

TAXI AMENDMENT BILL 2016

Second Reading

Resumed from 7 September.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [9.58 am]: I want to make a contribution to the debate on the Taxi Amendment Bill 2016, which is before the house today. I know it will be debated today and is expected to pass this chamber and go into the other place next week. I want to start by really castigating the Minister for Transport on what I consider to be, using Australian vernacular, a total balls-up. The Minister for Transport's carriage of the whole issue of the taxi industry over the last two years, and particularly the last year, has been nothing short of appalling. His appalling disdain, ultimately, for taxidriviers, not just in the metropolitan area, but across Western Australia, is simply unacceptable. It is therefore understandable that so many people who have invested their savings and their livelihoods into the taxi industry as operators —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean, can you acknowledge the Chair when you enter and can you also ask for permission to pass in front of the speaker. Thank you.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is just unacceptable. The fact is that so many taxi operators in Western Australia have been let down by this government and by the minister. It is totally understandable why so many of them would be angry with this minister and this government over their handling of what is ultimately their livelihood.

Yesterday during their contributions to this bill, some of the members on this side highlighted individual experiences of some taxidriviers who are also their constituents, including the member for Thornlie, who highlighted some individual examples. We know about the high profile example that was featured in *The West Australian* last week, in which the livelihood of a family is ultimately at risk. It is at risk and has been at risk because of the appalling stewardship of this portfolio by the Minister for Transport. We now have legislation before us that, as the opposition has highlighted and as our lead speaker, the member for West Swan, will be outlining later today, is a challenge for the opposition to support simply because of that poor stewardship by this minister and this government.

Although the minister has previously said that the changes predominantly affect only the metropolitan area, I want to challenge that and highlight the situation of the taxi operators in Mandurah and the Peel region. I understand that the proprietors of Mandurah Taxis, Julie and Greg Murray, met with the minister recently. I want to outline to the minister how Greg and Julie have operated Mandurah Taxis Pty Ltd for the last 10 years since they took over from the previous owner. Mandurah Taxis has been operating in Mandurah and the Peel region since 1959, so there have been cabs in Mandurah since 1959. Max Swinbridge held the licence, if you like, for the business for many, many years before it was sold to Greg and Julie 10 years ago. We know that during the last 10 years, Mandurah, in particular, has grown dramatically in terms of population and, indeed, in terms of demographics. The demographic nature of the population is such that we have a large number of older citizens, people with disabilities and people with specific transport needs. The proprietors of Mandurah Taxis, Greg and Julie, have worked extremely hard to manage and develop an even stronger 24-hour, seven-days-a-week taxi industry in the region.

As the minister knows, Mandurah Taxis operates within the country taxi zone. We are a country taxi zone and we have been for a long time. Indeed, it is important that that status remain. However, challenges are created by being in close proximity to Perth. Mandurah Taxis has given exemplary service to the region, particularly during the last 10 years. The Murrays have brought to the industry in Mandurah and the Peel region an even greater and more intimate understanding of the population needs. The fact that it caters for the increasing number of people with disabilities who require taxis, for example, is admirable. In fact, Mandurah Taxis has received awards in the past and has been a finalist in awards relating to disability support. In 2010, it was a finalist in the National Disability Awards that were presented at Parliament House in Canberra. It is accredited with the Tourism Council WA. Mandurah Taxis was nominated for this year's Disability Support Awards for regional excellence. They are not the only awards or acknowledgement of the contribution, commitment and service to the Mandurah–Peel community that Mandurah Taxis has been credited with. In 2009, it received the Count Us In WA Disability Services Award. In 2015–16, it was a finalist in the business category of the Alcoa Peel Business Excellence Awards sponsored by the Peel Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In 2015, Julie Murray was a finalist in the corporate and private category of the Telstra Business Women's Awards. In 2015, Mandurah Taxis was a finalist in the transport and tour operator category of the WA Tourism Awards. In 2016, this year, it was nominated for the regional road safety award. In 2016, it was nominated for the regional achievement award in leadership and innovation, and in 2016, it was nominated for the Tourism Council WA Award. Julie Murray herself has served on the Taxi Industry Board, representing regional taxidriviers or taxi operators in regional WA.

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I want to read to members a letter from Julie in which she highlights the challenge that now faces Mandurah Taxis from a taxi operator's point of view as a result of the botched handling of this whole issue in a region south of Perth, the Peel. She states —

Personally as Taxi Operators we just want to continue with our business, provide income for our staff and drivers and save our home!! We have been working extremely hard managing a 24/7 taxi service for 10 years to get where we are and we don't want to lose everything!!

That is the challenge that faces her business and so many drivers and operators in Western Australia now because of what the minister has not done and because of his absolute lack of stewardship of this issue during his time as Minister for Transport. Julie continues —

Taxis are a vital component of the public transport network ... Taxis provide privately funded 24/7 on demand, door to door, universal transport ... safe or accessible. Taxis complement other forms of public transport ...

Of course they provide a social and economic service to people. The letter continues —

Taxis are mobile tourist information services ...

That is important to remember. Some of the best promoters of our state and our icons are taxidrivers. The letter continues —

Mandurah Taxis Pty Ltd has been operating in the Peel Region since 1959. The current owners purchased the taxi plates in December 2006. The plates were valued by a Bank, approved by the Dept Transport and we still have a large outstanding debt now secured against a \$0 asset.

By the way, minister, they have no access to the transitional assistance package that other plate owners have been told they will have access to. As the member for Willagee said last night, that is a pitiful amount of \$20 000 and a pitiful offer by the minister.

The letter continues —

The ANZ Bank has made it very clear we have an unsecured debt and we are being closely managed. I am perplexed as to who advised the Minister that Regional operators would not be impacted by reforms?

Mandurah Operators have been doubly impacted initially by Govt inaction and lack of compliance and now first stage reforms which, due the proximity of the Peel Region, are anti competitive. We now have even more operators (both legal and illegal) flooding into the area whilst our Taxis are legislated to operate and provide a 24/7 service restricted within the Peel Region including undertaking the majority of the less viable jobs ... It is anti competitive reform that is impacting on our assets and income as a small business and could lead to Mandurah Taxis becoming insolvent.

I hope that does not happen, minister, because they have worked bloody hard to build up this business. They employ some wonderful people, some wonderful taxidrivers, in my region, many of whom speak a second language. They are trying to eke out a living for their families, but the minister has put it all at risk.

Julie's letter continues —

This week we are reviewing rosters and staff will be significantly reducing hours. Our Taxi Drivers have had their incomes reduced by up to 40%. This is harsh in the Peel Region which has the highest unemployment rate in the state at nearly 12%.

The last thing my region needs is more unemployment, but this is what the minister is foisting on it because of his haphazard, bungled handling of this whole issue. The letter continues —

WA Country Taxi Operators (WACTOA) have had serious concerns about the performance of the On Demand Transport Unit staff —

Mr D.C. Nalder interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: What is wrong with you?

Mr D.C. Nalder: Will you take an interjection? That is an appalling statement to make. That is an absolutely appalling statement to make.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Why is it appalling to state that you have put people's employment in peril? Why is that an appalling statement to make?

Mr D.C. Nalder: Because you're factually incorrect.

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Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Mate, you have botched this whole system.

Mr D.C. Nalder: No, it's —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Mate, you have botched the whole system!

Mr D.C. Nalder: How? Demonstrate how.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Why do you not apologise to the people up there? Why do you not apologise to the 250 people who turned up at the Italian Club last night, who —

Mr D.C. Nalder: You're grandstanding, aren't you? Grandstanding!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Because you do not know how to say sorry, mate! That is the problem with you; you do not know how to say sorry and you try to deflect everything. You are just like your Premier, mate. You want to be the Premier, but you are just like him! This is the problem with you and the problem with your government, mate!

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: What did you say? "Cheap"? You are cheap! You do not stand up for your taxidriviers!

THE ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member for Mandurah! Let us just take this one at a time. Calm down, member for Mandurah.

[Interruption from the gallery.]

The ACTING SPEAKER: People in the public gallery, we are totally sympathetic to your concerns, and I am sure the minister is too, but you are not meant to be making any noise, or someone will come and remove you, so please keep the noise down. Smile and wave, but no noise.

Member, did I hear you call something out when I was on my feet? That is absolutely not to be done, particularly if it is someone from that neck of the woods. Was it you, member for Geraldton? Please, member for Geraldton, it is not appropriate to call out when I am on my feet and it is not appropriate for anyone to be talking while the Chair is on their feet. That is enough.

Minister, you asked if you could interject; I think that time has passed, so please just sit tight.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will not be called "cheap" by you, member for Vasse, when I am standing up for my community —

Point of Order

Mr D.C. NALDER: Point of order.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member for Mandurah, I think, first of all, that we established it was not the member for Vasse; it was the member for Geraldton.

Mr D.A. Templeman: It was. Have the guts to tell the truth!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Secondly, member for Mandurah, I call you for the first time. Please, no yelling across the chamber. Member for Mandurah, you have been here long enough to know to direct your comments through the Chair, so I ask that you continue to direct your comments through the Chair, please.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will, but I will not be called "cheap" by a member of this place who says —

Mr D.C. NALDER: I would just like to draw the Acting Speaker's attention to the fact that what is at hand is the bill about taxis. There was no acknowledgement by anyone in this chamber about comments that were made on the other side. That was dealt with in your —

The ACTING SPEAKER: I am sorry; is this a relevance point of order, member?

Mr D.C. NALDER: The relevance of the arguments he is making about the cheap shots.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I have listened to the point of order; it is not a point of order. Member, please recommence your speech.

Debate Resumed

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 8 September 2016]

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Mr David Templeman; Mr Dean Nalder; Acting Speaker; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr Rob Johnson; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will not be told by any member of this place that this is cheap. The fact of the matter is this: I am standing up for the proprietors of the taxi industry in Mandurah, in regional Peel, and I am standing up for the drivers who are employed by that company down there in Mandurah. It is my right to represent them and it is my right to make sure that their concerns are heard. That is what I am doing, so if the member wants to call me cheap and then not have the guts to admit that she said it, that is trash. Why not stand up and withdraw the comment?

The fact of the matter is this: this minister has botched a process that is now threatening the livelihoods of people in my community —

Point of Order

Mr D.C. NALDER: Allegations are being made that I have botched the process. I would like to understand the specifics of the allegation.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Sit, please! Sit! That is not a point of order, minister. You should know better than that. You have not been here long, but you should know better than that; you are a smart man. There is no point of order. Do not raise those kinds of things again.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister will have his chance during consideration in detail and when he sums up. This is why this issue causes so much concern within so many parts of our community. It is because of how it is handled by the minister responsible. He has been duded in his shot to become Premier, and now he is trying to defend the indefensible. I am reading information from the proprietor of Mandurah Taxis; that is my right. She and her husband are not only defending the business which they have worked really hard over the last 10 years to build up and which is acknowledged for the quality of service it delivers; they are also pleading on behalf of the many people that rely on them as a Mandurah business to make sure that they have an income with which to sustain their families. That is my responsibility.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I hope the member on the other side who had a go at me earlier will stand up and defend the taxidrivers and people who work in her community. That is what I am doing.

Julie and Greg Murray are absolutely concerned about the future of their business, but they have dozens of families relying on them because dozens of drivers and operators rely on Mandurah Taxis for their income. I am passionate about this matter because two years ago one of our taxidrivers in Mandurah, Lindsay Ferguson, was killed. Just last month, the murder charge was overturned. I know that family, and I know the anguish that the family went through, and continues to go through, because of what happened to Lindsay Ferguson on the day he was, in my view, murdered while doing his job. Lindsay had been a taxidriver in Mandurah for many, many years. He was loved because he drove mainly Maxi Taxis, which deliver services to people with disabilities and older citizens in Mandurah. I am sorry, but I feel passionate about this, so I get angry when I am told that I am being cheap. I get angry when I am told that sort of thing. I am angry because Lindsay Ferguson did not deserve to die behind the wheel of his taxi in Mandurah. He did not deserve to die. This is about people. This is about families. This is about whether people are going to take home enough income to feed their families. This affects the people in my community. I will speak passionately about it and I will represent them. I will particularly represent a business such as Mandurah Taxis because I know that it has worked bloody hard to build up its business, and the minister puts that at peril. That is why I am passionate about it.

Mr D.C. Nalder: How have I put it at peril?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Because of your botched process! You sat there on your hands and you promised to do something and you did not do it and now we have legislation that is going to affect them.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member, just direct your comments to the Chair; otherwise, you are inviting interjections.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will take almost anything, but I tell members something: I will not take that rubbish from over there anymore! Julie Murray says the following, which I think is really important —

WA Country Taxi Operators ... have had serious concerns about the performance of the On Demand Transport Unit staff and the reform process ...

She mentions that she has notified people of these concerns —

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We have notified the Premier ... and the Minister for Transport in many different forums of the impacts of these reforms on regional operators. Mandurah Taxis owners have also provided information and met with the Minister for Transport regarding the issues we are facing. It would appear that ... despite industry recommendations and all of the meetings being held significant changes are being pushed through with little thought of the consequences for operators, drivers and the public.

Mandurah Taxis has personally notified Minister Mischin, this minister, Minister Harvey, former Minister Hames, now in his capacity as the local member for Dawesville, and me. Mandurah Taxis has also notified all of its local members about the issues that face regional taxi operators as a result of this legislation and what this minister is pushing through this Parliament.

On Saturday night I was at the 2016 Peel Business Excellence Awards in Mandurah; 400-odd people attended, including Julie and Greg Murray. Mandurah Taxis had been nominated but it was not a finalist, but Julie and Greg went along because they have been very focused on making sure that the taxi industry in Mandurah delivers to service requirements and needs. Over the 10-year period of their stewardship of the taxi industry in the region, they have tailored their services to cater for the specific needs of people in that area. That is why they have won awards and been acknowledged for their delivery of disability services through taxis. They have been nominated for various tourism-related awards because they are part of the community and the economic viability of Peel and Mandurah as a regional city. Julie and Greg are part of that. The minister's appalling stewardship of this issue has resulted in many people—be they drivers or owners of a company such as Mandurah Taxis—becoming absolutely vulnerable and at risk. If this minister cannot see that, for goodness sake, I appeal to the government backbenchers to understand it, because many of them have people living in their electorates who drive taxis or who have bought plates in the past and are now at risk. I know some of the backbenchers have had meetings with those people, but now is the time to stand up and represent them. Get up and have a say.

Mr R.F. Johnson interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: They probably will not. Get up and have a say. For the minister to say, "Well, I'm offended because I have not done any of this. I haven't botched this. I haven't done anything wrong" is rubbish.

Mr D.C. Nalder: I didn't say that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: So the minister is admitting that he has done something wrong.

Mr D.C. Nalder: Just say what I said. If you are going to quote me, quote me correctly.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Gee, I tell members what: if we had to sit around quoting the minister, we would have a dictionary of interesting quotes!

Ms R. Saffioti: Just quote the media advisers.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We could always quote the media advisers, too. Certainly the Premier's media adviser would have some very interesting quotes about you, sunshine. I would not like to repeat those in this place. They were repeated yesterday.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, I remind you that when you are referring to members in this house, you must refer to them by their electorate.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I certainly would not refer to a member as the media adviser from the Premier's department did. I would not use unparliamentary language such as that. It was very interesting to watch question time. Now the big strategy of the Minister for Transport in question time is to keep his head as low as possible. Have members noticed that? He flicks through papers and pretends that he is reading something. I saw that in the last question time. He had his head down. "Oh, gee, give me something to look at as if I'm reading so I can avoid any eye contact." That is what it is all about.

I conclude my comments by saying this: this has been a botched process. This has been botched by a fake contender for the Premier's position and a minister who has had no understanding of the real impact that this has on real families who rely on the taxi industry through drivers and taxi plate owners. He has had no understanding of that. It will bear very heavily—I might say, not on him, because he had his wrestle with the member for Bateman and he has wrestled the safer seat, so he will probably be okay—on those on the back bench, particularly those members who have these taxidrivers and their families living in their electorates. Be it on those members' heads if they do not stand up and defend those people and acknowledge the pain and angst that this has had on many families in the taxi industry, and will continue to have. Be it on their heads if they do not stand up and acknowledge that and support them. Be it on their heads at the next election, because this sort of thing brings down governments because it demonstrates how out of touch the government is with the general public in Western Australia. The government does not care about the budget and the fact that it has run up the debt it has run up. It does not care about the deficit. The Premier just bats that away. Perhaps he will still be here or, if he

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gets beaten, he may not even come back into Parliament after the next election. To those members who will not be here, examples such as this will have signed their death warrants. That is the situation government backbenchers face. They should stand up for their community and the people who drive taxis or own taxi plates. They should not just be told by the Premier and the bumbling minister that they have to follow through with it.

MR P. ABETZ (Southern River) [10.28 am]: As we want to get the Taxi Amendment Bill 2016 through today, I will keep my comments very brief. As I have said in this place many times before, I have a large number of taxidrivers in my electorate and I have had meetings with taxidrivers going back to 2009 during the boom time, so it is not a more recent interest in the taxi industry. They came to see me because they wanted to buy their lease plates. I argued with the drivers and said that I did not believe that that was a good way to go because when there is an inevitable downturn, it will be important that the government can pull lease plates from the market to match the supply with demand. I am pleased to say that I understand—the minister may be able to comment on this in his contribution—that 20 per cent of the lease plates have been withdrawn from the market, which has helped to lessen the impact of the downturn and the arrival of Uber at the same time.

In my meetings with taxidrivers prior to the arrival of Uber, there were many complaints about the conduct of Swan Taxis, the dispatch service, and their frustration in wanting to provide a good service to the community and the dispatch service really standing in the way of that. I do not have time to go into the details of that, but many of the drivers in the public gallery will know exactly what I am talking about.

An issue has been raised that the government did absolutely nothing: I do not think that is quite true. The government initiated prosecutions of Uber drivers; I am not quite sure where those prosecutions are up to, but the minister may comment on that. I certainly appreciate the financial stress that those drivers in my electorate, and elsewhere for that matter, are under, having purchased their plates in more recent years. The member for Gosnells mentioned the family who bought six plates. When the member for Gosnells mentioned that the husband has three and the wife has three, I just thought: who gave them financial advice? If I was going to invest \$1.2 million to \$1.6 million —

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member for Armadale!

Mr P. ABETZ: — I would seek some financial advice. I would never put all my eggs into one basket.

Several members interjected.

Mr P. ABETZ: I am not asking for interjections.

I certainly appreciate the fact that people have purchased a taxi plate with a view to having the right to drive taxis for as long as they wish, and that that is a licence to do that. But I think it is really important to remember that government regulation of an industry does not guarantee the capital value of the licence. I know of another example of that. My daughter is a pharmacist, and in the pharmacy industry the value of the licence that people need to operate a pharmacy has absolutely plummeted. Pharmacists are physically handing in their licences and shutting their shops because the licence they purchased a few years ago has become valueless because of the changes the government has made to the pharmaceutical benefits scheme and the way it funds things. We need to keep that in mind.

The member for Willagee mentioned yesterday that all industries have their downtime—down cycles; ups and downs—and the taxi industry is no different. The taxidrivers I have talked to acknowledge that that is something they accept; they are in an industry that that is part and parcel of. But I think the difficulty that has arisen is that with the arrival of Uber, and now moving to a deregulated situation, we are facing a double whammy, if you like, for the drivers.

It is interesting that some of the drivers in my electorate who have spoken with me are actually still doing quite well. I have one taxidriver who does wheelchair taxi work. He is a lovely, gentle guy, and he told me that he takes one or two jobs a week off the dispatch service. He gives the disabled people his business card and mobile phone number, and he is, basically, booked up all week with private jobs. That is what he does, and he does it well. In 2009 he was telling me that, and he is still fully booked. In many ways the value of his licence to him has not depreciated one little bit because he has built up a microbusiness, if you like, for himself.

I was recently in Gosnells doing a bit of doorknocking and I came across a gentleman who had a taxi in his driveway. I said, “You must be doing it tough at the moment.” He was an Iranian migrant, and he said, “I’ve been driving taxis for five or six years. I’ve got my licence, and it is down—true—but I’m still earning enough to make a living.” I said, “So how’s that working for you?” He told me that he gives people his business card and mobile phone number and gets a lot of private jobs. He said, “That’s what’s kept me going. I provide a good service.” He has been able to develop his own clientele base.

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I appreciate that people who have entered the industry more recently have not had a chance to develop that, and that makes it more difficult for them to keep going. Those who depend on the dispatch service are certainly struggling the most. I accept that the rank work and hail work, which has been reserved for the taxi industry, is in some ways not as big a part of the market anymore. By virtue of the Uber app, a person can call an Uber vehicle and it will come to where they are; in a sense, the app makes a mobile rank. It will be interesting to see whether rank work and hail work continues to make up 40 per cent of taxi work.

Towards the end of July I caught a taxi from the airport and chatted with the driver. I said, “Things are pretty tough at the moment, aren’t they?” He said, “I don’t know what’s happened, but in the last two weeks it’s really picked up.” I said, “Why’s that? Do you think there are fewer Uber drivers on the road?” He said, “I don’t know.” Remember, on 4 July the regulations changed and they now require Uber drivers to be licensed and front up with about \$800 in up-front costs. They are now obligated to have insurance and pay extra registration costs et cetera.

I received a letter from Jessika Loefstedt, manager of public policy and government relations for Uber, in May 2016; I think other members also received it. She said that 80 per cent of Uber drivers have declared they would not drive if they have up-front costs of \$500. Now they are facing \$800 up-front costs, and my guess is that as time goes on the number of Uber drivers will diminish considerably. The up-front cost should have been there earlier. I accept it when taxidriviers say that we have taken an awfully long time to get that in place; it should have been done quicker. But I think part of the reason for the delay in getting the Taxi Amendment Bill 2016 before this house has been that some backbenchers have been arguing very strongly that there should be something like a \$1 a ride levy to provide some further compensation for the taxi industry. The minister has been working on that with the department, and that has delayed the entry of this bill. I have frequently said, “Why don’t we get this bill into the house and get the \$20 000 available to all taxi plate owners?” For those struggling to pay their bank loans, the \$20 000 grant—it depends on how much they still owe—will be somewhere between six and 12 months of bank repayments. That will give them the opportunity to have a little bit of a break and get the bank off their back, if that is happening at the moment for them. It will give them a chance to get organised. Then, of course, there is also the hardship fund for which people can apply. That is particularly necessary, I think, for those who purchased their plates in more recent years.

The reality is that I do not think anybody can predict the value of a taxi plate in two years’ time. The question is: how do we move forward from here? I believe this bill, which will provide a \$20 000 grant to every plate holder, is a very worthwhile measure that will help everyone. For some, like my friend who does the wheelchair taxi work, it will be a very welcome \$20 000 that he does not really need because his business has not fallen; for many it will be very, very welcome. Once this is in place and people who have hardship issues apply for the fund, I think the \$6 million may perhaps prove not to be sufficient, but again that is something that can be addressed if we run out of funds on that score.

I believe that the taxi industry is very much in a state of transition. Within the taxi industry, there is real potential for people to take the initiative to develop private clientele, or perhaps even to group together in a taxi cooperative to operate their own dispatch service and their own branding to carve out a niche market for themselves. It may be a taxi service of all women drivers, for argument’s sake, because women may feel more comfortable catching a taxi knowing that they will have a woman driver—that type of thing. I think there are real opportunities to carve out a niche market. In the meantime, and given the current downturn in the economy, there is obviously less demand for taxis. I think we will see some more decline in the number of Uber drivers. An Uber driver came to see me because he was very concerned. He said that when he did the sums, he was earning about \$5 an hour. Once he took the depreciation of his vehicle into account and the extra insurance he needed et cetera, he was not really making much money. He felt quite exploited and was planning to get out of the industry. My guess is—I could be proven wrong—that the number of Uber drivers on the road will decline. Hopefully, the economy will pick up as the industry picks up. I believe that the taxi industry has a bright future, but I fully support the provision of hardship funding to those who are in serious need. As the member for Mandurah said, we are dealing with families. Real people are involved; it is not about just facts and figures; we are dealing with people. I believe that \$20 000 for every plate owner will be a very welcome relief for plate owners and drivers, if they are driving. For those who lease plates, licence plates have already gone down from \$13 000 a year to \$1 200 a year, I think it is. For them, there has already been a major improvement in their financial situations. Plate owners are the ones who are suffering at the moment. I believe that the \$20 000 grant, which is available to everyone who owns a plate, will be very welcome and very helpful. For those who are in a real financial crisis, the special needs hardship fund will be very helpful as well. As time progresses, there will still be the opportunity for further action to be taken by the government once we see how things settle down.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys) [10.42 am]: The member for Southern River followed my speech the other day—I gave a very passionate speech on another issue—and he referred to me as the member for hot air. Today,

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I liken the member for Southern River to a character in *The Wizard of Oz* on the yellow brick road where the Tin Man is searching for a heart; I liken him to the straw man who is searching for courage. When the going gets tough, he does a Paralympics job of hurdling over the Bar of the house out of the way so he does not vote against the government on an issue that is very important to the people of Western Australia. Today, it is the taxi industry. The member for Southern River will not vote against this bill; he will vote with the government like a lot of the sheep.

I may not be able to speak as passionately as the member for Mandurah—I have a bit of a throat problem at the moment—but I do feel as passionately about it. Many people from the taxi industry have come to my office to see me. Some of them feel absolutely devastated by the actions of this government. I do not blame just the Minister for Transport; I think he has a very difficult job. The problem is the Premier, who has overspent the credit card by billions of dollars, and a Treasurer who is trying to address that situation. I have been here for 24 years. I have seen industries deregulated, including the milk industry. I think milk vendors were paid fairly and squarely for the fact that their industry was deregulated. They were given back virtually the money that they paid for having the right to be able to go on a milk round. In certain areas, the fishing industry was deregulated. They were happy with what they got. Recently, we saw the, what was it —

Mr W.J. Johnston: Potatoes!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: We recently saw the classic case of the Potato Marketing Board. They are still growing potatoes, yes, but the people who were part of that scheme were paid good compensation. Why do we treat our taxi owners any differently from potato growers, or the people who used to drop off the milk—I used to have milk delivered to my home every day—or the people in the fishing industry? Why can other states and territories treat their taxi industry people fairly and squarely, yet, in Western Australia, we cannot do that?

A classic case came into my office. I will not mention names because I do not think it is appropriate. It was a family situation and other people were involved as well—about half a dozen people. There was the wife of a man who had bought a taxi plate just a few years ago—I think three or four years ago. They paid nearly \$200 000 to the government to change his licence from a peak-period one to an all-day licence with no restrictions. He could act as a taxidriver at any time of the day or night. They paid a few dollars short of \$200 000—let us say \$200 000. Quite frankly, the government was acting like a franchisor. It was selling something that was a promise and a wish—something that would happen in the future. We cannot say that it sold them a taxi plate, because that is worth about 20 bucks. It was selling them the right to be able to continue their business, which was a regulated business then. Now, it is being deregulated. To offer the people who paid \$200 000 just a few years ago \$20 000 is nothing but an absolute insult.

[Interruption from the gallery.]

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): I am really sorry, but you must stop clapping—you must.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Madam Acting Speaker, the people in the public gallery obviously feel very passionately about this. They are affected financially. Their families are affected financially. It is not just about the people who are here; it is also about their families and the people who are paid wages to drive some of their taxis when they are not driving them. Many people drive their own taxis and when they are not driving them themselves, they sublease them to other taxidrivers so that they can earn a living.

It was a long time ago now that the group first came into my office; I think it was last year. I told them, “Let me make it quite clear that I’m always in favour of competition.” They said, “So are we, Mr Johnson; we’re in favour of competition too, but there has to be a level playing field.” I absolutely agree with that. There should be a level playing field. At the moment, there is not a level playing field. Other organisations—Uber and others—are just doing what they want. They do not pay any of the sorts of fees that our taxi plate owners do and they do not pay the rates, yet they can get away with picking up people wherever they want and all the rest of it. It is not just in WA; it is worldwide now. However, for many, many decades in WA, we have had a regulated taxi industry, so we have seen exactly where they were going. Some taxidrivers are not the best in the world. You get the odd rude one, like you get the odd rude politician. Many people in here have been very, very rude, particularly to me because I am an Independent now! Members opposite laugh and the Premier growls and gets grumpy. He called me a grumpy old man the other day!

Mr C.J. Barnett: Well, you are.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Premier is a grumpy, arrogant old man!

Mr C.J. Barnett: I know.

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Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Premier is the most arrogant person I have ever met! Ask any of these people in the public gallery what they think of him. They cannot stand him! That is why we will be saying, “Bye-bye, Premier” very soon. I am not quite sure whether it will be the Minister for Transport or the Minister for Police who takes over. It could be the Minister for Corrective Services, but my money is on the Minister for Transport. The power broker in the other house wants the Premier’s sidekick, the Minister for Police, but I think most of the Liberal Party members actually do not.

I must get back to the bill, as Madam Acting Speaker is instructing me to. I will get back to the Taxi Amendment Bill 2016 because that is what we are talking about today. We are talking about the arrogance of not only the Premier, but also the government. It is arrogant to bring a bill like this, which has gone through cabinet, to the house. It would not have gone through cabinet if the Premier had not approved it. Nothing goes into cabinet without his personal approval and nothing comes out of cabinet without it. I know; I have been there and done it for four years. I know how it works. I do not necessarily hold the Minister for Transport responsible for this. He has to do what he is told. The person who is responsible is the Premier of the state. The buck stops with him. He is always glad to say that when something happens, but it stops with him today, in my view, which is why he will not be the Premier for much longer. I do not think he will be here by the end of this year—not as the Premier, anyway. I think we will all be saying goodbye to him. However, that is another story, and I am sure we will talk about that a million times.

I will be voting against this bill. This bill is not fair on taxi plate owners, taxidrivers and other people in the taxi industry. This bill does not provide fair compensation. We as a Parliament should not treat the people in the taxi industry in a different way from how we have treated other people who have been in a regulated industry. A young lady came to see me in my electorate office. She came with her father. They were taxi plate owners, with two separate businesses, and a third one as well. She bought her taxi plates about three years ago, before Uber came on the scene. Her husband was a fly in, fly out worker up in the boom area of the north west. He was doing okay, but they decided that they needed to find something to do for when the boom finished. She paid \$200 000, give or take a few dollars, to buy her taxi plates. She had to take out a bank loan to do that, and she put up her house as guarantee for that loan. What is that taxi plate worth today, in real terms? I am told that taxi plate owners have had a 50 per cent reduction in their business because of Uber. However, it is not all about Uber. There are other players in the market, and there will be more players in the future.

We should do the right thing as a Parliament and reject this bill. The member for West Swan has put on the notice paper some amendments to this bill. I support those amendments, because they will provide some fairness for people in the taxi industry. They deserve some fairness. They work all hours of the day and night. They have to put up with a lot of crap, with people attacking them, punching them or kicking them, or doing run-offs without paying their fare. The way this government is treating these people is absolutely appalling.

I will not talk for much longer because other members also want to talk on this bill. I want to make it clear that if the government does not accept the amendments that the member for West Swan will be putting forward, I will certainly be voting against this bill. Those amendments will go some way towards redressing the unfortunate and unfair situation that the people in our taxi industry have been placed in. They are tremendous people. They are very hardworking. They have invested their hard-earned cash in the taxi industry. Many of them have had to borrow the money. The young lady who came to my office was about eight months pregnant. She was very concerned that she and her husband would lose their house if the situation did not change.

This government has acted as though it is a franchisor, and it has sold the franchise to the franchisees—the taxi plate owners—for \$200 000. The taxi plate owners cannot on-sell their plates for anything like that amount. They would be lucky to get \$20 000 for their plates these days because of the competition that is coming into the market and the uncertainty about the future. We as a Parliament have an obligation and a moral duty to do the right thing by all the people in Western Australia. I swore an oath of office, not just to the people in my electorate, but to all the people in Western Australia. It was not to the Liberal Party—never in a fit. It was to all the people in Western Australia.

Mr I.C. Blayney interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: What did you say, member for Geraldton?

Mr I.C. Blayney: I said you were quite happy to use the Liberal Party’s name to get elected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I was not—no. I would not have the Premier’s corflute anywhere near me. On election day, the Liberal Party wanted me to have his corflute at all my polling booths. I refused. I said that the people in my area are going to vote for me, not for him, and they did—my margin went up enormously.

Mr P.B. Watson: We are talking about a serious issue, member for Geraldton.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Not to him—to him, it is not.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 8 September 2016]

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Mr David Templeman; Mr Dean Nalder; Acting Speaker; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr Rob Johnson; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, you know better than that! No yelling across the chamber.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I think I have criticised the Premier and certain people in this chamber enough for today. I am sure they will get more criticism today in question time and at other times. I will never resile from my job as a local member of Parliament to do what I think is right for the people in my electorate and for all the people in Western Australia. I will always stand up for them before any political party, whether it be the Liberal Party or the Labor Party. I will vote according to what I think is the right thing to do, and according to my conscience. I will be voting against this bill today because I truly believe that the people in our taxi industry are being treated extremely unfairly by this Premier and his government.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [10.54 am]: Madam Acting Speaker, I note that I am the lead speaker for the opposition on the Taxi Amendment Bill 2016. I wish to outline the Labor Party's case on this bill. This has been the worst handled reform in this state's history. The Minister for Transport and the Liberal coalition government have let down Western Australian families and small businesses. They have ignored the plight of these people, who have been paying taxes and fees and have been participating in our community for years upon years. This government has deregulated the taxi industry, without any consultation. Two months have passed since that deregulation, and only now are we debating this bill. This government has made mistake after mistake and caused disaster after disaster. I know the Minister for Transport gets offended when we say things in this place. However, my concern is not for the minister's ego. My concern is for the families in Western Australia who are struggling because of what this minister has done and because of the hypocrisy of this government.

I want to go through the hypocrisy of this government. Over the last decade, Labor has tried to make some changes to the taxi industry and provide a lifeline for the future. The government has talked about the value of taxi plates. However, for over two years now, the government has allowed the deregulation of the taxi industry. The income and livelihood of many taxi plate owners and drivers in Western Australia has diminished significantly. I have met many taxi plate owners and drivers. I do not know who the member for Southern River speaks to. I swear that every time he talks in this Parliament about the people he speaks to, he seems to speak to people that no-one else can ever find. The member for Southern River speaks to people who always welcome the government's decisions. I have not met one person who welcomes these decisions.

The hypocrisy is that government members sit in their electorate offices and say they support the taxi industry, yet when they come into this place, they fail time and again to stand up for taxidrivers. Liberal backbench members have great power on this issue, because ultimately they can drive the government to make better decisions. However, they fail time and again to do that. They sit in their electorate offices as big, proud individuals and say they are going to tell the Premier this or that and they will fix this, yet in the party room in this Parliament they fail to deliver. I am sick of hearing from people who say they have talked to a member of the Liberal Party and they have said they are going to do this or that. I know that is not true. However, those people took them on face value. Those members then come into this place and abandon those people as soon as the Premier looks at them. That happens again and again. This will be yet another example.

The taxi industry is a bit uncoordinated. There are a lot of different players—plate owners, taxidrivers, management companies and dispatch companies. The taxi industry has not employed a massive public relations firm, as other people in industry have done, and it has not employed Liberal lobbyists, as other people have done, and, as a result, the Premier has not listened to them. However, they are real people who are struggling to make ends meet. This government has abandoned those people and has deregulated the industry without putting in place a proper reform process. It is as simple as that. The government has pitted individual against individual. It has allowed anarchy. The government has failed to govern some laws of the state. I respect anyone's right to come to Western Australia and try to change the existing law. I respect that right, but I do not respect people who come here and do not abide by our laws and who, through political contacts and public relations and lobbying firms, operate outside the law and get their way. That is what the government allowed to happen. The government has told the rest of the world that WA's legislation is irrelevant, because people who come here and do not abide by the laws get their way. The government's compliance activity was non-existent. When there was a major threat it did not act properly; we all know that. If the government had done better on compliance early on, we would not be in this mess.

Members opposite can chuckle and be offended. Government members sat by for two years and let this happen; I honestly do not know how they sleep at night. I do not know any other minister who would have allowed this to happen. Having let someone come into Western Australia—I do not care who they are—who has ignored our laws, the government has basically told the entire community that our laws do not count. What precedent will this set? I think anything goes. The government has created such a bad situation that it

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has pitted taxidriver against taxidriver, and taxidriver against Uber driver. It has created a dog-eat-dog system with no minimum standards and wages. There is a new rule out there for those who drive people around—it is dog eat dog. Yes, we are the Labor Party and we believe in some form of fairness and regulation. I do not believe that people should be able to do whatever they want. Communities and societies do not survive like that. Not every house can be turned into a business, which is basically what the government is allowing. Ultimately, the government has abandoned the concept of fairness.

As I said, it has been two years since this issue first arose. The government let it go and now we have come to this. The government allowed people to operate outside the law. The government said last December that it was going to change the law. It brought in legislation in May, it deregulated in July and now, two months later, it is looking at transition assistance. To tell you the truth, I have never seen anything like it. We, the community, have let the government get away with it. We tried to hold it to account, but ultimately we let it get away with easily the worst-handled reform in the state's history. I cannot imagine a Labor government getting away with what this government has done. We were crucified for our properly thought-out reform process. This government has basically abandoned Western Australian families.

I will go through the history of some of these issues, because they are pretty important. I looked for the last time there was a taxi amendment bill. One of the last times was in 2003, which is when the Labor government at the time introduced the concept of leased plates. At the time the Liberal Party said —

... the industry is concerned about the government's intention to compete with it as it may influence the value of current plates. That is a very genuine concern. Taxi operators are also concerned about their future earnings. The Opposition holds the same concern.

The Liberal opposition voted against a bill that created leased plates because it was worried about the potential impact it would have on plate values, but now it is saying that plate values do not matter. On the issue of plate values, I will talk about two distinct steps. First of all, the government basically allowed Uber into the place unregulated, which immediately impacted the value of the plates. Of course it did, because a regulated environment with the strict regulation of costs and numbers inherently drives the value of a plate. The government allowed that decrease in value and then it decreased the annual lease costs from around \$13 000 to \$1 000. That had the second impact on the value of the leased plates. One just has to stand back. In a situation in which a person has a privately owned plate and earns X thousand dollars per annum, and they are competing with those who have government-owned plates for which the lease cost is \$13 000, if that lease cost is wiped from \$13 000 to \$1 000, the value of the privately owned plates is automatically wiped out. It just makes sense. Why the government did that, and how it did it, is beyond me. All that has done is exacerbate the problem for private plate owners. It has had a very significant impact; it is probably the most significant impact. I do not understand why the government did that. Sorry, there was an Economic Regulation Authority report that referred to it, but surely the government could have thought it through a bit more and understood the implications of it. The ERA report into microeconomic reform —

Mr W.J. Johnston: Which was rejected by the government.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes, it was entirely rejected. But even on the issue of compensation and taxi deregulation, the ERA even contemplated the concept of compensation for plate owners when it stated —

... deregulation of the taxi industry should take place even if the Government chose to provide full compensation to taxi plate owners.

Even the ERA had contemplated the point that there was a lot of value left in plates.

I will continue with the history of this issue, because it is important to see how we have come to this point. I will talk briefly about the history of Uber in WA. In August 2015, the minister was briefed about the uberX launch. At the time, the department made a number of points, which we got through a freedom of information request. The documents show some of the key points made about uberX. One document states that uberX had indicated that it was likely to launch in Perth irrespective of the illegalities. It states that the Department of Transport strongly suggested that Uber should at least ensure that its drivers have an F extension. It was likely to launch, but it had not provided a specific date. It also refers to compliance and how it needs to be improved. The document states that it is a highly resource-intensive compliance process. I do not think the government poured enough money into compliance initially. The government met with Uber on 29 August and basically said—this was its key mistake—that it was looking at having an interim operating agreement. Briefing notes from the agency state that Uber would be working outside the law, but the government contemplated having an operating agreement with the department.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 8 September 2016]

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In another key document, the minister asked the department to work on scenarios that had been discussed. Those scenarios were about allowing Uber to operate. Uber prepared a draft media statement in October and then it all began. The minister finally realised that he had to do more and that Uber was operating outside the law. During the months of August and September, the government's lack of activity allowed Uber in and allowed it to operate outside the existing law, which is fundamentally the most significant problem. As I said, anyone has the right to lobby government to change laws, but to operate outside the existing law, using Liberal Party or, let us say, political party contacts —

Mr C.J. Barnett: What contacts?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: What contacts? I will go through them.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Liberal Party contacts?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. I will go through the articles and the commentary about that in a minute.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Yes. That will be good

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Premier—honestly!

Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The government allowed Uber in, even though it knew that it would be operating outside the law. I will go through some of the articles. This was all before I became the shadow spokesperson, so I was not aware of what was happening. However, an article in *WAToday* reads —

Tom White is chairman of the Liberal Party's policy committee in WA and until last week was also senior policy adviser to Education minister Peter Collier.

This week, he started a new job as Uber's "demand manager" in Perth, but has not stepped down from his policy position ...

This is what was reported. On 11 July, Paul Murray said —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr N.W. Morton): Members!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo! Please, I am not going to have this descend into interjections.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine! I have just asked people not to interject across the chamber and you continue to do so. I want to hear the member for West Swan without interjections.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: On 11 July, Paul Murray went through all the contacts and connections between the lobbyists for Uber and the government; the office of the Minister for Police; Road Safety—he went through it all. These articles were written at the time by Western Australian journalists who made a connection between what was happening within the Liberal Party and the rise of Uber.

In July last year when I became the shadow Minister for Transport, I was immediately approached by some taxi plate owners who showed me their situation. They had bought plates for \$300 000 in March 2014. When you go through all their costs for the stamp duty that they paid, the cameras in their cars and the inspection fees, it came in early 2014 to over \$330 000. They were operating within a government regulatory environment. Many of these costs were due to government regulation—and that is the basic point. The government fees alone in that transaction were \$27 000. We took up their case straight away. We immediately called in August 2015 for the government to act with some compensation and assistance for the taxi industry, but nothing happened. A green paper was launched but that process ended up being pretty much a sham. Many of the contributions made in the community consultations were ignored. On 14 October, we moved a motion in here to assist taxi plate owners and the taxi industry. The minister at the time said —

I am ... aware that the clock is ticking and I want to provide solutions and certainty ... as quickly as possible.

Since then, nothing has happened. In December last year, a day after the New South Wales minister announced a deregulation process, the minister put out a media release to basically announce deregulation. It was again one of those situations: it was announced in December, yet no legislation came forward for another six months. That was another hit on the taxi industry. When governments announce deregulation, normally the process starts

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immediately so that people are not left with the understanding that there will be deregulation, yet there is nothing to make it happen. They were basically left in no-man's-land for another six months until May this year.

In May this year the government brought in and announced the two tranches of legislation—the Taxi Amendment Bill 2016, which we have in front of us, and another more general change to the taxi industry. By regulation, the government deregulated on 4 July. In the meantime, many families and small businesses have been impacted over years because of the way in which this government has handled the process. This comes from a Liberal Party that purports to support small business and hardworking families. This is a true test case, and the government has let them down. This debate sometimes goes to the quality of a person's last taxi ride versus the quality of another ride. This to me is about fairness and the policy challenge that lies before us. This government has failed to address the policy challenge presented to it, and, now, two years down the track, this government has created a dog-eat-dog world out there. It has given no respect to the people who have invested to help create a taxi service; this government has actually let them down.

I want to go through some key points about where we are at with all these issues. I want to talk about the impact on the value of plates. We heard from government that from 2012 to 2014, the value of plates in WA ranged from \$280 000 to \$290 000. In 2015, that figure dropped to \$220 000, and in 2016, it dropped to \$163 000. Post the new set of regulations, I do not know what that figure is, but given that a person can lease a government plate for \$1 000 a year, the value of private plates would be pretty much next to nothing. That is the only analysis that can be drawn from the fact that a government plate can be leased for \$1 000 a year. This government has overseen a dramatic reduction in the value of these plates. Many people bought plates at the height of the market and some bought them earlier on. The government must understand that it has severely impacted their ability to not only make a living, but also cover the basic cost of running a taxi.

I want to talk about the concept of a level playing field. The whole desire behind this legislation was to create a level playing field, which is surely not being created because not everyone who provides a taxi service has the same requirements. For example, cameras are costly and are required by some parts of the industry, but not by others. The concept of a level playing field does not exist. This government has not created a level playing field. It has basically created a race to the bottom in relation to the wages and conditions of people working in that industry. This government has set no minimum standards and no minimum wages. If that is the case, it is anarchy; there are no rules or regulations that apply to everyone. Why has the government chosen the taxi industry to have no minimum standard when the rest of us do? I do not know. People have said that the new competitors in the taxi industry provide a better service. If I were driver who is not government regulated and need not pay taxes or fees, I could provide everyone with a bottle of water. If a driver does not have to pay any of the taxes and costs, of course he can have more flexibility. The other point is about surcharges and the shortage of taxis on a Saturday night, which is because drivers cannot surcharge. If everyone thought that they could make 100 bucks a trip, they would all be driving on Saturday night. That opportunity was not allowed at the time. Of course, if you allow people to charge whatever they want, we will get more cars on the road. Again, it comes back to that concept of a level playing field.

I will now talk about rank and hail work. The figure put forward by the minister was that 60 per cent of the work undertaken by taxis is rank and hail, and that that work will be exclusive to taxis. That analysis has a couple of problems. First, other competitors set up their own temporary ranks with one of those flashing signs at major sporting events and other key areas. The other issue with rank and hail is that an app is, in effect, an instrument to hail. A person can hail a taxi physically by hand or by using an app. When a group of taxi plate owners took on the government in its enforcement of the legislation, the Supreme Court said that the concept of ride sharing that Uber put forward does not exist; it is a taxi service. The rank and hail concept comes with enormous fees, and taxidrivens are not getting the same volume of business at ranks by any stretch of the imagination because people use either electronic hailing system or an alternative rank. Another case that I see when I go to the rank—I still use taxi services—is that drivers pull up in front of the rank and pick up people. This whole concept of rank and hail being such a major benefit does not exist. Again, that is an argument that has been put forward by the government.

The issue outlined by the member for Hillarys is the example of the government selling plates in the last five years. Again, that is something that the Premier has never acknowledged, but the government was selling plates just a few years ago. The government collected that money but is now saying that those plates are not worth anything—that is basically what the government is doing. The government is basically taking \$200 000 from some Western Australian families.

That is some of the history and facts that led us to this point. I was going to use the example of Mandurah, but I think my colleague the member for Mandurah outlined that pretty well. I will go to some personal examples. Last week, we met Desta about his situation of trying to cover the costs of the borrowings for that plate. He has been working hard in Australia for 18 years. His wife has been working in a factory collecting and saving money to buy a plate. With very young children, they are now unable to cover their costs, and the banks are moving in.

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There were other examples highlighted at the meeting last night at the WA Italian Club. These people have been working hard. They have worked hard, in many cases in factory jobs working long hours, to get the money together to buy their plates, but now they cannot earn a living.

I want to talk about Peter who lives in my electorate. He came here in 1946 from Romania. He worked hard, bought a plate and loved his job. One of the issues I want to raise is that there have been a lot of owner–drivers who have performed a spectacular service for us in not only the tourism community, but also the general community. They are people who have been proud as taxidrivers. They love their job because they love meeting people and they like talking about WA. Peter is such an example. Tourism WA named Peter taxidriver of the year in 2008 and he was again a finalist in 2009. Do members remember the extraordinary taxidriver campaign the government ran in 2010? Peter was a finalist and was part of that campaign. The government was very happy to use people like Peter in its tourism campaigns. It saw the benefit that taxidrivers brought to the tourism industry by having friendly, outgoing demeanours and knowing a lot about WA. The government was happy to use those taxidrivers then, but now, only a few years later, the government is abandoning them. People like Peter are working hard trying to make ends meet and they are finding it difficult to do so.

I have received many emails, but I will not read them all out because I am conscious of the time. I will just read one that was sent to me and another member in this place. I will not say who it is from, because I did not seek their permission. It states that this particular taxidriver had woken up that morning at 3.30 am. The email was sent at 10.27 am and he had completed only four jobs in the last seven hours for a return of about \$70. He said it was a mental trauma and a too familiar situation every day. They are working 12 hours a day, bringing home \$200 gross and then having to subtract GST, tax, mortgage payments, interest, maintenance insurance and registration—the list goes on. He said that the government is basically creating a situation that is unsustainable in the longer term. He made the point that people want to be able to see their families for some hours of the day and to participate in their community.

As I was saying, I think it is incumbent upon us to make sure that we have a sustainable taxi industry into the future. It is like everything—we want a taxi industry into the future, but it has to be sustainable and there has never been that concept. The thinking has been, “What’s the cheapest fare we can get today?” But we all know we have to think about the longer term. We want a taxi service for the longer term. We want people who see this as a career to be able to participate in the longer term. The government is taking that away. Taxi driving cannot just be a part-time job someone has when they have nothing else and they are watching a bit of TV and the kids are looked after; it has to have some element of full-time sustainable professionalism. This whole idea that it is going to be so random that at any time of the day anyone could be driving any vehicle does not make long-term sense to me. Some sustainability has to be brought into the industry.

I want to talk about Uber and what is happening to many of the drivers. We have seen the takes from many of the Uber drivers. As I said, I have nothing against Uber drivers; they are out there trying to make a living too. But I do have a problem with a multinational company that takes 25 per cent of their income and is not contributing to the cost of our roads. All of us, all taxpayers in WA, have built WA roads. Do we just allow any company to come in and use those roads and pay pretty much no fee whatsoever? This is just a transfer of wealth from WA taxpayers to overseas—that is all it is. Uber drivers use their own cars. Are they getting paid for depreciation to cover the long-term replacement cost of those cars? No. Again, it is a wealth transfer from the individual driver to a multinational company. Uber is not paying its fair share and that is why I have a fundamental problem with it. Ultimately, we all have a responsibility to pay for the roads we use and to make our community a better place. There has to be some obligation and responsibility that everyone out there providing the same service is paying in the same way. We are seeing a transfer of wealth from WA taxpayers to elsewhere. That is how I think about it as an economist, but I know that for many individuals it is just about what service they can get at that point in time, and that is fair enough. We live in a very consumer-oriented society. But from a government perspective, from a regulatory perspective, we need to step back and know that we always have to balance the cheapest option with the most sustainable longer term option that can protect the interests of all the players involved and those of the wider public. That is our job. We cannot just say that someone is doing something better today and therefore we think it is a good idea. We have to step back and look at what we believe is more sustainable over the longer term, and that is what I believe we should be doing.

I will wrap up soon, but I want to outline Labor’s position on this issue. We have been watching it with complete dismay for many years. I did not want to go over this part of history again, but Labor tried to deregulate the industry back in 2005–06. That was rejected by some parts of the taxi industry and by the conservative side of politics. If that had happened, we would not be in this mess.

Mr P.T. Miles: Brian Burke was involved.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Pardon?

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Mr P.T. Miles: Your lobbyist was involved, I understand, to your members back then.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think the Liberal Party was involved in rejecting it; it voted against it.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Let us not descend into interjections again, members.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Anyway, so we were there, but that is old news.

Mr C.J. Barnett: It is probably relevant news.

Mr W.J. Johnston: Yes, that you voted against deregulation, yes, that is very relevant news.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That we had a proposal that the Liberal Party rejected that would not have created a mess like this.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Your lobbyist was involved.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Like the Liberal Party's lobbyist?

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Does the Premier want me to read through everything? Okay.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The Premier wants me to read through all the accusations that have been made.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr N.W. Morton): Leader of the Opposition, I am on my feet. Premier! Members, I am going to start calling people. I am on my feet, which means you are silent. I have said a couple of times since I have been in the chair that I do not want this to descend into interjections across the chamber as it just causes havoc and it makes it extremely difficult for Hansard to record. The member for West Swan has indicated she is wrapping up soon. I want to hear what the member for West Swan has to say; she has the call. Please desist from the interjections.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will read a couple of paragraphs from a Paul Murray article, in which he refers to Eacham Curry, stating —

Curry worked on the 2008 Liberal election campaign that brought Colin Barnett to power.

He was rewarded with several appointments as chief of staff in various Barnett ministries, including transport, before moving seamlessly into his role as a lobbyist in 2013.

Until recently, Curry was responsible for representing the illegal ride-sharing business Uber in its dealings with the Barnett Government.

Anyone trying to understand the latest strong endorsement for Uber from Barnett, and more lately Police Minister Liza Harvey, needs to know this background.

Even though Transport Minister Dean Nalder labelled Uber “not a legal service” Mr Barnett this week said his government would find a way of “accommodating” it.

Asked about reports that the Department of Transport was putting private investigators on Uber's case because it had been blocking government inspectors, Harvey said she also supported the company.

“The community appear to have welcomed Uber, so we need to make sure they are operating in a safe regulatory framework,” ...

Uber was operating against existing laws and not paying any of the licence fees to use our roads but the Minister for Road Safety was welcoming Uber. The article continues —

“My concern in this area ... is that the vehicles ... are safe ...

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However, that simply ignores the fact that Uber has been operating in WA unlawfully for a year and Mrs Harvey, also the Road Safety Minister, has no idea whether the vehicles are safe, nor if its drivers are ...

She has no idea whether they are breaking the law. I could keep going but I think it is pretty clear. As I said, we could have made a lot more of this, but we are looking at the future and what we need to do to support the taxi industry today.

We do not believe that a grant of \$20 000 is enough. I think everyone understands that. We will be moving some amendments to address that. We also think that the voluntary buyback scheme should be supported and instituted as soon as possible. The minister has left it too long. For two years, he could have been developing a policy that made economic and financial sense for everyone involved, and he has not. He created a \$20 000 assistance and hardship fund, which is not enough. He should also be out there trying to support the industry in the longer term. More assistance needs to be offered because the reality is that once this bill goes through today, nothing will be presented by this minister until the next election. No further assistance will be given. We believe that more assistance is needed and the government should be providing options to allow people to sell their plates to the government now. People need genuine help. They need a path forward and they need more assistance. The sum of \$20 000 is simply not enough.

If the minister is keen, I am willing to negotiate a higher assistance package in this chamber today. If members of the backbench want to come to me and explore a better assistance package right here and now, I am very keen to do so. For us to just throw up a number, only for it to be rejected, will not be good enough. If people want to talk to me, I am keen to negotiate another number—more than \$20 000. That is an option for everybody. If not, we will move an amendment to the bill. Let it be on everyone's head if they knock that amendment down. Members go out in their communities and say that they support the taxi industry when it is clear that they do not. They have an opportunity to do something about it in this place. I am willing to be responsible about the number but plate owners need to be offered more than \$20 000. That amount is simply not enough to allow for the proper restructure of the industry. I am offering the government that option. There will be other speakers. If any member from the other side, whether it is the member for Belmont or the member for Southern River, is keen to be the negotiator to try to get a better package for the taxi industry today, I invite them to come forward and we will do whatever we can to get a better package. We in the opposition do not have the numbers to do it by ourselves. We want a better outcome. Today is the opportunity to do so. We are simply running out of time —

Mrs G.J. Godfrey: Do you support the proposed levy?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I support a better package. The government has not put a levy on the table. How much will it be and when will it be implemented? The government has had two years to bring forward a policy. I want plate owners to be offered more assistance. How those opposite fund it is up to them. The government has had two years in which to do this. It could have put forward five different well thought out options. It has nothing. As I said, I am willing to compromise and get some greater assistance on the table. Today is our chance. If the legislation is passed today and plate owners are offered only \$20 000, that is it. At the next election, I know that we will have different policies. I think ours will be far more favourable to the taxi industry. I am not willing to wait the extra six months if we can offer the taxi industry a better package now.

In their heart of hearts, I think some members in this place want a better package. I am willing to negotiate more than \$20 000 but government members have to come up with a compromise. This is their chance because if they do not, that is it until after the next election. I say to the minister that the offer is on the table. We have said 100 times that \$20 000 is not enough. Today is the day to sort this out. He has let it go for two years. He has let deregulation happen by stealth for 18 months and deregulation proper for two months without a proper reform process. He has been caught out time and again. He has failed the people who have supported him. This is the issue. These are the people who were supporting him in 2008. I know that for a fact. They were helping him hand out how-to-vote cards. Those people were supporting him and the Liberal Party and he has let them down. It has been two years.

I can hear some of the discussions that the minister is having from across the chamber. I know he said that he would have some more discussions, but where and when and how is not clear. The minister can change the figure of \$20 000 easily by moving an amendment to this legislation. We need it on the table now because this is the time to do it. As I said, it is crazy that the minister allowed deregulation and he brought this legislation into this house in May. I understood that it was meant to be passed by 30 June but it never appeared until this week. That is because we went out and got support for families. I had to ring the office of the Minister for Small Business to try to get the Small Business Development Corporation to support the family that it was meant to be supporting in their negotiations with the bank. After three phone calls, I got a call back. This is the situation we

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have. The minister said that the Small Business Development Corporation is meant to be assisting these taxi plate owners, yet we have to try to sort these things out every day of the week.

This is our offer. We want more assistance for taxi plate owners. We believe today is the day. Because the minister has handled this matter so poorly, this issue will not be resolved by the election. I thought it would be. Quite frankly, the idea that the minister would announce deregulation in December and not have the package sorted for the next 14 months is again beyond me. I did not think we would be in this situation but we are. The taxi industry is hurting. The Labor Party wants a better package for the industry and we are asking the minister for his support.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington) [11.38 am]: I will point out that the member for West Swan has indicated that there will be a couple of extra speakers. This gives the government or backbench members of the Liberal–National coalition an opportunity to talk to the member for West Swan about what the final outcome will look like today. This is the one and only opportunity to get this legislation, the Taxi Amendment Bill 2016, right. After today, it is too late. After the last two years of waiting for something, it comes down to today. What will the Minister for Transport do? Will he improve the package today, because we are going to vote on it today, or will he not improve the package?

Is this all there is? Let us get it clear: if the minister goes out today and says to people, “Oh, well, we’re going to change things; we’re going to improve the package later on; just wait to re-elect the Liberal government”, that is not to be believed. If the minister were genuinely interested in improving the package he is offering to the community and to taxi plate owners, today is the day; for this legislation there is no tomorrow. The minister has had two years to get this right, and this is the package he has presented to us—not a different package, this one. The minister has to tell the truth today and say what the package is. Liberal–National backbenchers keep telling us they can do anything they want in this chamber. Now is their opportunity to come over here, speak to the member for West Swan, say what it is that they would like to see in the amendments, and negotiate the terms of the amendments so that we can get an outcome today, not tomorrow, and not on 12 March 2017—today. If the minister has a plan for something more than he has told us about until now, now is his chance, not tomorrow, and not on 12 March—today. This is the time for him to be honest with the people of this state. He could be honest for the first time in this debate today; this is his opportunity.

As I understand it, there is about \$27 million on the table for the taxi industry transition, of which there is about \$20 million for compensation and \$6 million-odd in the hardship fund. Yesterday we discussed the fact that there had been a \$114 million blowout on Ord stage 2. Five times more than what is being made available to the taxi industry was spent, and it was spent not on the actual Ord River scheme, but just on the blowout on the Ord River scheme. It is not as though the government does not have plenty of money to splash around when it wants to. In final numbers, \$2 billion went on the Perth Stadium and \$500 million, in round figures, on Elizabeth Quay. The government splashes around plenty of money when it wants to; what about the taxidrivers?

Let us be honest here: we all know that most taxidrivers have voted Liberal for a long time because they see themselves as small business people, and the Liberal Party, along with its supporters at 6PR and elsewhere, was in the front line against the Labor Party’s deregulation plans in 2005–06. What did the Liberal Party have to say about this prior to the 2008 election? A press release from that election campaign states —

Western Australian taxi patrons are entitled to expect that if a taxi is booked it will attend, or if a taxi is called for will attend within a reasonable time. To achieve that, Government must first create a viable operating environment for taxi owners and drivers.

That was a Liberal Party election commitment in 2008. What is its story today? Is it free market, devil take the hindmost? It sells a plate to private owners for \$200 000, and today it gives them \$20 000 compensation. The same press release also states —

A Liberal Government will return the ownership of taxi plates currently owned by the Government to the private sector.

That is what the Liberal Party said. Under the paragraph heading “A Fair Return”, the same document states —

The Liberal Party in Government will seek to ensure that taxi operators receive a return on investment that is attractive and that encourages operators to further invest in the industry. To achieve this, the Taxi Advisory Board will regularly review taxi fares to ensure they are adjusted appropriately and in line with key economic indicators.

It is important that taxi fares remain affordable whilst providing a fair return to operators;

The Liberal Party was very happy to shed crocodile tears on behalf of the taxi industry, but today is the minister’s chance to make a difference to the future of many people’s lives.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 8 September 2016]

p5684b-5709a

Mr David Templeman; Mr Dean Nalder; Acting Speaker; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr Rob Johnson; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti

In 2013 there was no hint in the Liberal Party's election commitments of the deregulation that it has now implemented. I quote from the Liberal Party's 2013 transport policy, which states —

While the Liberal-led Government has made progress in consultation with the taxi industry, there is still more to be done. As part of further implementation of our Taxi Action Plan a new occupational licensing system for taxi drivers will be introduced that will provide a penalty point system for all WA taxi drivers and a probation period for new drivers.

What did we get instead? We had deregulation and Uber drivers, who do not have to follow the same rules as taxidrivers.

A couple of years ago a taxidriver from Langford came into my electorate office, and he had been fined for wearing black jeans instead of black trousers while driving his taxi. I talked to him about it and he explained that it was actually the second time in a short period—about six weeks—that he had been fined. He went out to the airport on a Friday night and Department of Transport inspectors were out there, going down the taxi rank, because they knew that every time they went to the airport they would get at least a couple of drivers who were in technical breach of taxidriver rules, and one of the rules is that they cannot wear black jeans; they have to wear black trousers. They fined this taxidriver and risked his continuing capacity to drive—because if he does not pay his fine, he will lose his licence—for wearing the wrong type of trousers. Now the government has deregulated the taxi industry and allows Uber drivers to turn up in anything they want to wear. How is that fair?

The government says that it is returning rank and hail for the taxi industry and that Uber will miss out on that. I have the Uber app on my phone; I must say, I have never used it in Perth, but I used it when I was in America. I have just opened up the app, and I can tell members that there are now eight uberX cars within 500 metres of Parliament House; I can see them all on this Uber app. The idea that retaining the rank for taxidrivers gives the taxi industry an advantage is simply not true; it is incorrect. There is no value for the taxi industry in that because the user of Uber can see where the uberX, UberBLACK and uberXL vehicles are at any time, simply by opening up the app, so that is not a valuable benefit for the taxi industry.

I also remind members that Uber is a \$US70 billion company; it is not some small business, like taxi owners. I have no beef with Uber drivers; many of them live in my electorate, just as many taxidrivers live in my electorate. I do not have any problem with them; they are trying to earn a living and that is what people do—they find the alternatives and have a go. The problem I have is with the way in which the government has allowed this to develop.

I am sure that many Liberal backbenchers have had meetings with taxidrivers in their electorate offices, as I have. Recently I was talking to taxidrivers from Lynwood, Queens Park and elsewhere in my electorate, and one of them pointed out that he had only recently bought his plate and that he and his family had used a mortgage on their house to buy the plate. Because the value of the plate has now collapsed, the bank is saying, “Well, your loan is not fully secured anymore”, so he may end up losing the house he lives in because of the falling value of the plate. These changes are directly impacting on ordinary people in our suburbs, and I am sure there are many such people in the electorates of every suburban member. Another one of the taxidrivers gave me a table—a little Excel spreadsheet he had done up—that compared the positions of a private plate holder, a government plate holder and somebody who might be competing with them through a ride-hailing service.

He points out that the cost of his licence as a private plate owner is about \$24 000 a year when he pays the interest on the loan that he took out to buy the plate. A government plate holder pays roughly \$1 000 and the Uber driver pays \$60. They all pay \$210 in annual administration fees. In registration fees he is paying \$745, as is the government plate holder; the Uber driver pays—according to this little table—\$600. He is spending five grand on his specialist taxi car insurance, which would be the same for the government plate holder, but an Uber driver may be paying, say, \$700 or \$800 for their insurance. They all have to have their car inspected for \$93 a year. Taxidrivers each have to pay \$55 for an annual camera inspection, but there is no camera in a ride-hailing service vehicle, so there is no fee there. He has to pay about \$6 000 a year in repayments on his car. An Uber driver probably pays half that.

The taxi is on the road full-time, so he is paying probably five grand a year on maintenance. The Uber driver is probably driving only at certain times of the year so he would probably get away with about two grand. The taxidriver needs \$10 000 worth of camera equipment in his car; a ride-hailing service driver does not have to pay for such equipment. This taxidriver worked out that his daily running cost is about \$144 a day compared with about \$80 for the government plate holder and about \$20 a day for the Uber driver. In that space between those costs is the amount that the multinational company Uber takes, which is 25 per cent off the top. It would be good for the minister to explain to us the goods and services tax implications for this multinational company. Is it arranging its affairs to make sure that it pays the GST that is paid by the taxi industry? If the business of the Uber driver is turning over less than \$75 000 a year, the Uber driver will not pay any GST. As I understand it, the

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Uber corporation is arguing that its service is being provided overseas and it, therefore, does not pay GST to the commonwealth government. I might be wrong on that, but that is as I understand it. If the minister could explain that in his reply, that would be helpful.

This is a shambles. It is interesting that the minister's agency is prosecuting Tony Galati for having grown too many potatoes when he has just deregulated the potato growing industry, yet, as I understand it, he has not prosecuted anybody for breaching the rules regarding taxis. It would be interesting to know why the minister's agency is prosecuting people for breaching the rules regarding potato growing, but is not prosecuting anybody for breaching the rules regarding taxis. It would be helpful for the minister to explain why he and his agency are enforcing the potato growing issues, but not enforcing the taxi driving issues. What makes potatoes so special that he has prosecuted in the potato industry but he has not chosen to prosecute in the taxi industry?

Let us face it, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr N.W. Morton), as I am sure you are aware, taxidrivers are prosecuted constantly for wearing the wrong trousers, and that is unbelievable. I wrote to the former Minister for Transport a number of times about a constituent in Langford and all his problems with wearing black trousers and being fined. I will not go into it, but there was a whole series of problems with the Fines Enforcement Registry. He almost lost his licence even though he paid the fine. It has a huge impact because if a taxidriver loses their licence, they lose their income. I point out that one of my constituents from East Cannington spent \$185 000 on a plate in 2001 and \$295 000 on a plate in 2010. He has been in Australia, from India, for 26 years and he has worked hard and built himself a life, but now his investment in taxi plates will be worthless.

I make the point that it is not as though the Liberal Party has been silent on this issue. The Liberal Party actively supported the continuation of the regulation of the taxi industry. When an alternative was on the table, the Liberal Party chose to resist that alternative.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The Liberal Party resisted it. I was very interested in what the member for Wanneroo said, and perhaps he will participate in the debate. He made some sort of snide remark when the member for West Swan pointed out that these Liberal Party apparatchiks have been lobbying the government and getting the inside track on behalf of Uber to make sure that Uber's interests are taken into account. The member for Wanneroo talked about what happened in 2005–06 and who was lobbying on either side of the debate then. He indicated that Brian Burke was lobbying against deregulation. The member is right. Brian Burke and the Liberal Party stopped deregulation because, as we remember, the Labor Party did not have the numbers in Parliament, because we have never controlled the upper house. The conservative side of politics has always been able to prevent legislation getting through. I understand that the member indicated that Brian Burke and the Liberal Party stopped deregulation of the taxi industry at that time, and that is what happened. We are making that point. Brian Burke helped the Liberal Party to stop the deregulation of the taxi industry when the Labor Party made the proposal, and now these Liberal Party apparatchiks have been crawling all over the Minister for Transport and his office to lobby on behalf of a \$70 billion American company to deregulate the taxi industry. The big criticism of the Liberal Party in 2005–06 was that the Labor Party was not providing a significant enough compensation package to the taxi plate owners. What do we have today? There is effectively no compensation; \$20 000 is barely an insult.

I want to make a point about the hardship package. What a disgrace. A media adviser would have come up with the hardship package, because that allows the minister to go on radio and say, "Well, we have a hardship package, so if somebody's in exceptional circumstances and is in hardship, they've got a hardship package". But, of course, effectively, everybody who owns a taxi plate will suffer hardship, because most of the taxi plate owners are ordinary folk. They are not rich people; they are the sort of people who live next door to all of us who live in the working class parts of Perth. Those people's houses are on the line. It is not their investment. Like so many people in small business, they have effectively put their house on the line to make a living. Therefore, all of them are in hardship, and \$6 million shared across all the taxi plate owners is about 600 bucks each. But it is enough for the minister to go on radio and say that the government has a hardship package and so people do not have to worry about everybody losing their houses. The fact that the hardship package does not help anybody is beside the point because the minister is able to go on radio and use it as the fig leaf to protect him from the fact that, unlike people in other industries, he is not providing proper compensation to the people who are losing out.

I have another example of an individual taxidriver who has talked to me. He migrated from Malaysia eight years ago with his wife and two kids. He spent \$290 000 of borrowed money three years ago to buy his taxi plate. What is the government going to do for that constituent? There is also a taxidriver in the electorate of Mr Acting Speaker (Mr N.W. Morton) who pointed out to me that he applied for a government-owned plate, but he was 12 days short of having been in the industry long enough at the time the plates were being offered to be given a lease plate. Instead, he spent \$300 000 two years ago to buy a plate—his plate will now be devalued,

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and, basically, totally written off. These are the actual stories of real people, and they need action. The member for West Swan made clear that if the government has a better package and if members of the Liberal–National Party coalition backbench have some proposals to discuss, today is it—not tomorrow and not on 12 March 2017; today is it. We are going to see, today, where they really stand.

I will finish with another example of a taxidriver who has spoken to me. He left Ethiopia 14 years ago, when the place was at war with Eritrea so that Eritrea could break away. He spent three and a half years in Kenya. He moved to Australia and met his wife here. His wife works in a childcare centre. Six years ago he bought a house in Queens Park, and two and a half years ago he spent \$300 000 on plates. He paid about \$10 000 in stamp duty on those plates to the state government, and \$7 000 of other expenses. He had been working in the taxi industry for two and a half years as a driver. He had to borrow \$317 000, because of course he had to borrow the money for the stamp duty of \$10 000 he paid to the government, and there was \$7 000 of other fees and charges that the government levied on him; 100 per cent of that \$317 000 was borrowed from the bank on a second mortgage. As I say, there is potential for him to lose his house as well as his plates. The \$20 000 compensation will be 10 months' payments to the bank for his loan. His loan is over 30 years and he has been paying it for two and a half years, so he has 27 and a half years to go on his loan. He is asking what he is supposed to do for the next 26 years and eight months, until the end of his loan repayments. The \$20 000 will cover him for 10 months, but not beyond that. He is saying that if he is not going to be compensated the \$317 000 the plates cost, he would like \$12 000 a year—\$1 000 a month—so that he can continue to make the payments on the plates. I point out to the minister that this is the real story of a real person who lives in Queens Park in my electorate. How will the government's \$6 million hardship compensation help my constituent? What in the government's plan gets him off the hook? If the government simply gives him \$20 000, he will lose his house—he will lose his house! There is no other outcome for him.

Think about this: when the lobbyists for Uber were offering free trips to the Liberal Party state conference where the Liberal Party was debating whether it would support —

Mr M. McGowan: Were they?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes.

When the Liberal Party was debating whether it would support the deregulation of the taxi industry, where were the interests of my constituents that I have outlined today being considered? When the government was compensating potato growers for the deregulation of the potato sector and industry, where was it considering the needs of people in the taxi industry? The minister sat in cabinet and approved \$114 million to be spent not on investment—but this is on the blowout! This is the money the government spent because it did not manage the project properly, not the underlying money. There was a \$114 million blowout on the Ord stage 2 scheme. Why was the government able to do that, but not adequately compensate the people of my electorate who are going to lose their house if they are not given a proper level of compensation?

Mr R.F. Johnson: And in my electorate.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: That is the case, apart from people in the western suburbs and a few other places where taxidrivers generally cannot afford to live. I am sure some people have taxi plates as a third-line investment. They have \$1 million in shares, million-dollar houses and a couple of taxi plates, but they are not the people I am worried about. I am worried about people who drive taxis and have invested in taxi plates. They might have bought a second taxi plate because that is the industry they understand. They understood the finances and economics of the taxi industry, but they do not understand the finances and economics or have any inside knowledge to invest in other things in West Perth or whatever; this is what they knew. The rules have changed, particularly, as I say, after the Liberal Party put its arm around the taxi industry in 2005–06 and said, “We don't want deregulation.” In 2008 the Liberal Party said that the Labor government had not done it right because the Labor government was interested in deregulation, and the Liberal Party was going to stop it. In 2013, when the Liberal Party said it was going to introduce a new licensing system for taxidrivers, nothing about deregulation was mentioned. It is not as though taxi deregulation is a new thing. Going back to the 1980s, reports have been done by the Productivity Commission and other places about the taxi industry; it is not as though this is a new topic. What is new is that a \$70 billion US company has come in and used technology to change the way we order a taxi. That is what has changed. It is not the need for deregulation. What has changed is that the Liberal Party, having spent all those years with its arm around the taxidrivers, is now hiding from them.

Today is the day, minister. If the minister wants to do more than \$20 000 a plate, today is the day to tell us—not the 12 March promise. As the Premier keeps saying, we should not listen to people's election promises; it is the vibe. Tell us what the government is going to do today.

Mr David Templeman; Mr Dean Nalder; Acting Speaker; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr Rob Johnson; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition) [12.07 pm]: I think some of the speeches on this issue have been very good and I do not intend to speak for a long time, but I want to put a few points on the record.

First of all, I welcome along to Parliament today the members of the taxi industry who are here to listen to this debate on the Taxi Amendment Bill 2016. Naturally, it is an issue of great concern to them because it is their businesses and homes that are at risk. I find the flippancy with which some members of this place and some members of the community treat this issue of the livelihoods and the property that people have invested in disturbing. I find it disturbing that there is so little understanding, empathy or sympathy in regard to this issue amongst some people in our community.

As with all members, people have come into my electorate office and talked to me about what has gone on. I have talked to taxidrivers. A gentleman came in a month or two ago to explain to me his family situation, and I think this is the overwhelming experience of the taxi industry. The family are migrants. They came to Australia, brought whatever savings they had and looked for an opportunity. The migrant experience, both here and internationally, is often that people go and invest in taxis. If people get into a taxi in the United States, they will often find they are driven by migrants. If people get into a taxi in Britain, they will often be driven by migrants. People will have a similar experience here. People have saved up and come to this country. The skills or qualifications they may have from their homelands are often not recognised here and they may have language difficulties, but they have a willingness to work hard and put in a lot of hours and a desire to better themselves and their families and thereby provide opportunities for their children. We often find this to be the case, as with the gentleman who came to my office; he is a university qualified civil engineer. His father had bought a taxi plate and that was the livelihood for the family when he was growing up. Now the family is in difficulty because of events that are beyond their control. We find this to be the common experience; these people came to this country and looked for an opportunity. This is where the flippancy and lack of empathy of some people comes in.

We hear from some people, “Well, it’s just business. Things happen in business; sometimes it goes well and sometimes it goes badly. That’s risk and business involves risk.” They say that therefore sometimes people invest and they do well, and sometimes they invest and they do badly—that is the fundamental of a market-based economy and a free enterprise system. That would be a legitimate argument but for one thing. I think this is lost on some people. When people invested in the taxi industry, it was a regulated market—it was regulated by law in an act of this very chamber in which we are standing. People therefore came to this country as migrants and invested in the taxi industry on the basis that it was the law that their competitors were defined by an act of Parliament. They invested all their savings and all their income and borrowed against future earnings on the basis that the taxi industry was a market that was regulated by this chamber—by the Parliament of the land. A lot of people around the world, including here, look to the government and think if the government has said what the situation is and what the laws are, they can rely on that. People therefore invested based on that reliance on the law. The argument that it is just free enterprise or just the market—like it or lump it—does not work when the market is regulated by a law of Parliament. What is more, the law has significant penalties for companies or individuals who breach that law. All the people who invested therefore understood that although they paid a premium for a plate to drive their cars around to pick people up and take them to another destination, that premium was based upon a set of laws they could rely on.

Over the last five or six years, it turns out that technology has, to a degree, overtaken that situation. If it was not a regulated market or if people invested on the basis of a market that was not regulated, I would agree that technology moves on and things change. Once upon a time, we riveted ships. These days, they are welded. All the riveters no longer have jobs. Things change as time goes along. However, the taxi industry is a regulated market by law of this Parliament; therefore, there is an obligation on the state to resolve this issue fairly for the people.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Particularly when people paid the government up to \$200 000 —

Mr M. McGOWAN: I was coming to that.

The member for Hillarys told the story of a family in his electorate who, three or four years ago, paid the government a couple of hundred thousand dollars—a couple of hundred thousand!—for a plate, and the compensation to be returned by the government is \$20 000. Seriously? How is that fair on small business people who rely upon the law? They did not pay the money to another plate owner; they paid the money to the state. In effect, the state has ripped off these people to the tune of \$180 000. For me, as I said, if it was not a regulated market, it would be one of those things. Time moves on and markets change. It would be unfortunate, but that is the society we live in. However, it is not. It is a regulated market and, therefore, considering there is an act of Parliament to regulate the industry and the number of plates, there is an obligation on the state to do the right thing by these people.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 8 September 2016]

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Mr David Templeman; Mr Dean Nalder; Acting Speaker; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr Rob Johnson; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti

I know that it is a tricky issue, but that is what ministers are paid for. The Minister for Transport has been at the centre of much controversy lately regarding his own ambitions for himself. As a minister in a government, we had Hon Alannah MacTiernan as the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. She loved controversial, difficult issues. She loved to get in the middle of them and understand the issue, and then come up with an innovative solution. That is what she loved. She did not see her role as coming into Parliament and reading out a list of roads that she might be building or resurfacing. That was not her role. That is what this Minister for Transport seems to think is the role: the department delivers a list of roads and he comes in here and reads out the roads that have been built. That is not his role as a minister. As a minister, with the opportunities presented by having executive control of the agency, his role is to use his imagination, cleverness, ability and power to resolve issues. That is what it is. This does not resolve the issue here today. Anyone can tell the minister that if a family loses \$180 000 by paying the state over the last few years, that does not resolve the issue fairly. The Australian way of doing things is to treat people fairly—I think it is anyway. I think that is what defines us. I am pretty sure that in other countries around the world, it would just be bad luck. But that is not the Australian way of doing things; the Australian way is fairness for people.

The Minister for Transport is in the heart of controversy. He seems to be in the paper every day with his leadership ambitions and his knowledge of polls and all the rest of it that he has been up to, including his chastisement by the Premier and his threats to be sacked. The role of the minister is not about him. He seems to think it is all about him, but it is not. It is about fixing issues like this. These people deserve a decent outcome. The Taxi Amendment Bill 2016 will not deliver a decent outcome.

The opposition will move some amendments. The shadow Minister for Transport, who has that capacity to throw herself into the middle of an issue and try to work out solutions, was there last night when the taxidrivers had a meeting in North Perth. She is not afraid of going to these things. She talked to the taxidrivers and has been working away at resolving their problems. We will move some amendments today to try to resolve this issue. Despite all our requests for government members to come and speak to us, we have seen members in the media—I think the member for Belmont and the member for Southern River—saying that they are on the side of a fair resolution for taxidrivers. I expect not one member opposite will cross the floor to support us. I expect not one member opposite will talk to the shadow minister or cross the floor to support our amendments. The amendments are very, very simple and straightforward and achieve a great deal more fairness in this bill. I expect not one member opposite will support them. However, if that is the case—if members opposite are not prepared to put their vote on the line or sit on the other side of the chamber from the Premier and have him look at them, and know they are voting against his resolution—they cannot then go out and tell taxidrivers that they are on their side. Government members should not pretend that they are on their side, because they are not.

We have heard about the potato growers' issue. For the last five years or so, I have been calling for a reform to those laws. I am pleased that that has happened. I note that the Minister for Transport is also the Minister for Agriculture and Food and I note that the 70 potato growers received a very significant compensation package. Virtually, all those potato growers live in safe Liberal or National Party electorates.

A government member interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: They do. They all live virtually to a person in safe Liberal and National Party electorates. It is fair to say that the potato growers of WA are a reliable voting base for the Liberal and National Parties. They got fair treatment. Of course, the potato industry had to be deregulated because the system was ridiculous. As a member of Parliament, I have been saying that for 15 years, but as Leader of the Opposition, I have been saying it for five years. Thank God it has been fixed. The government gave them fair treatment. They have their land and the opportunity to grow whatever crops suit their land and expertise, but they still got fair compensation. Why does the government have different arrangements for and a different attitude towards taxidrivers? I understand that there are a lot more taxidrivers than there are potato growers, that they do not all live in Liberal Party electorates and that a lot of them are not members of the Liberal or National Parties, but they deserve fair treatment because that is the Australian way of doing things.

As I listened to the member for West Swan, I saw the Premier sniping at her under his breath. I will tell members what that tells me. It tells me that the Premier has been here a long time listening to members of the opposition and sometimes that annoys him. It also tells me that he has a tired bunker mentality.

Mr J.H.D. Day: You're making it up.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Leader of the House of all people is the most tired. He looks as though he is asleep half the time.

Mr J.H.D. Day: I am lulling you into a false sense of security!

A government member: You'd better watch for the sucker punch, Leader of the Opposition.

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Mr M. McGOWAN: I will not be nasty to the member for Kalamunda. But it is true. When there are controversial issues, governments that have been in power for a long period get in a bunker and think that they are right and everyone else is wrong, but eventually everyone else gets them. That is what is happening here, because the government is not prepared to listen to these people and it is not prepared to treat them fairly. That is what is going on here. The government should treat them with a bit of fairness. It should listen to the amendments we put forward and actually do something for the decent, hardworking people who invested in this industry on the basis of its regulated market. The government was elected in 2008 on the basis of supporting that market. I will not dwell on the issues that the members for Cannington and West Swan raised, but there were moves to deregulate the industry. Do members opposite know what compensation was offered by the state Labor Party in 2006? It was \$230 000 per plate or thereabouts. Do members know what the Liberal and National Parties did? They said that that was not good enough. Do government members know what expectations taxidrivens have of the government?

Mr J.H.D. Day: The industry was short-sighted to oppose it.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Leader of the House told them to oppose it.

Mr J.H.D. Day: I did not.

Mr M. McGOWAN: There you go; talk about leading with your chin. Talk about sucker punches over there—whatever your name is.

Mr S.K. L'Estrange: Nice.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I do not know who said it. It was one of you. I am not wearing my glasses and, to be fair, the three of you—in fact, the four of you—all look the same. In fact, the five of you look the same!

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: To be fair, I am not wearing my glasses and I swear that the five members from that corridor along are quintuplets!

Mr J.H.D. Day: It is a pity the industry opposed it at the time.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The industry opposed it, but it opposed it because people such as Dan Barron-Sullivan, who was Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party at the time, met industry members on the front steps of Parliament House, told them to oppose it and said that the Liberal Party would give the industry a better deal. That is what happened. The Leader of the House can disown that and shake his head. I can see he is doing that from exasperation about how bad that was and how wrong Dan Barron-Sullivan was, but it was his party that did it. We offered them \$230 000, but the Liberal Party said that it would give them a better deal and now it is offering them \$20 000. What does the Leader of the House think they think of him? I think they were mistaken to not have supported it and I think they now think that they were mistaken to not have supported it. Of course they should have supported it. But they were given assurances of a better deal by the Liberal Party if elected; it was elected and now look at what it is doing. Honestly, this issue has become a travesty over the last few years. It is a travesty that the Minister for Transport sat there dithering about this issue during that time. He does not know whether he is—I was going to say something or a shiver—Arthur or Martha. He should immerse himself in the issue, come up with a decent solution that is based on fairness and understand that there are serious morality issues in the way the government is treating people in this industry.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [12.26 pm]: I rise to make some brief comments. I am always reluctant to do so after the member for Cannington and before the member for Armadale because I usually find myself feeling totally inadequate because of the information and facts and figures that they provide. I want to make a couple of observations.

A lot of taxidrivens live in the seat of Kwinana, particularly in the area of Bertram in the east of my electorate. I know this because for the first time in my life, I know I will always be guaranteed a cab to Perth Airport on time and ready to go. I am always the first job of the day. Taxidrivens never fail to mention the difficulties they are confronting as a result of what is, on the one hand, a significant digital disruption to their industry and, on the other, the ineptitude of a government whose failure to respond appropriately to that disruption has left them facing significant financial losses and lost opportunities.

The Leader of the Opposition presented very well the dilemma that they currently face. A lot of people in the community, particularly those of the philosophical ilk who sit on the other side, say that having entered the marketplace, they have to wear the impact of change in that market. That is what happens when people go into business; they make an investment and they live or die by the wisdom of that investment. Essentially, they have to take what comes in market changes. But, of course, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, this is not an ordinary market. This market was essentially artificially contrived through government regulation and laws, and

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people invested in the market on the strength of those laws. They invested in a process that would protect them as operators of cabs. They made an investment in the industry on the basis of the laws in place at the time. They cannot be accused of not seeing what was coming. Essentially, the value of their investment was upheld by the strength of the provisions of the law. They paid a premium for that, which is why taxi plates became so expensive; they were protected from the risk to which people in other markets would otherwise be exposed. The decision by plate owners was a particularly rational one, and now that the rules have changed, they rightly feel aggrieved. The rules have changed because the government of the day refused to enforce those rules.

When Uber came along, the Minister for Transport sat on his hands and allowed the situation to deteriorate whereby the deregulation from that digital disruption became so unstoppable that it would not matter what laws we passed; people would continue to flout those laws and undermine the investment that people had made based upon government regulation and laws. In effect, the taxi legislation took away the risk associated with other competitors coming into the market and a premium was paid because the risk was alleviated and mitigated by government regulation. It created a false market but a market upon which people should rightly have made investments because they always assumed they would have a Minister for Transport that had the bottle, the backbone and the capacity to stop people simply coming into the marketplace, ignoring the laws that were in place, and undermining and completely demolishing that market. There was a positive obligation upon the Minister for Transport to do one of two things: one, he should have prosecuted those Uber drivers and forced them out of the industry to bring it back to that regulated environment—obviously that was always going to be a difficult task—or, two, he should have acted more swiftly to protect the investments that these cab drivers had made and move the industry on to a new footing. But of course we did not have a minister who did that; we had a minister who dithered, sat on his hands and simply watched the situation. Now we have what is essentially a crisis. Cab drivers have made investments that are now almost worthless and they made those investments on the basis of loans that they now cannot service, and that all rests at the front door of this minister.

We are in a time of change right across all our industries. The transport industry will not be the only industry to be confronted by digital disruption. The health industry and a whole range of areas will ultimately face significant disruption as a result of the advancement of digital technology. It is not surprising that people get blindsided from time to time because of that disruption. That disruption will go to the very highest level of the service industry. We have seen it impact upon banking and we will see it impact upon the legal service. As I said, the health system will be almost unrecognisable in a decade in terms of what will happen in that space. There is an obligation on people to move swiftly to make sure that the regulations and the laws that regulate these industries are appropriate and that the right things are in place to make sure that those markets do not fail once they move to the new digital age. One of the minister's defences is: "How could we have seen this coming? This is a significant change to the industry. We are not bringing this legislation in late. We have got onto this on time." The minister's office knew exactly what was going on and it chose to do nothing about it—well, not everyone in the minister's office. A few of his staff saw what was going on and they acted on that opportunity quick smart, yet the minister himself sat on it and did nothing at all.

The other day my attention was drawn to an article back in May 2016 in which a Chris King had launched his move into the Uber-based transport market with a significant investment into that area. He was looking to take advantage of the deregulation of, and digital disruption to, our taxi industry. Mr King saw the opportunity that was coming for him. Mr King says that there was a great opportunity and he saw it. Why did he see it? Why did he feel that he had the jump and was able to make this bold investment of \$60 million to establish Uber-related services right across the country? Mr King launched the company, and the article states —

It was a risky move for the former WA ministerial officer, with Uber still unregulated in most states.

"It was still a grey area of the law," Mr King said. "I had a gut feeling, I've worked for the Minister for Transport and State Treasurer.

"Knowing that the taxi industry needed to be fixed up, Uber provided a good opportunity for politicians and bureaucrats to fix the system.

"You've got to take a risk to earn the reward right?"

There was some insight going on in the Minister for Transport's office and some of this staff saw the opportunity that was coming along as a result of the Minister for Transport not acting on what was obviously going to be a significant change to the taxi industry. While the minister did nothing at all and watched people's investments burn as the value of their taxi plates reduced, some of his former staff who saw this stuff happening and must have chatted to him about it thought that this was a great opportunity, so they got out and got in to what was fast becoming the rogue market of cab-related services. Although some of the minister's former staff are doing quite well out of this thank you very much, the minister did nothing at all. Now he has the audacity to come forward with this legislation and this hopelessly inadequate offering to the cab drivers of Western Australia. They

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invested in good faith upon the legal framework that was in place and in the belief that the government of the day would protect the industry because it was underpinned by government legislation. The opportunities that came with that investment are now disappearing in front of them. The value of those plates is going through the floor all because of the hopelessly inadequate response from the Barnett government.

As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, Labor had a package or a solution to what was obviously coming on the horizon. As the minister at the time, Hon Alannah MacTiernan brought that solution to the table. As the Leader of the Opposition so appropriately pointed out, that was opposed at the time by the Liberal Party. We can now see what a generous and adequate package that was to alleviate the industry of what is now an almost irretrievable situation. I hope that the Minister for Transport provides some explanation to the chamber when he makes his reply speech about why we have taken so long to reach this point in time. We want to know why the compensation that has been put on the table is so inadequate and why the minister's government cannot provide a better package for these cab drivers that provides justice so that cab drivers living in the outer suburbs of Perth such as Bertram receive an appropriate package and we can ensure an orderly transition of this industry. As demonstrated to me by the representative from Uber, I know that there are sod all Uber cars in the outer suburbs of Perth. This is a very real issue. If we allow the whole market to be picked off by these entrepreneurial opportunists who come in and cream the best of the market, the inner city transport opportunities, the transport facilities for people living in the outer suburbs will be inadequate.

I know that the shadow Minister for Transport has some amendments that she will bring to this legislation, and I want the government to reflect carefully on those, because we are the ones who have been talking to the industry. The member for West Swan was the one who was at the meeting last night. We are the ones who have listened to the industry and we are the ones who have heard the industry. We want to make sure that we provide some justice to the industry.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armada) [12.40 pm]: I also rise to contribute to the debate on the Taxi Amendment Bill 2016. As many people in the public gallery know, a number of taxidriviers in the taxi industry are very concerned with what is being proposed in this bill. I will get on to this a bit later, but I suppose one has to ask how the minister reached the figure of \$20 000 and what he honestly believes taxidriviers can do with that to recoup the incredible loss that has resulted from the way the industry is developing now. Is it a form of compensation? Is it an adjustment compensation package? Is it supposed to be compensation for wrong done by the government or someone else? Is it just trying to distribute wealth of \$20 000 from the government to taxidriviers even though they might have paid \$200 000 for their plates? What does that \$20 000 seek to do? Reading *Hansard* from last night, I noticed that the minister had an interesting exchange with the member for Gosnells. He was talking about the \$20 000, how much the plates cost and trying to elicit what that \$20 000 was meant to do. The minister was saying that it was an adjustment assistance grant.

Mr D.C. Nalder: He was saying that was what we determined as the value of the plate.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, and I know the minister said that it is not. There is no way that is the value of the plate and that is quite clear. But the question is: what is it? It was interesting that the Leader of the Opposition mentioned the package put up by the state Labor government with Hon Alannah MacTiernan as the transport minister, which was rejected by the industry at the time—obviously in hindsight it regrets that now—and the Liberal Party, the current government. It seems absurd that the Liberal Party was opposing a compensation package of around \$200 000 and yet now it supports a package of \$20 000. The member for West Swan has put out an offer; has she received any offers yet?

Mr J.E. McGrath: Haven't heard.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Has the member for South Perth not heard?

Mr J.E. McGrath: I haven't heard from the member for West Swan yet.

Dr A.D. BUTI: She spoke, but the member was not in the chamber. The member for West Swan —

Mr J.E. McGrath: Hang on, I have been in the chamber all morning. The member for West Swan has not told the minister what her recommendation is.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Excuse me, the member for South Perth has not been here all morning. The member for South Perth is misleading Parliament.

Mr J.E. McGrath: I sat through the member for West Swan's speech. Are you blind? I have been here all morning.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Did the member for South Perth not hear what the member for West Swan said?

Mr J.E. McGrath: The member said she would move an amendment and she was willing to talk to members on this side about what that might be.

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Dr A.D. BUTI: Exactly.

Mr J.E. McGrath: She hasn't spoken to any of us and has not paid the minister the courtesy of telling him what the —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Member for South Perth, you say I am blind; maybe you are deaf. What the member —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): I understand it was an interjection and I understand the member will respond to it. I am just putting a pause between things so we can keep them on a civil basis.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Member for South Perth, it was quite clear, in plain English, from the member for West Swan. She made an offer for members of the government backbench to come and see her, not for her to go and see them—for them to come and see her. If they want to do it, that is fine, but do not blame the member for West Swan. She put the offer to them. If they do not want to take it up, they should not take it up.

Mr J.E. McGrath: I would have thought that the protocol would have been —

Dr A.D. BUTI: You know a lot about protocol, especially barbecue protocol. You know a lot about leadership barbecue protocol. Member for South Perth, I do not want to take any more interjections from you because they are just ridiculous interjections. The member for West Swan made a very interesting offer that is very rarely made in this chamber. If members of the backbench do not want to take it up, that is fine. It is not up to the member for West Swan to go around chasing members of the backbench. She is the alternative transport minister. If you want to speak to the member for West Swan, speak to her.

Mr J.E. McGrath: Go back to university; you've got no idea.

Dr A.D. BUTI: About what?

The ACTING SPEAKER: We are pretty clear on that point, so let us stop the interjections across the floor. We are clear on that point now; we understand what was said. Let us move on to the next part of the debate.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member for South Perth got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning, definitely!

Mr J.E. McGrath: I'll be speaking on this later on anyway and I want you in the chamber when I speak.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I beg your pardon? Do not try to direct me, mate! Who do you think you are?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Armadale!

Dr A.D. BUTI: The only contribution you have ever made —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Armadale, I am on my feet. I am just going to take a few moments.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I am just going to stand here until you are all calm, you are all collected, you all know where you are heading and you are directed. Are you ready? Does the member want me to stand up again, because I will stand up as quickly again?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is a shame that the member for South Perth interjected on this incredibly important issue. I was mentioning that no-one had taken the offer from the member for West Swan. I do not want to continue with this because it is just a waste of time on such an important issue, but I will just say one thing to the member for South Perth. I have been here for six years and his contribution to this Parliament has been minimal. For the member to tell me to go back to university—member, I may have gone to university, but I also grew up in Armadale. I am not a person who does not know about what happens to the taxidriver who comes in to see me, who has invested their life savings and their family's life savings into an industry regulated by the government on a certain representation, and is now being offered \$20 000. That is what I know, member for South Perth; I have some idea. I look forward to your contribution, but I will decide whether I am here, because certainly none of your other contributions in the last six years I have been here have been worth listening to. If you want to speak, you speak. The point is that the member for West Swan has made an offer to members of the backbench and if they want to take it up they can, but if they do not take it up, backbenchers should not go out to their electorates and say they are standing up for taxidrivers, because those taxidrivers, the media and the Labor Party will make sure that we tell the electors of the backbenchers' electorates that they have not supported taxidrivers. They have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in this industry and what is the government offering? It is offering \$20 000. What a joke. We will be interested to hear the minister tell us what that \$20 000 will do. We are led to believe that it is an assistance package, but where is that going to go? What is \$20 000 to someone who has invested a couple of hundred thousand dollars? This is an incredibly difficult issue, I understand that, but this government introduced this legislation in May and it has waited until now to bring it on. These taxidrivers are living in a period of incredible uncertainty. The offer by the member for West Swan remains. The Liberal Party always seeks to consider itself different from the Labor Party because its members are free and they can vote on matters of conscience—they can listen to what they think is right. But they do not

Mr David Templeman; Mr Dean Nalder; Acting Speaker; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr Rob Johnson; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti

do it. It may only be a conscience vote in name, because no members of the Liberal Party actually do it. If they are really being honest in saying they support taxidivers, they will come to the member for West Swan. It is absurd for the member for South Perth to expect the member for West Swan to go chasing backbenchers; they know who she is.

Mr J.E. McGrath interjected.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not taking your interjections, so be quiet.

The member for West Swan has said that she is open to members of the backbench going to her. If the minister wants to see the member for West Swan, I am sure that she will have a discussion with him. There are no problems there. I do not think the minister requires the assistance of the member for South Perth on this matter. It is quite incredible that the member for South Perth, who sold out the racing industry—he basically sells out most people and hardly ever contributes to debates in this place—is suddenly fired up. He usually spends more time in the dining room. What did he have for lunch? Did he have something that fired him up? He is certainly really going at it today. In six years, I have never seen him like this. It is quite amazing. I thought I would be the last person to fire up the member for South Perth but for some reason I fired him up, which is quite interesting.

Mr J.E. McGrath interjected.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member for South Perth is so righteous. What contribution has he made?

Mr J.E. McGrath: You've done nothing in six years in this place.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Member for South Perth! Member for Armadale!

Dr A.D. BUTI: Coming from you, that is a bit rich.

The ACTING SPEAKER: You are both called. I am on my feet.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 5721.]