent —

Mr J.E. McGRATH: A lot of schools have programs now for kids to go out to work.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Yes. Also there are programs for kids to just walk through aged-care facilities and talk to the people in there; it makes their day. It is so simple. People can just do a bit of volunteering for a couple of hours a week. It builds character and our quite special Australian way of life. It also saves the state \$30 billion-odd. We remind people about the \$41 billion debt; if we did not have volunteers, we could put \$36 billion on top of that. It is a very, very big debt, and thank goodness for volunteers.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I refer to page 239 of the *Budget Statements* and the machinery of government changes, and page 259 on the costs of employee benefits. I am curious as to the interim corporate executive structure. Has that been finalised as yet?

The CHAIR: Minister. I am conscious of the time, so if the minister can keep his responses as accurate as possible.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I can answer that question very quickly. No.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Excellent. Thank you. I am conscious of the time as well. I have only two further follow-up questions. Does the minister have an expectation as to when the interim corporate executive structure will be finalised and when contracts will be offered?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: As the member understands, sometimes these things have to be worked through. That is exactly where it is at the moment, so, no, I cannot give the member that answer.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Tuesday, 19 September 2017]

p10b-18a

Chair; Mr Zak Kirkup; Mr Mick Murray; Mr John McGrath; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Matthew Hughes; Mrs Lisa O'Malley

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I thank the minister.

The CHAIR: Any further questions?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I have a final question. Is the minister aware of anyone in the interim corporate executive who has indicated to the minister or his office that they will not reapply for their positions once they are finalised.

[11.00 am]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I think I made it very clear previously that that is a personal decision. If people have done that, I will leave it at that. That is their personal decision. They have spoken to me on a personal note and I do not think —

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: They have spoken to you on a personal note? Is that what the minister said?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I said that if they have spoken to me, I see that as on a personal note and a personal issue.

The appropriation was recommended.