



Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Tuesday, 5 April 2022

Legislative Council

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THE PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy) took the chair at 2.00 pm, read prayers and acknowledged country.

CHAMBER SEATING PLAN

Statement by President

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy) [2.02 pm]: Members, I have approved a small seating change, which will see the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Disability Services moved into the seating of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney General.

BILLS

Assent

Message from the Governor received and read notifying assent to the following bills —

1. Administration Amendment Bill 2021.
2. Wittenoom Closure Bill 2021.
3. Mutual Recognition (Western Australia) Amendment Bill 2021.

PARLIAMENTARY EDUCATION OFFICE — CHAMBER PHOTOGRAPHY

Statement by President

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy) [2.03 pm]: Further to my email on Friday, I would like to remind members that the Parliamentary Education Office will be taking photographs around 2.30 pm today for inclusion in the virtual tour project. Members may choose to remove items from their desks that they do not want to be inadvertently captured in the images.

PAPERS TABLED

Papers were tabled and ordered to lie upon the table of the house.

TREASURER'S ADVANCE AUTHORISATION BILL 2022

Second Reading

Resumed from 22 March.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [2.07 pm]: Thank you, President.

Hon Sue Ellery: Great speech! The best he's ever given.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: President, that might have been my best speech ever!

A member interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Here we go!

The PRESIDENT: The Leader of the Opposition has the call and the question is that the bill be read a second time.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you, President. Gee, it was bad enough when they cut me down from unlimited and now they are going to cut me down to nothing! Government censorship at its best—my goodness. The Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2022 is one of these joyful appropriation bills on which we have some degree of latitude in speaking about the key issues of the day economically. I know that the Minister for Emergency Services in particular enjoys the cut and thrust of economic debate across the chamber. I am sure he has been waiting with bated breath for this particular bill to come along, so I am very much looking forward to this debate. Obviously, we need to start with some of the general economic parameters faced by the state before we progress into the detail of the proposal for expenditure within the bill itself. It has to be said that the state of Western Australia is doing fiscally very well—remarkably well. As I have said on the odd occasion in this chamber, Western Australia is one of the few, if not the only jurisdiction in the world, that has been making a hefty profit out of the COVID experience. In all of our debates we need to remember that Western Australia has done so much better because it is making a profit out of worldwide stimulus spending. That is a good thing for the people of Western Australia but it should be acknowledged. I would like to go into that in a little more detail soon.

The state of Western Australia is rolling in cash. The Treasurer, who is also the Premier, is rolling in cash. I have been known to use the example that it is a bit like Scrooge McDuck rolling in his Money Bin. I do not think that has changed significantly since then. It is one of those games that can be played. I hope his staff are listening to that.

He is like Scrooge McDuck rolling in his Money Bin because he has this mass of wealth raining down upon him. There have been a few recent examples of exactly how and why this has occurred. I thought I would take a few minutes at the start of my address to look at those things.

One of the more recent events that occurred was the 25 February release of the *Quarterly financial results report* of the second quarter of the 2021–22 financial year, that is, October November and December. I was able to slip out a nice little media release at the time. I thought it useful for members to get a feel for how much money is rolling into the Treasurer's coffers, and, as the overview summary of the *Quarterly financial results report* was very good, I might just read a small section of that in, just to remind members. It said this —

The general government sector recorded an operating surplus of almost \$4.8 billion for the six months to 31 December 2021, a \$1.8 billion increase on the surplus reported for the same period in 2020–21.

I make the note that the 2020–21 budget recorded at the end of the process a \$5.8 billion surplus in total. Members should note that in the first six months of the year we were already at a surplus of \$4.8 billion at that point and well on the way to nearly \$2 billion up on the previous year. That \$5.8 billion surplus turned out to be a record surplus for any state in Australia in the history of Australia—the biggest wealth accumulation that had ever occurred. Bearing in mind that this comes from a state with one of the smaller populations, it is a fairly massive effort. Obviously, we will find out in a minute why we find ourselves in that situation, because the paper goes on to give an indication. Following on from that first sentence in the overview, there are a couple of dot points. The report states —

- General government revenue for the first six months of 2021–22 was \$2.7 billion higher than the same period last year. —

It was \$2.7 billion, President —

This mainly reflects higher Commonwealth grants (up \$1.9 billion), tax revenue (up \$844 million) and royalty income (up \$464 million), partially offset by lower dividends from public corporations (down \$657 million).

We will come back to public corporations in a minute, because there are few little manipulations in the system that the government likes to use. Let us just go through those numbers again. Commonwealth grants are up \$1.9 billion, with a significantly higher GST than was predicted, but it is not just GST. Other government grants were higher than predicted. Tax revenue is up \$844 million and royalty income up \$464 million. That is a massive bonanza of wealth. Treasury even breaks it up a bit for us. Let us look at those in a bit more detail. Higher commonwealth grants are up \$1.9 billion. The breakdown of the \$1.884 billion on page 3 of the *Quarterly financial results report* shows higher GST grants are up \$1.041 billion, with \$1 billion extra in GST and higher North West Shelf petroleum grants up \$308 million, mainly due to higher oil prices.

I wonder how that is going to reflect in the third and fourth quarters of this current financial year, because members may have noted that the oil price has gone in one direction. Bear in mind that \$308 million extra in North West Shelf petroleum grants are commonwealth grants, they are not a royalty as such; they are an offset grant. I do not propose to go into the explanation about why, or we would be here all day, but perhaps if we had unlimited time it would be something we would look at. It is \$308 million based on the oil price in the first six months of this financial year ending on 31 December. Guess what? The price has significantly risen since then. Higher Homebuilder grant funding is up \$274 million, bearing in mind that is one of those throughput exercises, and higher transport infrastructure is up \$120 million. We could reflect on that, given the recent federal budget. That is the total increase in commonwealth funding: high taxation revenue of \$844 million and higher payroll tax collections up \$422 million. Half of this massive increase in taxation revenue is payroll tax, that old chestnut that we debate here on occasions. Payroll tax is half of the increase. Higher transfer duty is up \$304 million as well to go with it. Then we get to the higher royalty income up \$464 million based on, would you believe, President, the benchmark iron ore price, which in the first six months averaged in the 2021–22 financial year \$US136.7 a tonne compared with the year earlier, which was \$US125.6 a tonne. Even from the boom time of the year before, we are \$US11 a tonne higher on average. We will come back to that in a minute, because we have an update on that, based on a question without notice that I asked on 17 February on the update.

I want to remind members of this wonderful comment that I have on occasion read into this house, when on 12 February 2019 I asked the then Treasurer what modelling Treasury had done if the price of iron ore stayed above \$US90 a tonne for any significant time. That was answered on 12 February 2019. It is a great answer because it says —

- (1)–(2) A scenario where the average price of iron ore remains at \$90 a tonne has not been modelled, as this assumption is highly unrealistic.

Bear in mind that if the government was averaging \$US90 a tonne, it would be making good money. The reason that that question was asked on Tuesday, 12 February 2019, a while ago now—we have gone through to February 2020, then February 2021 and we passed through February 2022—a bit over three years ago, is that we were debating whether \$US90 a tonne would give the government a boost on its predictions and make significant additional revenue for the McGowan government. The answer was that \$US90 a tonne is entirely unrealistic. I think that is great.

I hope Treasury is doing some new modelling now, because in the lead-up to the budget coming in a month—we might try to squeeze in a few comments around that too, before we finish today—it is obviously the case that it has been significantly higher than that.

Just to give an example, before the *Quarterly financial results report* had made the suggestion, we said that in the first six months of this financial year, 1 July to 31 December 2021 last year, iron ore averaged \$US136.7 a tonne compared with \$US125 a tonne in the same period the year before. On 17 February 2022, a few short sitting weeks ago, I asked a question in these terms —

- (1) What is the current spot price of iron ore as measured by Treasury?
- (2) What was the average iron ore price for the 2021–22 financial year to date?

Bear in mind it was assumed that this was set for approximately mid-February and the spot price at the time was \$US159.85 a tonne and the average iron ore price to the year to date was \$US137 a tonne, so it was just slightly above. The question was whether the iron ore price at \$US136 was going to correct. By February, the average for the long-term price was \$US137, so, no, it was not going to go down.

I will use the august media outlet *The West Australian* to check what it has the iron ore price at today. The iron ore price listed in the financial snapshot of that good newspaper is \$US159.85 a tonne. We are pretty much on \$US160 at the moment, President. Rather than dropping back from \$US136 or \$US137, the price of iron ore has risen. The price of iron ore is on its way up. I also note that the price of oil has hopefully stabilised, but at a fairly high level. I might as well read that in as well. The Brent oil price is at \$104.75, which, on a bright note for petrol consumers, is down \$2.54, and will need to drop significantly. The price of iron ore is incredibly high again. It is not at its peak of \$US230-odd a tonne, but it is remarkably high. Brent oil is at \$104, and that also provides additional revenues to the state of Western Australia.

Members will remember that the budget came down in September, so it is only six months old. The predictions in that budget were for an average price in 2021–22 of \$US121.30 and a long-term average of \$US66 a tonne going forward. We are obviously significantly well above \$US121.30 and I suspect we will be well above \$US66 a tonne next year. All of this points to this government having an enormous amount of money with which to deliver services to the people of Western Australia. So much so, President, that just recently one of the ratings agencies conducted a review. On 21 March, Standard and Poor's Global Ratings released its review of the fiscal standing of the state of Western Australia. I will reference the Treasurer's media release on that occasion, because a comparison between the actual document and what the Treasurer said is quite interesting. I will read a few sections of the S&P state of Western Australia ratings credit highlights of 21 March 2022. It says —

... the state economy is rebounding, boosting revenue collection.

...

We expect the price of iron ore, Western Australia's most important export, to be higher than assumed in the state's budget. We assume a price of US\$130 per ton in 2022, declining to US\$80 per ton in 2024.

I thought this line is also very good —

The state will achieve small after-capital-account surpluses, supported by elevated commodity prices, a favorable distribution of federal grants, and a moderately sized infrastructure program.

Obviously, what is happening is a favourable distribution from the commonwealth, elevated commodity prices. It is interesting it says “a moderately sized infrastructure program”, because the Premier who is the Treasurer was very keen in his press release to suggest how large the infrastructure program is. Standard and Poor's also said —

The state is benefitting from strong royalty revenues and growth in tax receipts.

When we get into the bulk of the report and the rationale, it says —

We expect Western Australia to continue to post healthy operating surpluses. The state derives a significant portion of its revenues from mining royalties; in fiscal 2021 (year ended June 30, 2021) royalty income surged by a remarkable 44% to A\$12.2 billion. This was due largely to strong Chinese demand for iron ore, a key steelmaking ingredient, and supply disruptions in Brazil.

It also says —

A strong economic restart in Western Australia since mid-2020 has propelled broad-based revenue growth, including in transfer duties and payroll taxes.

We have discussed those a little bit today. It continues —

Importantly, we see downside risks to budgetary performance as being substantially mitigated by reforms legislated in 2018 to Australia's system of horizontal fiscal equalization. The reforms established an effective relative “floor” for Western Australia of 70% of its population share of the national goods-and-services tax ... pool, rising to 75% from fiscal 2025 onward. The state is now benefitting from top-up GST grants worth an estimated A\$3.7 billion over fiscal years 2021 and 2022.

Standard and Poor's recognised quite properly and appropriately the exact financial situation that Western Australia finds itself in—that is, massive revenues, massive revenue growth and ongoing revenue growth. I note that the Treasurer's media release suggested the report showed resounding support for his government, saying "S&P Global Ratings has tipped its hat to the McGowan Government". I am not sure it did that. I will agree that it did affirm its positive outlook on WA's AA+ credit rating, but it hardly tipped its hat.

The Premier's press release does not mention revenue. The Premier who is the Treasurer did not mention revenue once in his press release. He did not say "I would like to thank the iron ore industry for propping us up" or "Wow! We've got all this extra GST" or "Taxes are through the roof. Payroll tax is up. Everything is up and we are making a motza. Thank you very much." That would have been a nice, honest way to progress, President. He might have been able to go out and say, "Yes, we are doing very well, primarily because our revenues are high. Income is through the roof, the cash is rolling in and that's given us a good outlook and a good return." That would be true, but the press release does not mention revenues at all. The Premier likes to claim credit for the position the state finds itself in without necessarily addressing the reasons that even Standard and Poor's suggest were responsible for that position. It is not great financial management to simply open the doors and have the trucks back in and pour through the cash.

That is not economic management; that is riding your good luck, and good luck is not good economic management. It would have been useful if the Premier and Treasurer had given some credit to those industries that contributed to the outcome Standard and Poor's recognised and those people, members of the community, particularly businesses paying additional payroll tax, who have contributed. Businesses were doing okay; it is not all of them. Some businesses are doing very, very well. Obviously, the resources sector is doing very, very well. Those businesses that are doing well are paying more taxes to the state government. Overall revenue is up significantly by hundreds of millions of dollars.

I have to say that the Standard and Poor's ratings credit highlights made some rather bold predictions, and not only the one that said that the price of iron ore would revert to \$US80 a tonne by 2024. I think that is highly likely to be the result. It might even slip a bit below that and go back to the long-term average. My suspicion is that by 2024–25, the budget prediction of \$US66 a tonne will be relatively accurate. What does that mean? It means that this government will potentially have a boom that has gone from February 2019, or slightly before, all the way through to the end of 2023–24, with massive revenues—in fact, an income level that, to be honest, it will be struggling to spend. We will get to that in a minute. The government obviously has an infrastructure package that it is struggling to get out the door, in some cases for reasonable reasons. The government has massive revenue; and, on the other side, it has expenditure that it is struggling to get out the door. The exception to that is the circumstances that we find ourselves in because of COVID, and I look forward to wider debates around COVID expenditure during the committee stage of the bill, and also when we get to the budget proper.

There are a couple of Herculean predictions in the Treasurer's statement. In the 2022 financial year, the estimated budget surplus applied by Standard and Poor's was \$7.922 billion. We have seen a bit of talk in the media about a potential \$8 billion surplus this financial year. The biggest surplus in the history of Australia was \$5.8 billion. The second-runner at the moment, at a surplus of \$5.7 billion, is the state of New South Wales. I would love to do those figures by head of population. I reckon that would be really interesting. If an \$8 billion surplus were to come to fruition, that is a massive amount of money that obviously the government would struggle to get out the door. I think that is probably a little over generous. I might be proved wrong. Given the circumstances around oil and iron ore at the moment—I am wearing my Nostradamus hat again—there is every chance that the government will beat last year's surplus with this year's surplus. I think the \$5.8 billion predicted surplus is now a highly realistic budget surplus for this financial year.

There are a few reasons for that. The government will probably get a bit clever around this. I understand what it is doing; it is probably the same as it was doing last year. Government trading enterprises are now allowed to retain dividends rather than those dividends being put into revenue that the government does not need at the moment and cannot really spend. The Water Corporation may retain \$1 billion to put towards the next desalination plant some years into the future. It generally should not work like that. It is an accounting trick. The Water Corporation, like most government trading enterprises, is a function of government. If it makes a profit, it goes into the consolidated fund. I suspect that when the Water Corporation decides to build the next desalination plant, if it is smart it will be somewhere in the northern suburbs of Perth to pick up the growth in that area. Here is a tip for you, President. Maybe we should look at a desalination plant attached to a 200-megawatt to 300-megawatt gas-fired power station that comes off the Dampier–Bunbury pipeline, just to make sure the baseload capacity is there. That would be a good infrastructure investment over time. I will come back to that during the budget process in a month's time.

What should happen is the Water Corporation should come back to government and say it has done the business case. Despite what other people say, I believe business cases are critically important when we consider spending considerable amounts of money on infrastructure. I hate to see projects go out at any level of government without the proper business cases being done. That is what normally would happen. The government has not done that. The government has had an embarrassment of riches, or wealth, so it has to hide some of it. The government also

has special purpose accounts floating around so that the money does not come into the consolidated fund. That is the case even within the Water Corporation. I think that is hilarious. That now sits as a separate Water Corporation bank account. A lazy \$1 billion is out there somewhere, but it is hidden off the books so that no-one will get to see it. The same thing is applied to other government trading enterprises, in particular the electricity GTEs, because they are the other ones that make significant amounts of money.

The government is also putting money into special purpose accounts for future investment. That is because it cannot get money out the door at an adequate rate to spend it in this particular financial year. That is more difficult, of course, because special purpose accounts that are set aside cannot be hidden in the way that the dividends of government trading enterprises can be. I have some sympathy for the government on this. I have said this on a number of occasions. A significant funnel of infrastructure investment is going into both the private and public sectors at the moment. That means it will be difficult to get projects out in the sort of time frame that people might have optimistically thought of a couple of years ago. I understand that. Anybody who deals in economics would understand that we cannot necessarily control that. There are shortages of labour and materials. Therefore, it makes perfect and logical sense that money is sitting in special purpose accounts waiting for things to move forward.

It is interesting that we are seeing some significant blowouts in projects. The original \$3 billion Metronet project is now a seven-and-a-bit-billion-dollar undertaking. The government has been lucky, though, because the federal government is now putting in over \$3 billion on its own, so the original plan has been funded pretty much in its entirety by the federal government, and let us assume that the state government is putting in the money for all the extra bits. I understand that blowouts are going to occur. The government is therefore in the situation that it simply cannot spend money fast enough to get it out the door to keep its budget surpluses at a more modest level. It is stuck with this massive amount of revenue.

Again, the Treasurer; Premier should be a bit more honest about this. I get very tired of listening to him go on about his good financial management. He is the beneficiary of a massive revenue stream. I suspect that no Premier in our lifetime will benefit from the same sort of revenue stream. Again, I might be wrong; there might be another boom around the corner if lithium or rare earths take off to the point that they are fuelling starships, for example, or something that I am not aware of and is beyond my capacity. However, short of that, I doubt that any future Premier will be looking at a set of books for this amount of free money. We find ourselves in an astounding circumstance.

Members, it was useful in my introductory remarks to go through some of the parameters in which we find ourselves, and the massive amount of money that this government has to spend. Before we get to the Treasurer's advance itself, I would like to go through a few details that we need to look at. For new members, a Treasurer's advance occurs in a financial year in which the expected expenditure of the government is going to exceed the approval that we gave it to expend in the previous budget. Obviously, there are various ways for the government to manage unusual expenditure. The government has some capacity to effectively postdate its approvals, because every cent that the government spends should go through an approval process through the Parliament; that is the constitution under which we operate. If the spend is in a previous financial year, we have catch-up appropriation bills. As I understand it, in the last Parliament we were looking at quite a few additional appropriations bills that were never passed. I do not think they are on the current notice paper, because obviously the Parliament tipped over. I am assuming that should those be remembered, some government in the future might have to come up with some retrospective appropriations for expenditure in previous years. I think that some of this goes back to the previous government and was additional expenditure under the previous government—I was going to say the coalition or alliance government; whatever that one was called—so we will have to catch up on those. No? Not with the changes in the act?

Hon Stephen Dawson: We made changes to the act, so there's no need to do that.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Good; I was going to check on that. That is good; we can bypass that process with the changes to the Financial Management Act. Okay. Good work.

Hon Stephen Dawson: It's on the back of your good work, as well, because you obviously supported it.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes, absolutely. It was a pointless exercise to be out there debating six appropriation bills for expenditure that occurred six years previously. I think that is a good outcome. When a government over-expends in a financial year, it needs a Treasurer's advance bill, and that is what we are dealing with today. A Treasurer's advance effectively gives the government parliamentary approval for additional expenditure beyond that approved in the budget, which was back in September. Appropriation bills are a common but not regular event. They have become a little bit more regular in the last few years. No doubt, the reason given will be that the COVID pandemic has meant extraordinary expenditure, and I am prepared to accept that from the government. COVID has meant that rather than having one appropriation bill every few years, we are actually having one a year, as we get to three-quarters of the way through the financial year. My memory is that these bills were less common under the previous government but were for higher amounts. Someone in Treasury might remember that. I vaguely remember a large one when Troy Buswell was the Treasurer, but I do not remember the amount, because I am trying to do this without notes. My memory is that it was a higher amount. It has certainly been used by governments of both sides in Parliament. It is not uncommon. As I say, I think that it has become an annual event over the last few years; it will be nice to get to the stage at which it is no longer an annual event.

The bill before the house seeks to extend the amount of money available to the government. The bill before the house seeks an additional \$1.5 billion on top of the allowance that is already available to the government. Members should also be aware that in any financial year, without a second appropriations bill, the government has a flex of three per cent. It can effectively go three per cent over budget without an appropriations bill. Anything beyond that will require a second appropriations bill, and that is again part of the Financial Management Act. That three per cent flex of effectively \$820.5 million is available to the government. This bill will allow an appropriation of an extra \$1.5 billion, taking the total amount to \$2.3 billion. That is not an insignificant amount of money.

We will probably need to go into Committee of the Whole House, minister, because I want to check in particular some technical questions about how the original \$820 million was spent. The government has indicated that \$723 million of that has been spent, which leaves \$97 million available for the rest of this financial year, so, in fact, the government would have the \$1.5 billion additional expenditure from this bill plus that remaining \$97 million available to it. I note that that is not to say that all of that \$1.5 million will be spent. I understand that this is a capacity to spend, not a direction to spend. Those of us who have teenagers generally work out that capacity to spend and expenditure usually mean the same thing, but I hope that might be somewhat different for the government. I do not often get change; perhaps others are in a more fortunate circumstance than I. This bill will allow for a significant increase on top of the advance that was already proposed.

In the midyear review for the last financial year, appendix 4 outlined the proposed expenditure for the additional \$820 million that was available. For those who are interested, this is appendix 4 of the 2021–22 *Government mid-year financial projections statement*, page 129, “The Treasurer’s Advance”. At that point, some detail was made available about how the money required out of that \$820 million was going to be allocated. This is a document that occurs in the midyear review. It comes out in December, and I think, from memory, the cut off for that midyear review is something like the beginning of November or early November. I might check that.

Hon Martin Aldridge: It is 29 November.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: There we go; it is 29 November, so it is not quite the full indication. The midyear review is not for the full six months, but five months is effectively put in there. Obviously, at that point in the midyear review there was an indication that \$723 million was going to be spent, including a \$20 million allowance for net recoverable advances. I am presuming that we are looking at that projection of \$20 million. I would be interested to see precisely where that expenditure was expected to go, or whether it was simply an offset or a contingency.

In the midyear review, the Treasurer’s advance gives us a reasonably detailed breakdown of where that expenditure is going to go. When we get to the committee stage, there are some specific questions I want to chase down about that. For example—I will give the minister a bit of advance notice—\$30 million was set aside for the COVID isolation payment. I would be very interested to know how expenditure is going in that particular direction. Obviously, the biggest recipient of this additional money was going to be the Department of Health. The recurrent budget allocates \$227 million directly to the Department of Health and it breaks it down into the capital appropriations. I will just check that number. There is another \$149 million in excesses. If we put that \$149 million with the recurrent \$227 million, we are getting pretty close to half of the additional expenditure in the \$823 million flex that the government had, of which \$723 million was proposed to go into Health.

When we get to the committee stage, we might look for a bit of a breakdown or a little more detail on how that distribution will occur. Not much has changed.

I note that a couple of tabled papers were presented by the Treasurer during debate in the other place—the house that shall not be named. Tabled paper 1036 was effectively a rewrite of appendix 4 of the *Government mid-year financial projections statement*. Ultimately, the numbers add up to remarkably similar totals. It probably provides a bit more detail than some of the details in the midyear review. If we read the two documents together, over the top of each other, we would get a pretty reasonable view of how it all comes together. It comes up with the same number—\$723.2 million of the available \$820.5 million attributed to certain expenditures, leaving a balance of \$97.3 million, which will be rolled over. That particular section is all well and good because it effectively looks back at what has already been announced. Yes, there is a bit more detail in tabled paper 1036. WA Health is broken down into additional beds and other bits and pieces.

Of more interest to us is tabled paper 1035, which was also tabled by the Treasurer, and relates to this debate. It provides an expectation of how the additional funding, beyond the \$723 million that has been itemised in the midyear review, will potentially be broken down. This is my issue; this is the shortfall in the information that has been provided. Tabled paper 1035 of the Legislative Assembly has headline costs with remarkably little detail. It is a one-page document. It has a table. It basically lists the \$723.2 million, which is adequately accounted for in the midyear review, and tabled paper 1036, and then it adds these expenditures: COVID-19 rapid antigen tests, \$294 million; other COVID-19-related costs, \$164 million; various other agency costs, subject to the 2022–23 budget process, \$634 million; and a buffer for unseen issues, particularly COVID-19 measures as required, \$505.3 million. The total draw against the Treasurer’s advance is \$2.32 billion, effectively made up of \$820 million from the previous limit—that is, the three per cent variation—and a new Treasurer’s advance limit of \$1.5 billion. That document is remarkably unhelpful in the detail that it provides. It effectively gives a broad breakdown of these

particular things. When we get to the committee stage of the bill, I would be very interested to know the breakdown of this, in particular, as much as we have on the three that are not specific. One is quite specific—\$294 million for COVID-19 rapid antigen tests. I would be interested to know how cost efficiently they were maintained—whether the commercial marketplace for rapid antigen tests matched the government’s price. We might be able to find a bit of detail. I am not sure what a rapid antigen test is worth at the moment. They were being sold for some ridiculous amounts. I understand that if they retail for \$10 to \$15 a test, they would be wholesaled at \$8 to \$10.

Hon Martin Aldridge: Under \$4.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is excellent. The opposition is providing great information at the moment. Well done, Hon Martin Aldridge. The price is under \$4.

I am prepared to accept that governments often pay above the base rate. People like to get government contracts and whisk the price up a bit. We reckon that \$294 million would buy a lot of rapid antigen tests. If we were paying \$10 each, we would expect to get 29.4 million rapid antigen tests. I would be interested to know what they cost. I asked a question in this house about the cost of importing the tests, including the airline flights. I do not have the information with me. They were raced in. Obviously, flights are expensive so I get that the breakdown might have to include some rapid transport. I would love a breakdown of that cost to see precisely how it works out. When we get to the committee stage, I would be interested to know precisely how the cost is broken down. Other COVID-19-related costs amounted to \$164 million. Simply having a line item does not mean that the government knows what that expenditure has been spent on. We need to know some more detail about that.

This is a great line—various other agency costs, subject to the 2022–23 budget process. Presumably, if it is subject to the 2022–23 budget process, it is aimed at activity that will occur in the 2022–23 financial year. Maybe there is a reason it has to be in the 2022–23 budget process, but it has to be a part of the appropriation bill. Can the minister explain why it needs to be part of this bill? Is it genuinely part of the 2022–23 budget process or are things occurring in the current financial year that will lead to other things occurring in the next financial year, setting up for any particular thing?

The amount that really requires some explanation is the buffer of \$505 million for unforeseen issues. We are in interesting and unforeseen times. The COVID experience has been one that nobody has really understood or predicted, in a good way. I think we are getting much closer to that. Last week I was out in the media praising the government for its COVID modelling, suggesting that it is very good and it has been highly accurate. It is so good that it can be used for making proper and rational decisions around the future management of COVID. Well done to the government for that. We have seen a good set of modelling. I know that overall case numbers are up again today but the peak of COVID numbers was predicted by the modelling to be somewhere between 9 700 and 10 200. Guess what? It got to 9 770 or something. It kind of hit that level and then drifted away on the weekend because testing was a bit lower, but the figures are up again today. Yesterday’s numbers, which were reported today, are back up to 8 000. The modelling has been remarkably good. Well done to the government for that. It should be able to work out a process going forward, and that seems to be the point where it falls over and fails. Some of it is done remarkably well.

I would be interested to know for what the \$500 million buffer could be required. I say so specifically under this circumstance: we are three-quarters of the way through the financial year that this Treasurer’s advance deals with. The Treasurer’s advance deals with the 2021–22 financial year. The budget we do in a month will deal with the next financial year. Effectively, the government is saying, “We want flex of half a billion dollars for unforeseen circumstances that might roll out in the next couple of months.” I would have thought that was a very big figure. I think the government has given itself a huge amount of flexibility and leeway on this one. I would be interested to see how the \$500 million in reserve, if you will, was arrived at. I hope I am wrong but I suspect it might have been to round the numbers out reasonably well to \$1.5 billion. If the government is saying, “Okay, we have \$1 billion that we think we are going to spend, but we will round it up to \$1.5 billion and call the last half a billion dollars basically the spinning reserve, waiting to go forward”, a bit more information on that is absolutely required.

I have to say that tabled paper 1035 is pretty unhelpful. It is good that the government provides briefings; it has always been very good at that. I say to the officials at every briefing that the more information they can give us in advance, the shorter time these debates will take, because the more informed we are, the fewer arguments we will have. The minister may spend a bit of time getting up and saying this is what we need this for and this is what the breakdown will look like, which will be great, but my suspicion is that had the minister given us that information in advance, the debate time would have been curtailed and I probably would not have known what to spend the last 20 minutes of this debate on. Generally speaking, the more information the government gives the opposition, the better off we are and the easier these bits of legislation will be to pass. That said, the opposition has no interest in either attempting to block the bill or not supporting the bill. Obviously, we support the legislation, and we do not play games around granting supply. I would never suggest, with all the questions I have asked and intend to ask, that the opposition will not support the government to receive the funds it requires to do the job properly. I could have spent time talking about all the things that I think a Treasurer’s advance bill should provide expenditure for, but obviously the government has put its priorities into action and the opposition has suggested that it should perhaps

shift those priorities. I could have spent an hour talking about where that investment would have been better expended, but, to be honest, as we go through this process, I will be reasonably comfortable if we can reach the point that we get some accurate figures around the expenditure the government has proposed. I would like to know how that last \$1.1 billion has been divided. An allocation of \$164 million has been made for “other COVID-related costs” and \$634 million for “various agency costs”, which may well go into Health or workforce problems. Some of that might be realistic, but it is hard to debate the bill when we just have an overall figure and, of course, the buffer itself. The government is not required to spend all of that allocation, and it might get to the end of this financial year and suggest that it needed only \$1 billion out of that \$1.5 billion it has proposed. The principle we need to consider is whether we can adequately scrutinise government expenditure and hold the government to account.

At the 2017 election, the Premier promised us a gold standard of accountability. I note that over the last couple of months the Premier has corrected that promise and said that he meant it would be a “sometimes” gold standard of accountability. I think he said this in Sydney not that long ago. Although I am very pleased to hear the Premier’s admission, which is good, it does not augur well for accountability across the chamber. Luckily I know that the Minister for Emergency Services is dedicated to accountability and I am sure he will do his absolute best to get us the answers. I suppose the question will be whether the Treasurer provides the answers, but we shall see. I know the minister will do his absolute best. It is difficult to provide a lot more commentary on the bill without having that level of information. I look forward to the Committee of the Whole House. It might be that the minister will adequately provide all that information in his response to the second reading debate, but I suspect we will go into committee for a component of the bill.

I will sum up, because I will unfortunately run out of time to debate all the things I would have liked to, especially where the additional funding should have been spent. I would like to have spent time on the efficiency of distributing some of the funds. I could have spent an hour talking about compensation granted to businesses affected by COVID restrictions, because I think that program has been remarkably ham-fisted. I have given the government credit for many of the things it has done around COVID; in fact, in the last week, I was quoted in *The West Australian* giving the Premier some credit. If the question arises in debate whether the opposition gives the government credit, we absolutely do! But not everything is perfect or is working well, and the business compensation package is a prime example of that.

Far too many businesses have missed out on this or are on their knees and will not survive the next few months without significant change to the compensation criteria and some support. We are not talking about handouts at this point; effectively, it is survival money for a number of businesses. The government’s ham-fisted approach to date has been terrible. The opposition supported a bill that we debated last month to try to improve that package. We are prepared to give the new minister and parliamentary secretary a short amount of time to get on top of this and to fix some of these issues, but time is running out for some of those businesses. The government should be focused on that issue, and it will be good to have a significant debate on that. I hope that, with a bit of luck, some of this money might end up in the business compensation package, but I am not confident.

Just to recap, under this bill, the government has asked for an additional \$1.5 billion on top of the \$820 million that was already available to it with the three per cent leeway. The total amount of \$3.2 billion is calculated by adding those two numbers, which means that the residual of \$790-odd million that is available under the three per cent cap will be rolled into this. The government does not have to expend all of that, but this bill will give it the capacity to do so. The opposition will do this willingly by supporting the bill, but let us try to make the government more accountable for this expenditure. Let us get some detail about precisely where this money will go, and where the government will commit this expenditure. This government has more capacity than any government in the history of this state to look after its people and to deliver better outcomes. I have to say that it is a remarkably average looking report card to date. Plenty of people continue to struggle and plenty of issues have not been addressed. From a government that had a \$5.8 billion surplus in its last budget and will beat that in this financial year, with potentially \$6 billion-plus, this government should be doing more with the massive wealth it has.

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [3.07 pm]: I also rise to address the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2022 and will follow on from some of the comments of my honourable colleague Hon Dr Steve Thomas, who has presented a very cogent and detailed assessment of the outlook for this budget, and I thank him for that assessment. I will reiterate some of the points he has made, taking a slightly different tack by focusing on some of the structural issues we are facing as we go forward with the Treasurer’s advance. In saying that, I want to note the word “unhelpful”, which the shadow Treasurer used to describe the detail provided to the opposition to assist in its assessment of the bill and to support the expenditure of what is quite a considerable amount of money the government has sought to top up the 2021–22 budget. In fact, in the language of some small nations, an additional \$1.5 billion would be their complete budget.

I note that the second reading speech is two pages long and the explanatory memorandum is one page. There is quite scant information about why this additional funding is required. In fact, the amount that will be required over and above the budgeted amount will be close to 10 per cent of the total budget. When the budget was brought down, the total amount, including capital, was \$27.349 billion. A considerable amount was sought at the time the budget was brought down by the Treasurer, but we are seeking a total additional amount of \$2 billion for the financial year.

The reasons are summed up in three paragraphs of the second reading speech, and some of those were announced as part of the midyear review. For example, there are fairly small amounts for the construction of common-user infrastructure on the Burrup Peninsula, an additional COVID test isolation payment, the very important support for temporary workers' accommodation as part of the severe cyclone Seroja disaster recovery package, and cleaning in schools. It could be said that those matters are supported, but the problem is that we do not have a lot of detail about how those are progressing. Tenders were sought for some land for workers' accommodation in Kalbarri only in March this year. Not a lot of information has been provided in this paragraph; no doubt it is somewhere in the depths of Treasury or scattered throughout a few press releases. Certainly, the detail that has been provided to Parliament for this Treasurer's advance is lacking. More effort could have been provided by the government, and I hope that when the Minister for Emergency Services returns from urgent parliamentary business, he can provide a bit more detail on the matters outlined by Hon Dr Steve Thomas.

I made a note of the comment by my honourable colleague about the efficiency with which the rapid antigen tests were obtained. I will make a comment, probably during the committee stage, about the efficiency of their distribution, because that is as vital as the efficiency with which they were obtained.

I want to make some comments about the assessment of royalties, which deserves further commentary over what was presented by Hon Dr Steve Thomas. I reflect on the fact that in my reply to the budget speech, I made the assessment that there was some upside risk to the \$120 a tonne royalty. There was a time when that might not have been the case, because there was a dip in the price, but I think that will certainly be the case, as has been said by my colleague. There was probably a reasonable expectation that there would be some upside risk, and we are seeing that come to pass in this financial year. Again, it is a conservative approach, and I think that is reasonable, but it highlights the fact that this state government, unlike any other in the history of Western Australia, is rolling in cash. It is rolling in the incredible royalty revenue that has flowed into the coffers of state Treasury. I made the comment in my speech on 16 September last year that there might be some downside risk in the long-term projections. Although that risk is small, it needs to be considered in terms of the structural direction of the Western Australian economy, if the state can influence it. It is important that in the future we de-risk our economy to the largest extent possible from those international shocks that occur. As we are seeing with the events in Ukraine, although it is not a major trading partner, the unexpected can occur in ways that no-one can imagine. Western Australia remains quite vulnerable to those international risks, although they may be small because of our strong reliance on iron ore exports to our major trading partner. That is something that we should focus our attention on.

This is where I would like to highlight a couple of things about the structural situation in the Western Australian economy and reinforce some of the comments I have made previously in this place. If we look at the 2011–12 budget, because it is a reasonable point, it was a time when we saw the resources economy in the growth stage and we know that after that there was a bit of a tipping off and that really had an impact on revenue. At that time, royalty income for Western Australia represented 19 per cent of general government revenue, or \$4.79 billion. There was \$3.6 billion from GST revenue. Taxation was the largest component, which was very important. Although state taxation is great, we can reduce state taxation and provide relief for small businesses and medium enterprises and reduce the cost of property transactions, which are vital for our economy and the realignment of the structural nature of the housing estate across the whole state. People should be able to transfer property at minimal cost and without too much intervention by the state so that we can get more efficient use of the housing estate. I am talking about the housing estate in the broadest possible sense across Western Australia. Particularly in the current situation with vacancy rates being low, it is important that there is some focus on reducing that tax revenue. We should also look at other ways of growing the pie so that we can collect more tax revenue over time in ways that are not detrimental to our economy but will fulfil the growing needs of Western Australia. In that way, we will not be so reliant on our royalty income.

That has really been the story over the last couple of years, and COVID has reinforced this problem. I think there is a real risk that when we finally emerge from the COVID pandemic, we will have an economy that looks more like that of a petro-state than an advanced economy. I am talking about the Western Australian economy. It is a real danger that we will end up in a situation in which we are so reliant on resource-based income that if there is some major shock internationally, we will be in dire circumstances going forward.

As I said earlier, in 2011–12 the royalty income was 19 per cent. If we go back another 10 years, it was even lower. I am trying to be reasonable here and make a comparison with a time when we were doing quite well with royalties before the drop-off from 2014 to 2016. This is when things got a lot harder because we had the horrible convergence of the GST still going down, because of the way in which it was calculated by the Commonwealth Grants Commission, and we were losing royalties. It was a perfect storm that hit the Barnett government at the end of its period in government. I am pleased that I have not had a huge amount of interjections at this point because it is reasonably dispassionate if we look at that situation that was not ideal going forward. The royalty income as a percentage of the projection in revenue is probably going to go up, and I expect that the final figures in the budget papers will show this. In 2021–22, it was sitting at 27 per cent of taxation revenue or \$10.1 billion. The numbers are very close so we can see the convergence. Back in 2011–12, taxation was 28 per cent and it is now 26 per cent. Royalty income was 19 per cent and it is now 27 per cent. We are seeing this convergence. This has been occurring

at a time of record GST revenue. The total revenue has gone up considerably and GST revenue now represents 20 per cent. It is important to look at our investment going forward and we should really focus on the diversification of our economy.

I know that there is a level of bipartisanship with budgets. I understand that and I want to acknowledge the fact that there is this effort around making sure that we provide support through grants and various measures for things outside the normal scope of our economy. But we could be doing a lot more to support our regional economies and businesses and to ensure that we do not lose those important aspects that have been most damaged by the COVID pandemic, for example, events in the tourism sector. Those areas have been hit really hard. One only needs to walk the streets of Perth on a Friday night to see how quiet things are compared with what they were like in the past. When we talk to the chambers of commerce around the state, we find that parts of our economy are really struggling and doing it hard. In September last year, I quoted some bankruptcy figures and talked about how high they were. It would be a tragedy if they have increased further. I would be very concerned if we saw a hollowing out of our non-resource based economy, the component that does not rely on that massive injection of support that is coming from growth in the resources sector.

These changes have also played out to some extent on the expenditure side. It is important to make the comparison. It is important to look back in order to look forward. It is important to understand where we have come from and where we are going. In 2011–12, education represented 23 per cent of our expenditure. Investment in education was proportionally much greater. In 2021–22, education represented only 16 per cent of expenditure. Yes, total expenditure has gone up—in fact it has actually gone down. Perhaps that has something to do with the way that some of the portfolios were amalgamated. As I said in September, the machinery-of-government changes have made it quite difficult to make that comparison and assess the budget papers. Many areas were previously assessed separately and the amalgamation has reduced the level of transparency. In some cases, this has been to the detriment of the state, as we have seen in the Department of Communities recently. It has affected the delivery of mental health and child protection services and, in particular, the realm of housing. I am sure that the government disagrees with me, but I reiterate that the merging of housing and child protection has been a bad marriage. It is not the right combination of skills and expertise. There is no way in my mind that an agency head can focus their mind on all these issues to ensure that we develop the workforce in those areas of need given that they are all such an important part of this state's current priorities. It is vital that we have affordable housing. It is vital that we have great communities and happy and healthy families. It is vital that we deal with those things. We are seeing so much disruption in this area and if we do not get on top of it, it will be to the long-term detriment of the state. If I could offer a bit of gratuitous advice, it would be to review the machinery-of-government changes and to separate those agencies to get some proper focus back on those areas to start to deliver the outcomes that we need.

We need to be aware of those structural issues because we have a massive requirement for additional funds. There is a real challenge around the way in which we are currently directing our expenses. As I said, changes in our total expenditure have benefited some areas. For example, in 2011–12 health received just on \$6 billion or 25 per cent of the revenue. Now the combined areas of health and mental health have gone up to 30 per cent. This is not unexpected with an ageing population. In my former role in Treasury, we talked about the double whammy of rising costs per service in the health sector and the challenges of an ageing population, with our rising population in a general sense and the rising need. That double whammy of the cost per service as technology increases and the ageing population is impacting on the cost of health service delivery. Of course, on top of that, we have had the COVID pandemic. We keep getting health advice from the government but we do not actually see it. My view is that we have underinvested in our health services in the last few years. We have put a lot into some of those important infrastructure projects. For example, nearly \$8 billion has been put into Metronet during one of the biggest existential crises we have had in Western Australia—that is, the COVID pandemic. I question whether we really have had our priorities right, given the incredibly difficult situation we are seeing now with record levels of ambulance ramping, and the challenges for young people to get services. My colleague Hon Donna Faragher raised in the media recently about the waiting lists for services. I do not think the government would have got too much complaint from the opposition if, in the scope of things in the last couple of years, there had have been a pausing or slowing down of some of those big infrastructure projects the delivery of which is being challenged. The outcome in the delivery of some of those big projects is that the government has had to go back to the contractors and ask them to reschedule those projects because of the shortage of labour. Some of those capital projects have not been delivered in the time that was budgeted for. There has been an insufficient focus on health. Although there has been great focus on the COVID issues by themselves, there has been an insufficient focus on the delivery of the general health requirements of our community that continue to exhibit themselves with some of these terrible outcomes we are seeing.

In summary, I think there should be an absolute focus on those other sectors that have been struggling due to COVID. We are really in danger of hollowing out our economy and when we come out of this crisis, this emergency, we could be at huge risk of being vulnerable to future shocks, particularly international shocks. We have been incredibly lucky as a state. We have had some incredible revenue numbers come in through the royalty stream and, of course, GST. That is also borne out with some of the great state product numbers we have seen. I will note a couple of numbers that I think are important. Quoting from the WA economy notes that are put out on the Treasury website, in

2017–18, for example, as part of our gross state product, household final consumption expenditure was \$101 billion from a total gross state product of \$255 billion. But in the latest published data, which was only in 2019–20, household final consumption expenditure had dropped to \$106.6 billion. That was out of a total gross state product nominal of \$316 billion. These are incredible figures for a state the size of Western Australia. As I said in my previous address in September, if WA was a country, a state in an international sense, it would have one of the highest per capita nominal GDPs in the world. This comes back to the concern about the narrowing of our base.

Whilst exports continue to rise and grow, the balance sheets of large companies such as BHP and Rio Tinto continue to increase and the cost of delivering a tonne of iron ore continues to go down, a massive amount of money pours in. What I do not see is the government thinking laterally about how to support medium and small business, protecting those businesses that are struggling. The retail businesses I see in my region have to close because they cannot get labour, they cannot get staff and they cannot find housing for staff. This is the ongoing challenge. We have not invested enough in our Government Regional Officers' Housing, for example. At the moment in my hometown of Broome, public servants are not able to find accommodation. Of course, that just knocks on in terms of having to spot purchase private homes, which sucks up the market in relation to the supply of housing, and we have seen an enormous rise in the value of housing in my hometown of Broome. It has been massive. The unaffordability levels are such that it is really hard to rent a three or four-bedroom home. People have to pay upwards of \$700, \$800 and sometimes up to \$1 400 a week for a four-bedroom home, which are obviously of differing quality. These are extraordinary figures. As I said earlier, there is a risk that we will become a bit like a petro-state, because we are so focused on that pot of gold, like Scrooge McDuck, to use my honourable colleague's term. I did not think that I would, but here I am, be making a comment that we are rolling around in the money pit. The money is pouring in but it is coming from a narrower and narrower base. That is a real risk to us as a state.

The impact of that is on the people in those services. A level 1 or level 2 officer who works in the Department of Communities and child protection is only going to be on \$50 000, \$60 000, maybe \$80 000 a year. There might be some things that get topped up in their income if they go to a regional town. It is really tough. I talk to a few journalists, and they do not get paid a lot. I must say that I have some sympathy for them, because it is really getting tough for journalists. I think we will see more stories about this in the regions because people are worried about how they are going to deal with the thing that is in front of them, which is housing. Of course, that impacts on the ability of our businesses to attract and retain staff.

I have an anecdote that I think was reported on ABC News. A package of \$92 000 a year had been offered for a barista in Broome. That is to make coffee. Great, they are getting paid \$92 000, but by the time they outgo all those expenses on their rent and transport, those cost-of-living pressures are real. I would really like to see, and I think my colleagues would welcome, more emphasis on dealing with those cost-of-living issues and making sure that whilst this pot of gold is pouring in, we are protecting the basis of our economy, because at some stage, there is a probability that revenue will not continue in the way that it has.

I wanted to make a comment about GST, but I may not have it in front of me right now. We saw such an incredible change with the GST revenue that came in. That is welcomed. We have seen a bit of scare campaign in the commentary at times about the longevity of that, but it is absolutely locked in. I congratulate my colleagues, such as Senator Dean Smith, who has taken a very strong position on this, for promoting the reform that occurred. That really protects the state into the future, because it is spread across all states. We share that risk. That GST revenue ensures that we have a basis for our economy going forward, because we are all taxpayers. Although there has been horizontal fiscal equalisation—I think that is the term used in relation to that matter—which is a principle that we support, obviously, with this important floor, it means we will not get caught out like we have in the past.

In saying that, because we are in a much more secure position going forward, that will provide some buffer. Although we are seeking this additional funding for the budget, I come back to the point about transparency—let us write a \$1.5 billion cheque and scribble out a few notes saying what we need. The last paragraph on the first page of the second reading speech sums it all up. It is really hard to make an assessment about the need for that. The additional spending has emerged since the *Government mid-year financial projections statement* was released. The speech states —

This includes the cost of purchasing COVID-19 rapid antigen tests and other COVID-19-related costs for WA Health ...

I would have thought that could have been anticipated to some degree. Members might disagree with me, but that seems reasonable given we knew where things were going. In my mind, it demonstrates a lack of planning.

I am glad more money will be put into the Western Australia Police Force. On top of housing, another major issue in my region is community security. We are seeing an appalling state of lawlessness emerging in some of our regional centres. There has been some response in the last couple of months. I welcome any response by the Minister for Police. I think the Minister for Police has failed to deliver the fundamental requirement for our community—that is, to have a safe community. It is just not on. I have met with a number of taxi drivers from Port Hedland and what they have to go through on a daily basis is just not Australian. It is not correct and it should not be occurring in our state. We are a wealthy state. As I said, if we were a country, we would be one of the wealthiest countries per capita

and among the top in the world, even if our revenue has a bit of a narrow base, like a golf tee. It is a bit unfortunate in that sense, but we are an extremely wealthy state and there is no reason we cannot address some of the social issues that underpin the lawlessness issues. We should focus more of our budget on that. There should be more interventions with families that are not taking care of their kids. We have four-year-olds, six-year-olds and eight-year-olds out in the street late at night, throwing rocks at cars. I know these are long-term, systemic issues that go back many generations and are not easy to resolve, but there needs to be a dual process of law enforcement—I know police are doing what they can within the powers that they have—coupled with programs and intense support, even if it costs us more to deal with these issues in terms of service delivery.

We also have to have accountability from the Department of Communities. I think joining those agencies has been a complete and abject failure. We have issues with housing. When I go back to Port Hedland, I see streets of social housing in a state of decay, with empty houses that are broken down and in need of repair and refurbishment, yet we still have an affordability issue, with people like retirees unable to get a suitable house. They might be offered a house but not a suitable one. This is really problematic. I think we need to step back and look at the structural issues in our state and ask, “Where are our priorities?” We need the balance we had 10 years ago, when we had challenges but the state had less. It is almost like the more we have the less focus we have on the important issues. We need to make sure that we can deliver the right outcomes for our community because the fundamental issue is keeping people safe. The Labor government has played on that issue very strongly in relation to COVID. All credit to the Labor government on the issues around the hard border and maintaining people’s safety around COVID—I give credit for that—but we must focus on other parts to community safety. Right now, the gaze needs to shift. We have high vaccination rates, so the gaze needs to shift to life post-COVID and how we can provide community safety going forward and how can we link community members with jobs and meaningful futures.

In September, there is a focus on unemployment. The wicked problem with community safety people often talk about is around intergenerational unemployment and the challenges for people who do not have fixed employment and lead very insecure lives. They do not have that good feeling that comes from going to a good job and being part of a community in a way that imbues some pride in and ownership of their lives as members of our society. I will refer to some figures on the unemployment rate from March 2021. Although the unemployment rate is at an incredibly low level and some of our regional towns are very short of staff, there is the problem that large pockets of our community are missing out on involvement in the good things that come from employment. I will quote some figures and then give an update on them. Although there has been some marginal improvement, we still have an incredibly difficult situation in some parts of our society. It is important that we really invest in ensuring that kids go to school. We have really low attendance rates in some of these difficult pockets of our community. There has been controversy around this, and I will talk more about it in the future, but we have to ensure schools meet the needs of kids so school attendance is closer to 100 per cent than to zero per cent. Let us take the example of the Premier’s own electorate of Rockingham. I mentioned in my contribution to the budget debate that employment in Rockingham was 13.1 per cent. It is now 11.3 per cent. There has been marginal improvement, but it is still too high. We have to find a way to close the gap and address the challenges of unemployment to people’s health and wellbeing and their role in society. In March 2021, the unemployment rate in Girrawheen was 21.5 per cent. It is now 17.2 per cent. For Hansard, I am referring to the statistical data grouping “SA2 Code (2016 ASGS)” for labour force versus smoothed unemployment. There has been some improvement in Girrawheen. It is fantastic that some of the resource companies are so desperate that they are picking up some of the kids who do not have skills. There are jobs out there if people are job ready. Unemployment in Halls Creek was 24.5 per cent. It is now down to 20.6 per cent. Yes, there has been some improvement, which is good, but it is still too high. Unemployment in Meekatharra—again in my electorate—was 10.9 per cent. It is now 9.5 per cent. It is stunning that in places in which resource companies are operating, there is still an unemployment rate of close to 10 per cent. Therefore, the focus that we need to put on our budgets going forward should be about where we are going to invest. Again, I have some advice for the government. If we can put more emphasis on that, that would be fantastic. We are not a one-cheque wonder. We are more than that. We are about our community. While these rivers of gold are pouring in, there is no reason that that should not be able to have an impact on the big social and economic structural issues in our community. We should take the opportunity to address those issues going forward. That is my theme today.

I agree with my colleague Hon Dr Steve Thomas about the need for more transparency. There is a lack of transparency in the budget. We need to see more focus on structural issues and on ensuring that our economy will be more resilient going forward. We need to take the opportunity to build resilience, rather than put laws and regulations through this place that cause our economy to narrow, and where the only groups that are consulted are the big end of town. We need to make sure that we do not crush small businesses that do not have the capacity to deal with additional red tape. We need to make sure that we consult with not just the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia or the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, or the two or three big mining companies, but also the contracting companies and businesses and get their genuine views. I make that point also with respect to the Aboriginal heritage regulations that are currently underway. I ask the government to please make sure that it consults with those small and medium-size businesses, because the red tape that will come from this will be very challenging. Those are my comments today. I note the Treasurer’s Advance Authorisation Bill 2022.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [3.52 pm]: Members will be very pleased to know that I will be speaking on the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2022 for a matter of only a few minutes. At the risk of stating the obvious, we in the Legalise Cannabis Party WA are not in government. Mind you, if we were, things might be a lot different—the chamber would be more sedate, and we could spend an extra day or two on consulting—or maybe things would not be so different after all, but we are not in government. It also needs to be said that this debate is not a matter of discussing the different budget choices; it is about adding \$1.5 billion to the budget as an advance authorisation. It is for the government of the day to set its priorities. The government will decide, according to its own information, how best to use the finances. We in our party need to hold the government to account, and we shall do that. That is our reason for being here. What we should not do is block the government's access to the funds it needs in the first instance. The purpose of being on the crossbench is to hold the government to account and assess how moneys are being spent. That is what we are supposed to be doing. I would like to think that we on the crossbench, certainly in my own party, are seen as responsible members of this chamber. As a result, I will do no more than give notice to the government, as I did last year, that we as a party, and myself in particular, will hold the government to account for the additional \$1.5 billion that it intends to spend. But we are under no illusion—this amount of \$1.5 billion is so large that most of us, myself included, cannot write that number out properly. It is beyond our understanding. The pressure of spending such a large amount of money boggles the mind.

We are not going to stand in the way of this Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2022. It has our support. When it comes to budgetary recommendations, I will not go into nearly the detail that the two speakers before me have gone into. However, the issuing of funds of this high number does not mean that the money is being well spent. People have the understanding that if a large sum of money is being devoted, it must be well needed and be well spent. The degree to which we see a large amount of money being spent tends to influence us into thinking that this must be money well spent. This is just not so. I recall looking at the Southern Inland Health Initiative at work in the wheatbelt. I use the words "at work" advisedly, because I observed that about half the funds that had been allocated to the improvements of that health service did not go to the health service but went to the advisers. A group of advisers came up by plane regularly, again and again, to assess the building. It looked like a junket to me. They ended up doing things like placing a door smack across the middle of a fluorescent light, which then could not be changed any more. I also recall them actively deciding to place an emergency alarm system out of reach of the person who needed that alarm system. They also placed doors in such a way that if someone in the clinic were to be confronted by a combative knife-wielding aggressor, they would not be able to open the door because it opened inwards rather than outwards, so there was no way of exiting the room quickly. We spent good money on people who had come to advise us on that. It certainly was not money well spent because of the catastrophe of planning. In fact, they had taken a building that had been planned for elsewhere and just dumped it into our area, and it did not meet the needs there either. I would not call that a successful and efficient use of the money. The money was certainly successfully and efficiently disbursed, but I doubt it was well used.

The same might also be said of the money spent on much needed mental health services. Much has been made of the large amounts of money that are being spent on mental health services. Staff are clamouring for innovation. Yesterday in my clinic, I listened to someone who works in the area. She said that people are resigning. One woman had come from over east and had spent six months here before she said, "I can't take this anymore. The system you have here is so backwards and primitive compared with what is happening over east that I find myself encumbered and unable to do the job I am paid for. The patients are not being well served. Before I become mentally ill myself, I am going to leave and go back to a place where the services, while not perfect, are certainly better than they are here."

This allocation of funds, which is much needed, should be spent in a way that matters and is efficient. I will be holding the government bodies to account for that. I will also be holding the government to account. Nevertheless, having listened to the minister in the course of his second reading speech, and taking into account the pandemic and all its ramifications, I am convinced that the government is justified in making the request that it has made of us, and on that basis the bill has my support.

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural) [3.57 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2022. As the speakers who have preceded me have mentioned, this bill is worthy of some consideration by members of this Council, notwithstanding the brevity of the bill in its three-clause form. I will seek to canvass a number of matters during the second reading debate on this bill, but I suspect that the level of detailed information that is likely to be sought will probably require further consideration of some aspects when we get to the Committee of the Whole stage.

As members who are following this debate would be aware, this bill seeks to authorise the appropriation of \$1.5 billion on top of the \$820.5 billion that has automatic authorisation pursuant to the Financial Management Act. It is important, because there will be several references to this during the debate, that we reflect on the document that was presented publicly on 16 December last year, or at least I think it was 16 December because that was the date on which what is known as the *Government mid-year financial projections statement* was released and I think subsequently became a tabled paper of this place.

I want to draw members' attention to the Under Treasurer's certification. That is found fairly early on in the report; in fact, it is right after the table of contents. It is a two-page certification signed by Michael Barnes, PSM, Under Treasurer, on 16 December 2021—interestingly, the same day that the report was released. It states —

This Mid-year Review is based upon Government decisions that I was aware of or that were made available to me by the Treasurer, together with other relevant information known to Treasury, on or before the Mid-year Review cut-off date of 29 November 2021 and which have a material effect on the State's financial projections.

If I am not mistaken, last year was an election year, and, as is often the case in an election year, we had a late budget. That budget was in September, if I am not mistaken, and our estimates process was delayed as a result. In fact, during the consideration of committee reports tomorrow, we will consider for I think a further period of three minutes the report of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations on its inquiries into the 2021–22 budget. If we keep that in mind, I think the shadow Treasurer mentioned that there was a very short period between the budget being handed down and the midyear review than otherwise would ordinarily be the case. Obviously, we are approaching the budget period next month. The midyear review is required to be tabled by 31 December each year. There is generally a more significant period and sometimes more significant matters of budget impact have arisen during that period that may be reported in the midyear review.

Notwithstanding those comments, I will come back to this Under Treasurer certification in a little while. Information was provided; earlier speakers have referred to it, and hopefully we will see in this place the minister representing the Treasurer do the same, but in the other place the Treasurer tabled two documents—that is, tabled papers 1035 and 1036. The first of those two tabled papers is a summary of the 2021–22 Treasurer's advance, which includes not only the estimate of \$723.2 million that was anticipated in the midyear review, but also allowances for issues emerging since the midyear review, keeping in mind this was a document presented publicly on 16 September, which amount to almost \$1.6 billion. As has been previously mentioned, that includes a \$505.3 million buffer for unforeseen issues, particularly COVID-19 response measures as required.

As I understand the way in which these Treasurer's advances work, they provide an authorisation until only 30 June of the financial year, at which point, of course, we enter a new budget period—the next financial year. Of course, we all anticipate that budget being presented to first the other place and then this place in the coming weeks.

It is interesting to look at these tabled papers, and I think the shadow Treasurer remarked on the level of detail that was provided with respect to, first of all, the anticipated Treasurer's advance that was required and anticipated in the midyear review. That is the \$723.2 million that I just spoke about. To some extent, a reader could ascertain a level of understanding from the information across these three pages. Having said that, there are a few sections of these tables that I would like to ask the minister representing the Treasurer to either provide by way of a second reading reply or perhaps when we get to the committee stage. There is a line in each of these two tables; one relates to recurrent funding and the other to capital funding. At the end of the recurrent funding table is a bunch of anticipated expenditure under the heading "All other recurrent items" of \$56.4 million, and the description is "Items less than \$10 million". When we get to the committee stage, I would be interested to know whether we can get some greater level of understanding of perhaps the number of types of expenditure. If there are 456 things, I am not going to ask the minister to detail all of them to the Council, but I suspect the number is far less than that. I would like to try to get some insight into these recurrent items that are less than \$10 million. I am not sure whether the minister will be in a position to present some further information at that point. In the capital table, "All other capital items", which are items less than \$10 million, amounts to \$29.4 million. Those items amount to around \$85 million of the \$723 million, and there is no visibility of those two items in the tabled paper that has been presented.

We then turn to the second tabled paper, paper 1035, which is a very simple table that provides a summary of the Treasurer's advance in total, the one that is automatically authorised under the FMA and the one that will be ultimately authorised with the passage of this bill to provide for an amount of \$2.3205 billion in total advance to be authorised this financial year to the government.

Reflecting on this table, a number of things are listed. Actually, only four things are listed. The first is some \$294 million for COVID-19 rapid antigen tests. I will pause there and say it is my understanding that that is half the cost of the state's procurement of rapid antigen tests, because, as I understand it, the arrangement with the commonwealth is that the commonwealth will reimburse the state effectively 50 per cent of the value of that procurement, so this is effectively the state's liability. The second matter is "Other COVID-19 related costs", which is \$164 million. The third line item is "Various other agency costs subject to the 2022–23 Budget process", and that is \$634 million. I might pause there, because I do not fully understand this line item. It might be a matter that is fairly simply explained, but if it is an agency cost subject to the 2022–23 budget process, I am struggling a little to understand why we are providing a Treasurer's advance in the 2021–22 financial year for something that is subject to a future budget process. Anyway, there may be some simple explanation. That amounts to some \$634 million. The fourth line item is "Buffer for unforeseen issues (particularly COVID-19 response measures as required)", and that is a very specific but large number of \$505.3 million. According to my calculation, the total of those four figures is \$1.5973 billion, so almost \$1.6 billion. It would be good to try to get a level of detail perhaps similar if not even better than the breakdown that has been provided for the \$723 million that was flagged

in the midyear review. I think that tabled paper 1036 in the other place presents in quite a simple format a general understanding for members of what these matters relate to, which agency is likely to be incurring the expense and for what purpose. I think they are quite key and core requests to understand the need to authorise a further \$1.5 billion to the state government for these four purposes.

I have briefly outlined the truncated budget process that we went through in 2021–22, largely arising out of the state election in March 2021. We have a situation in which a budget was handed down in September, we had a midyear review in December and here we are in the first week of April dealing with the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill to get us through to 30 June. I would like to understand the point at which between 16 December, when the midyear review was presented, and 22 March, which I think was the date that the bill was introduced, second read and third read in the Legislative Assembly, it was realised that the state needed another \$1.5 billion to get through to 30 June. That is not an extraordinarily lengthy period. If we were to be more charitable, we could ask at which point from 29 November, when the Under Treasurer said that was the state of the finances based on all the information known to him, and 22 March did we realise that we were \$1.5 billion short? It would be interesting to perhaps get some understanding of the factors that led to that assumption, or assessment, being made and why some of these figures, as imprecise as they may be, may well be necessary and required by the state between now and the end of the financial year.

I want to spend a little time talking about the first line item of the \$1.6 billion package—that is, the \$294 million that will be used to procure COVID-19 rapid antigen tests. As I said before, I understand this figure is half the total cost of procuring the rapid antigen tests for Western Australia. It is important and interesting to note some of the history of the matter. Members may well recall that only fairly recently was it lawful in Western Australia to sell or procure a rapid antigen test. In fact, we were quite late to the party compared with other jurisdictions. I am just looking at my notes, which suggest that up until 26 January, with a few rare exemptions that related largely to the transport and logistics sector, particularly the interstate transport and logistics sector, rapid antigen tests were unlawful in Western Australia under the direction of the Chief Health Officer under the Public Health Act 2016. I do not have a specific comparison with other jurisdictions, but I have seen that other jurisdictions started to use rapid antigen tests two to three months before we saw that occurring in Western Australia. That may well be because of the extent of community spread of the disease; not until December and early January did we start to see community spread of the disease in a larger way in Western Australia than we had seen over the last two years. We certainly knew that RATs were available. We certainly were using them in some contexts but it was unlawful to sell or supply a rapid antigen test until 26 January. Why is this important? My assessment of this situation is that we perhaps left it a little late in the process to procure these tests. I know that for quite a time the government refused to answer how it engaged in the procurement process, when it engaged and what it had procured.

I am fortunate to have been a participating member of a hearing of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations in the last couple of weeks. Hon Peter Collier put a question to the Leader of the House about when the state procured these rapid antigen tests. At that point, a specific answer was not provided to the standing committee. It is interesting to note that on 22 March, during the one-day examination of this bill in the Assembly, the Treasurer confirmed, as indicated in the *Hansard* of that day, that the procurement for the first order of rapid antigen tests occurred around 14 or 15 December. That is a bit more precise than we have been able to gather thus far. The Treasurer went further and said —

What happened with the supply of RATs is, around 14 or 15 December, we put in our first order across four suppliers. The Department of Health ordered 85.7 million RATs and the Department of Finance procured 25 million RATs. That is what occurred. They arrive progressively. The last report I had was that we had on hand 25 million or 30 million.

Given that this matter is directly relevant to the bill before us, it will be interesting to know the current status of our RAT procurement in Western Australia. I certainly do not have an update that I can provide since I asked the following question on 15 March, which largely reflects the contribution of the Treasurer on 22 March —

How many RATS has the state ordered and received to date?

The answer was —

The government has ordered 110.7 million rapid antigen tests and 30.1 million have been received.

I asked —

What procurement process has been utilised by the state to procure supply?

The answer was —

Due to the rate of the emergence of Omicron, short lead times for supply and global competition to secure RATs, the WA government used the emergency provisions within the Procurement Act 2020 to procure supply. This approach included approval of funding by the relevant delegate and direct negotiation with the supplier for product quality, delivery schedule and costs. The WA Department of Health used purchase orders approved by the relevant delegate to place the order with the suppliers.

I asked —

How many charter flights have been utilised to date, and what is the relevant cost of each flight?

The answer was —

Two charter flights were used to expedite delivery at a cost of \$700 000 per flight.

I asked —

What is the cost to date of procuring RATs identified in part (1)?

The answer was —

The total cost of procuring the RATs was \$578.9 million.

As I said earlier, I understand that the commonwealth will incur half the costs of this procurement, which is a matter that I would like to understand more fully. That would make some sense when looking at this figure of \$294 million, which is not exactly half of what was provided in answer to question without notice 153 on 15 March, but it is pretty close. It may well include other transport or logistics costs on top of the procurement cost of the tests. I think Hon Brian Walker made the comment during his contribution that sometimes we need to pause and reflect on the numbers that we are using because they are so significant and they start to lose value when we say them repeatedly and so quickly.

Members, 110 million RATs have been procured, totalling a cost of almost \$600 million to the state and the commonwealth. To put that into some context, it is about 50 per cent of the cost of constructing Perth Children's Hospital. It is not an insignificant expenditure. It is a very significant expenditure, made even more so due to the information we have been able to understand to date, and the procurement process that was used. Keep in mind that the emergency provisions of the Procurement Act 2020 were evoked. I understand that there was, and probably still is, an urgency to make sure we had supply and supply quickly. I do not think we will be able to get to a full understanding of or conclusion to this matter today, but I am hopeful that this will perhaps be something that the Auditor General of Western Australia will contemplate and consider examining. We have an excellent Auditor General in our jurisdiction and I would have thought that these types of emergency procurement processes, particularly ones in the order of \$600 million, would be examined with the appropriate detail that is required. To complicate this matter further, keep in mind that two agencies were engaged in the procurement process. The Department of Health procured 85.7 million tests and the Department of Finance procured 25 million tests. When the government made such a large procurement with a very streamlined procurement process, without the usual checks and balances, I would like to understand why it was necessary to involve two agencies. In addition, the procurement took place via four suppliers. It would be good to get an appreciation and understanding of where those suppliers were located. I understand that at least some of them were offshore. It may be the fact that, because of the way that these things are manufactured and because they are quite specialised pieces of technology, all of them were supplied offshore. That would not be an unreasonable expectation. The emergency procurement provisions of the Procurement Act were used; two agencies were involved; almost \$600 million was spent; and four suppliers were used, I suspect all of which were offshore. I would think this would put a procurement of this type into a high-risk category. This is something that is worthy of further examination today and tonight, but also perhaps by the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations and the estimates process and hearings that will be upcoming, but it is also worthy of the consideration of the Auditor General of Western Australia.

Before I move on to other areas, I want to talk about a couple of other things regarding the supply of rapid antigen tests to Western Australians. Hon Neil Thomson touched on this idea that it is not just about procurement but also the logistics of distribution. I want to make it quite clear that the logistical exercise of distributing 110 million tests—if we even have that many in Western Australia yet; I am not sure—to those who need them the most is no small exercise, especially when the government is relying on Australia Post, couriers and other third parties and perhaps it does not control that part of the supply chain as much as it would like. With the number that was procured—110 million—again, perspective and context are important. That amount is sufficient for 40 tests for every man, woman and child in Western Australia. It would be good to try to get an understanding of how we arrived at 110 million tests being required for Western Australia because if we compare that with other jurisdictions, the per capita rate of government procurement is much higher, even if we compare it with a state like Victoria, which has something like three times the population of Western Australia. I do not know whether we have them or not, but we have procured a significant quantity of tests as part of this emergency procurement.

I think a question was asked perhaps in the other place about this. It may well be the case that some members of the Western Australian community will need more than 40 tests, such as people working in high-risk environments, critical workers or people engaged in particular supply chains who may be subject to daily testing. I understand that that might be the case, but it is also hard to compare when I have received feedback from the community—I will use a de-identified example of a childcare centre. Childcare centres play a critical role in keeping parents engaged in the workplace when often, more and more workers are unable to go to work because of COVID-19, whether they have it or they are a close contact of someone who has. Childcare centres play a really important role in the availability of our workforce generally but also, more specifically, currently. They are also what I would consider to be fairly high-risk environments. Certainly, some of the earliest transmission in my community originated from

childcare centres and schools. That is just from anecdotal experience, but it is certainly what I have seen in many of my communities. Having said that, a childcare centre in my electorate received five tests from the government in the last couple of weeks. This childcare centre has five employees. If we consider the requirements of the critical worker protocol, what happens when you are a close contact, maybe even if you want to implement a policy of proactive testing or surveillance testing, whether it is daily or twice a week, to try to eliminate the risks to not only children in the centre but also staff, five tests in a five-person childcare centre is not going to provide supply for very long. I appreciate that the government has listened to feedback on the rollout of the community rapid antigen test program. When the government announced the first five tests, I thought about the time it would take to actually get the tests to regional and remote people particularly when delays were factored in. The government advised at the time that delivery could take up to 15 business days. By the time we go through that exercise of putting five of these tests in a parcel and it goes through the whole logistic supply chain to get to somebody maybe three weeks later—constituents have certainly experienced it being much longer than that—five tests really is grossly insufficient. The government recognised that and, shortly thereafter, I think within a week or so, increased it to 15 tests per household. That was welcome but I am still struggling to see how we are going to get to anywhere close to utilising 110 million tests, which we have procured as part of this process.

One of the other things I want to talk about is the way in which the directions, first of all, made it unlawful to buy or sell rapid antigen tests, but also has displaced and impacted upon small businesses, particularly those that established their own supply chains and their own stocks of rapid antigen tests. In my view, these have largely been displaced by the state order. I understand that the first priority of the state is to ensure the safety and health of the community. Certainly, in the early days of this year, these tests were in short supply, particularly in regional Western Australia. To some extent, those supply issues have turned a corner and tests are readily accessible in most communities; in fact, it would be hard to walk through a shopping centre, service station or any similar premise without seeing a bunch of these things sitting on the counter.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 1506.]

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

SOUTH WEST COACH LINES — COLLIE–BUNBURY SERVICE

267. Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the cessation of the South West Coach Lines bus service between Collie and Bunbury on 1 February 2022 and to my questions without notice 216 and 244 asked in March.

- (1) Given the comments of the member for Collie–Preston, Ms Jodie Hanns, in the Collie River Valley Bulletin last Thursday that she was informed of the impending cessation in December, did the member for Collie–Preston inform the minister of the impending closure?
- (2) If yes to (1), on what specific date and in what form of communication?
- (3) Will the minister table that communication; and, if not, why not?
- (4) Was the minister informed of the impending closure by another source, including South West Coach Lines themselves; and, if so, when and how?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(4) As previously advised, the decision by South West Coach Lines to end its service is disappointing. The minister and Transwa will work with the member for Collie–Preston and the community to discuss their public transport needs and whether any potential improvements can be made to provide better links between Collie and Bunbury.

The state government's commitment to improving public transport in Collie and the south west is clear. In 2018, the state government increased the frequency of Transwa road coach servicing into Collie, reversing cuts by the former Liberal–National government. The state government is also delivering a new, locally built, *Australind* train, following the failure of the former government to plan for or fund a replacement at the time it should have been replaced.

SYNERGY AND HORIZON POWER — DISCONNECTIONS

268. Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Energy:

Thank you, President. Three questions and I am still waiting for an answer!

- (1) How many residential disconnection notices have been issued for each month from 1 August 2021 to 31 March 2022 inclusive?
- (2) How many residential disconnections have occurred for each month from 1 August 2021 to 31 March 2022 inclusive?

- (3) What was the number of applications received and hardship utility grant scheme payments made in each month from 1 August 2021 to 31 March 2022 inclusive?

Hon KYLE McGINN replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question. I answer on behalf of the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Energy. The following answer has been provided by the Minister for Energy.

(1)–(3) The answer is in tabular form.

I seek leave to have the response incorporated into *Hansard*.

[Leave granted for the following material to be incorporated.]

Synergy

	Residential non-payment disconnection notices issued	Residential non-payment disconnection completed	Reconnections after residential non-payment disconnection	HUGS applications	HUGS payments - count
Aug-21	721	373	309	468	420
Sep-21	1121	681	528	511	451
Oct-21	1074	740	584	584	531
Nov-21	1266	858	663	902	836
Dec-21	486	484	420	978	868
Jan-22	814	327	192	940	840
Feb-22	1945	992	748	893	767
Mar-22	1588	1166	957	922	798

Horizon Power

	Disconnection notices issued	Disconnections completed	HUGS applications	HUGS payments – amount
Aug-21	1029	265	51	\$41,326
Sep-21	1188	190	32	\$27,418
Oct-21	819	172	24	\$19,271
Nov-21	1497	248	37	\$32,291
Dec-21	200	105	21	\$18,463
Jan-22	959	20	16	\$12,087
Feb-22	1104	203	29	\$25,309
Mar-22	1505	300	28	\$13,796

Note: Horizon Power does not record the number of distinct HUGS payments made; this data is held by the Department of Communities.

WATER DEFICIENCY DECLARATION — ESPERANCE

269. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the minister representing the Minister for Water:

I refer to the minister's response to question without notice 190 in which the minister advises that neither the Salmon Gums nor Grass Patch dams hold sufficient water for the purpose of watering livestock or crop spraying.

- (1) How much water is currently stored in each of the two dams?
- (2) How much water was stored in each of the two dams at 30 June 2021?
- (3) Why did the Water Corporation place sandbags in the catchment of the Grass Patch dam, impeding water flowing into the dam?
- (4) What work has been undertaken by the Water Corporation to improve the catchments for each dam during 2020–21 and 2021–22 to date, such that water flow into the dams could be increased?

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. I provide the following answer on behalf of the Minister for Regional Development representing the Minister for Water.

- (1) On 28 March 2022, the Salmon Gums quarry dam was estimated to be at less than 0.5 metres in depth. This was based on a visual estimation as the level was well below its operational level. On 28 March 2022, the Grass Patch dam was at approximately 1.7 metres in depth.

- (2) On 21 June 2021, the Salmon Gums quarry dam was estimated to be at less than 0.5 metres in depth. This was based on a visual estimation as the level was well below its operational level. On 21 June 2021, the Grass Patch dam was at approximately 2.5 metres in depth.
- (3) The Water Corporation has previously placed a small barrier on one part of the chute going into the Grass Patch dam from the water catchment area. This was done to direct and disperse the water flowing into the dam as a means of reducing turbidity. This assists in creating a less concentrated flow into the dam and therefore helping to improve and/or maintain water quality in the dam. The placement of this partial barrier in the chute has not prevented or reduced any flow of water into the dam.

ATTORNEY GENERAL — UNFAIR DISMISSAL CASE

270. Hon NICK GOIRAN to the parliamentary secretary representing the Attorney General:

I refer to the answer to question without notice 232 in which the Attorney General advised that 1 244 hours were recorded by the State Solicitor's Office and 171 hours recorded by the Solicitor General and \$12 015.20 expended in two related Supreme Court actions involving the President of the Legislative Council.

- (1) How many hours have been recorded by the State Solicitor's Office and the Solicitor General in relation to the Attorney General's intervention in PSAB31/2020?
- (2) What other associated expenditure has been incurred?
- (3) Is the intervention ongoing?
- (4) Have any other hours or associated expenditure been recorded or spent by those officers in relation to that unfair dismissal claim?
- (5) If yes to (4), what are the identified hours or sums spent separate to the Attorney General's intervention or, in the alternative, the combined total number of recorded hours and expenditure?

Hon KYLE McGINN replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question. I answer on behalf of the parliamentary secretary representing the Attorney General. The following answer has been provided by the Attorney General.

- (1)–(5) This matter remains subject to ongoing litigation.

PUBLIC HOUSING — WAITLIST

271. Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Housing:

- (1) How many applications were on the public housing waitlist at the end of March 2022, and how many individual applicants does that represent?
- (2) How many applications were on the public housing priority waitlist at the end of March 2022, and how many individual applicants does that represent?
- (3) How many people on the public housing waitlist at the end of March 2022 received the disability support pension?
- (4) How many people on the public housing priority waitlist at the end of March 2022 received the disability support pension?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(2) As at 31 March 2022, there were 18 738 applications on the public housing waiting list, representing 32 873 people. This included 3 952 priority applications, representing 8 006 people.
- (3)–(4) As at 31 March 2022, there were 3 701 applications on the public housing waitlist who identified a household member as in receipt of a disability support pension or payment; of these, a total of 993 applications were priority listed. This does not mean that all these individuals in any given household are in receipt of a disability support pension or payment.

CLIVE PALMER — LEGAL ACTION

272. Hon WILSON TUCKER to the Leader of the House representing the Premier:

I refer to the defamation action brought by Clive Palmer against the Premier and I note that by convention the taxpayer is paying for the Premier's legal defence costs. Is the taxpayer paying for the cost of any other minister involved in this case such as legal costs, travel costs to attend court or any other associated costs? If so, please provide a breakdown.

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. Member, I have seen the question and an answer. There is something that needs to be checked, so I will provide an answer tomorrow.

NORTH EAST METROPOLITAN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

273. Hon DONNA FARAGHER to the Minister for Education and Training:

I refer to the North East Metropolitan Language Development Centre.

- (1) How many government primary schools fall within the centre's catchment area?
- (2) Will the minister provide a list of those schools that are taking part in the centre's school speech pathology service pilot in 2022?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) The North East Metropolitan Language Development Centre does not have a catchment area; students can be referred from anywhere.
- (2) Yes; there is a list of schools that are taking part in the centre's school speech pathology service pilot in 2022.

I seek leave to have the list of schools incorporated into *Hansard*.

[Leave granted for the following material to be incorporated.]

The schools that are taking part in the Centre's School Speech Pathology Service pilot in 2022 are:

Anzac Terrace Primary School	North Balga Primary School
Ashdale Primary School	Roseworth Education Support Centre
Beechboro Primary School	Sir David Brand School
Boyare Primary School	South Ballajura Education Support Centre
Bullsbrook College	Weld Square Primary School
Dianella Primary College	Westminster Education Support Centre
Eden Hill Primary School	Clayton View Primary School
Governor Stirling Senior High School	Madeley Primary School
Malvern Springs Primary School	Sutherland Dianella Primary School
Moorditj Noongar Community College	West Morley Primary School
Morley Primary School	Yokine Primary School

METRONET — ARMADALE RAIL LINE

274. Hon TJORN SIBMA to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the announcement by the Premier and the Minister for Transport on Sunday, 20 February informing the public of the government's decision to shut down the Armadale line for up to 18 months, including the statement "While a number of shutdown options were examined, the extended shutdown was the preferred option".

- (1) On what date was the decision made to shut down the Armadale line for up to 18 months?
- (2) How many shutdown options were examined and what were they?
- (3) Will the minister table the advice that led to the preferred option being selected; and, if not, why not?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(3) As outlined previously, a number of shutdown options were considered, predominantly concerning shorter, more frequent, shutdowns over a longer period or the extended shutdown. The extended shutdown was determined to be the least disruptive to the community over the longer term. This decision was made and announced 12 months in advance of the closure in order to provide as much notice to the community as possible and to allow for extensive consultation to be undertaken.

COMMUNITIES — POLICE RAID

275. Hon PETER COLLIER to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Community Services:

I refer the minister to her answer to question without notice 165 asked on Wednesday, 16 March 2022.

- (1) How many documents were alleged to have been accessed by the 13 public officers in the internal investigation?
- (2) Apart from allegedly accessing documents, what other forms of serious misconduct were allegedly committed by the 13 public officers in the internal investigation?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

The Department of Communities advises that a response to this question cannot be provided within the time frame. The honourable member may wish to place the question on notice.

METRONET — ARMADALE RAIL LINE — GRADE SEPARATIONS

276. Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Transport:

I refer the minister to the state government's commitment to deliver grade separation at numerous intersections on the Armadale line, including some in the Cities of Armadale and Canning, and the Town of Victoria Park.

- (1) Has the government committed to any grade separation at intersections in the City of Gosnells?
- (2) Specifically, has any commitment been made or contemplated to grade separation at Kelvin Road to facilitate development of the Maddington town centre by the city and/or at William Street; and, if not, why not?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(2) The state government will continue to work to plan and remove level crossings across the heritage lines.

CYCLONE SEROJA — RECOVERY GRANTS

277. Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I refer to the \$104.5 million disaster recovery funding package for cyclone Seroja-impacted communities and the answer to Legislative Council question without notice 60 asked on 17 February 2022.

- (1) What is the total amount to date of the \$104.5 million disaster recovery funding package that has been disbursed directly to applicants?
- (2) How many applications that have been submitted are still awaiting approval?
- (3) Noting that it has now been almost 12 months since cyclone Seroja impacted WA, what action is the minister taking to ensure that disaster funding is reaching those in need in a timely manner?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

There were some errors in the answer. I have just sent it out, so if it comes back in by the end of question time, I will give it to him; and, if not, I will give it to him tomorrow.

GOVERNMENT REGIONAL OFFICERS' HOUSING — BROOME

278. Hon NEIL THOMSON to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Housing:

I refer to the availability of government worker accommodation in the Kimberley, specifically the regional centre of Broome.

- (1) Are there any public servants or government workers on waitlists for Government Regional Officers' Housing houses?
- (2) Have any agencies been impacted by the shortage of GROH houses; and, if yes, which agencies and has the shortage of GROH houses resulted in delays in the transfer of staff to vacant positions in Broome?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(2) The Department of Communities does not operate a waitlist for GROH. Client agencies continually submit and update requests for GROH to enable them to meet forecast and changing demand as part of their workforce planning. These requests fluctuate throughout the course of a year, as business needs change and do not always indicate an immediate demand for housing. When GROH accommodation may not be immediately available, individual client agencies can make arrangements for alternative accommodation required for their employees. Ensuring that regional communities have access to critical state government workers, such as teachers and police officers, is essential. The McGowan government is investing \$200 million in the GROH program across the state, investing in spot purchases and new builds, and refurbishing properties to bring stock back online and undertaking maintenance to ensure that stock is maintained to a high standard. The Minister for Housing is exploring all options to fast-track the delivery of GROH houses where they are needed, including modular, timber and prefabricated builds, leasing opportunities and partnerships with local government.

PUBLIC HOUSING — WAITLIST

279. Hon STEVE MARTIN to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Housing:

I refer to the current public housing waitlist.

- (1) What is the breakdown of the total number of applicants on the housing waitlist in each of the following regions —
 - (a) Kimberley;
 - (b) Pilbara;
 - (c) Gascoyne;
 - (d) midwest;
 - (e) wheatbelt;
 - (f) Peel;
 - (g) south west;
 - (h) great southern; and
 - (i) goldfields–Esperance?
- (2) Of those applications in (1), how many are on the priority housing waitlist in each of the regions?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

(1)–(2) The answer is in tabular form and I seek leave to have the response incorporated into *Hansard*.

[Leave granted for the following material to be incorporated.]

(1)–(2)

Public Housing Wait List as at 31 March 2022		
Region	Wait Turn	Priority
North Metro	5,890	1,243
South Metro	3,863	865
East Metro	3,124	636
Great Southern	615	173
Southwest	1,329	156
Goldfields	545	93
Midwest/Gascoyne	1,065	185
Pilbara	750	254
West Kimberley	839	145
Wheatbelt	366	75
East Kimberley	352	127
Total	18,738	3,952

Please note, the number of wait turn applications includes priority applications.

TIMBER HARVEST PLAN

280. Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS to the minister representing the Minister for Forestry:

I refer to my questions without notice 26, asked on 16 February 2022, and 245, asked on 24 March 2022.

- (1) How are hardwood logs measured and what units of measurement are used when they are sent to a sawmill?
- (2) For hardwood logs, what units of quantity are used in the pricing of logs on each invoice?
- (3) Does the Forest Products Commission maintain its database and publish statistics of the tonnes of hardwood logs produced?
- (4) If the FPC has the data on sawlog production in tonnes, will the minister provide in tonnes the data requested in question without notice 26 asked on 16 February?
- (5) If no to (4), why not?

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE replied:

On behalf of the Minister for Regional Development, I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. I provide the following answer on behalf of the Minister for Forestry.

- (1) The *Forest management plan 2014–2023* recognises two types of log timber—sawlog and other bole volume. The FMP yield of hardwood sawlogs and other bole volume production available is measured and provided in cubic metres. The Forest Products Commission, when delivering log products that can contain a mix of FMP sawlog and other bole volume, uses tonnes per delivered product.
- (2) The Forest Products Commission, when pricing log products that can contain a mix of FMP sawlog and other bole volume, uses tonnes for invoicing purposes.
- (3) The Forest Products Commission publishes data on delivered product volume that can contain both FMP sawlog and other bole volume.
- (4)–(5) Question without notice 26 refers to jarrah sawlog production. The jarrah sawlog production volume information is generated by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and is in cubic metres.

ESPERANCE PORT — IRON ORE EXPORTS

281. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Ports:

I refer to the current financial assistance arrangements and commercial agreements for the export of iron ore through the port of Esperance.

- (1) Can the minister please table a summary of all contracts, licences and leases related to the current export of iron ore through the port, including the expiration date for each of these agreements?
- (2) What is the total amount of financial assistance that has been provided by the state government to the current exporter of iron ore through the port up to 31 March 2022?
- (3) Has the state government commenced any negotiations for the provision of financial assistance to the current iron ore exporter beyond the current arrangement?
- (4) If yes to (3), what type of assistance is being considered?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I make the point that a lot of information has been requested in part (1), so there is an answer that I will give the member now, but that is a lot to ask within the four-hour time frame.

The minister's answer is that due to the level of detail requested, an answer will be provided to the member on the next sitting day.

CORONERS ACT — LEGAL ADVICE

282. Hon NICK GOIRAN to the parliamentary secretary representing the Attorney General:

I refer to changes in the interpretation of the Coroners Act 1996 following advice in 2020 from the State Solicitor's Office to the Office of the State Coroner that all information contained in a coronial file, including post-mortem examination results, is confidential and belongs to the State Coroner and, as a result, is no longer routinely provided to hospitals.

- (1) Who provided that advice and on what date?
- (2) Which health service providers were consulted prior to the advice being given?
- (3) Will the Attorney General table that advice?
- (4) On what date did the Solicitor-General provide advice on this issue?
- (5) Does the State Coroner inform medical practitioners if the cause of death was related to a secondary condition or clinical incident arising from their provision of health care?

Hon KYLE McGINN replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question. I answer on behalf of the parliamentary secretary representing the Attorney General. The following answer has been provided to me by the Attorney General.

- (1)–(3) Legal advice is subject to legal professional privilege.
- (4) The Solicitor-General was not consulted to provide advice and did not provide any advice on this matter.
- (5) The State Coroner does not provide information to medical practitioners on the question of whether the cause of death was related to a secondary condition or clinical incident arising from their provision of health care unless there is consent from the senior next of kin to do so. The exception is where the coroner seeks a report or a statement from a medical practitioner in order to investigate the death to make the findings under section 25(1) of the Coroners Act 1996. In such cases the medical practitioner will be provided with relevant information for the purposes of preparing his/her report or statement for the coroner and this may include information about a relevant secondary condition or clinical incident arising from their provision of health care.

LLOYD STREET BRIDGE, MIDLAND

283. Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the Midland Lloyd Street bridge project.

- (1) Did Main Roads Western Australia use a heritage consultant as part of the planning process?
- (2) If yes to (1), could the minister please table the advice received from the heritage consultant?
- (3) If no to (2), why not?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) Yes.
- (2) I table the attached documents.
- (3) Not applicable.

[See paper [1200](#).]

ROYAL PERTH HOSPITAL — WAITING ROOM NURSES

284. Hon WILSON TUCKER to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Health:

I refer to reports in the media that the waiting room nurse role at Royal Perth Hospital has been left unstaffed and since 3 March, has been abandoned altogether, and I also refer to the independent inquiry into Perth Children's Hospital that found that the removal of the waiting room nurse resulted in a delay in comprehensive assessment and may have also contributed to the death of Aishwarya Aswath.

- (1) Since the inquiry's report, how often has the waiting room nurse role been unstaffed?
- (2) Is it appropriate for a single nurse to cover both the main waiting room in the hospital and the assessment emergency department marquee?
- (3) What resourcing changes will be made to ensure that the waiting room nurse role is always staffed?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(3) Request for detailed workforce data should be placed on notice. The waiting room nurse position is an important position to help keep our patients safe. Currently that position plays a vital role in both reviewing patients in the area and also performing the required rapid antigen tests. Briefly, the position was moved to the COVID waiting room when the pandemic numbers increased markedly. Subsequently, the role was expanded to both the main waiting room in the hospital and the assessment ED marquee.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT CENTRES AND SCHOOL OUTREACH SERVICES

285. Hon DONNA FARAGHER to the Minister for Education and Training:

I refer to the Department of Education statewide speech and language outreach service.

- (1) What was the total amount of funding allocated to the service in 2021?
- (2) How many schools accessed the service in 2021?
- (3) Will the minister provide a list of the schools referred to in (2) that accessed the service?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) The total amount of funding allocated to the language development centres and school outreach services in 2021 was \$2 365 310. In addition, some school-related staffing costs, such as long service leave, workers' compensation and other additional salary costs are paid centrally.
- (2) In 2021, 436 schools accessed the statewide speech and language outreach service.
- (3) The information requested is in tabular form.

I seek leave to have the response incorporated into *Hansard*.

[Leave granted for the following material to be incorporated.]

Adam Road Primary School	Alinjarra Primary School
Alkimos Beach Primary School	Alkimos Primary School
Allanson Primary School	Allendale Primary School

Amaroo Primary School	Anne Hamersley Primary School
Anzac Terrace Primary School	Applecross Primary School
Arbor Grove Primary School	Ardross Primary School
Armadale Primary School	Ashburton Drive Primary School
Ashdale Primary School	Ashdale Secondary College
Ashfield Primary School	Aspiri Primary School
Aspiri Primary School	Attadale Primary School
Atwell Primary School	Aubin Grove Primary School
Augusta Primary School	Aveley North Primary School
Aveley Primary School	Avonvale Primary School
Bakers Hill Primary School	Balcatta Primary School
Baldivis Gardens Primary School	Baldivis Primary School
Baler Primary School	Balga Primary School
Balingup Primary School	Ballajura Community College
Ballajura Primary School	Banksia Grove Primary School
Bateman Primary School	Bayswater Primary School
Beachlands Primary School	Beacon Primary School
Beaconsfield Primary School	Beaumaris Primary School
Beckenham Primary School	Beechboro Primary School
Beeliar Primary School	Beenyup Primary School
Beldon Primary School	Bencubbin Primary School
Bertram Primary School	Beverley District High School
Bibra Lake Primary School	Bindoon Primary School
Binnu Primary School	Bluff Point Primary School
Booragoon Primary School	Borden Primary School
Boulder Primary School	Boyare Primary School
Brabham Primary School	Brentwood Primary School
Bridgetown Primary School	Brookman Primary School
Brookton Primary School	Broomehill Primary School
Bruce Rock District High School	Brunswick Junction Primary School
Bull Creek Primary School	Bullsbrook College
Bullsbrook Community Kindergarten	Bunbury Primary School
Bungaree Primary School	Burrendah Primary School
Busselton Primary School	Butler Primary School
Cadoux Primary School	Caladenia Primary School
Calingiri Primary School	Calista Primary School
Campbell Primary School	Canning Vale Primary School
Capel Primary School	Caralee Community School
Carey Park Primary School	Carine Primary School
Carnaby Rise Primary School	Carnarvon Community College
Carramar Primary School	Cascade Primary School
Cassia Primary School	Castletown Primary School
Caversham Primary School	Caversham Valley Primary School
Chapman Valley Primary School	Charthouse Primary School
Charthouse Primary School	Christ the King
Christmas Island District High School	Churchlands Primary School
Clarkson Primary School	Clifton Hills Primary School
Collier Primary School	Como Primary School
Condingup Primary School	Connolly Primary School
Coogee Primary School	Cooinda Primary School
Coolbellup Community School	Cooloongup Primary School

Cottesloe Primary School	Creaney Primary School
Cunderdin District High School	Currambine Primary School
Curtin Primary School	Dalwallinu District High School
Dalmain Primary School	Dalyellup Primary School
Dampier Primary School	Dandaragan Primary School
Dardanup Primary School	Darkan Primary School
Darlington Primary School	Davallia Primary School
Dawul Remote Community School	Denmark Primary School
Derby District High School	Dianella Primary College
Djidi Djidi Aboriginal School	Djugerari Primary School
Dowerin District High School	Dryandra Primary School
Dumbleyung Primary School	Dunsborough Primary School
Durham Road School	East Beechboro Primary School
East Butler Primary School	East Hamersley Primary School
East Hamilton Hill Primary	East Kalgoorlie Primary School
East Kenwick Primary School	East Kimberley College
East Maddington Primary School	East Manjimup Primary School
East Narrogin Primary School	East Wanneroo Primary School
Eddystone Primary School	Eden Hill Primary School
Edney Primary School	Ellen Stirling Primary School
Ellenbrook Primary School	Embleton Primary School
Endeavour Primary School	Esperance Primary School
Excelsior Primary School	Fairview Primary School
Falcon Primary School	Falls Road Primary School
Flinders Park Primary School	Floreat Park Primary School
Forest Crescent Primary School	Forrestdale Primary School
Frankland River Primary School	Fremantle Primary School
Gairdner Primary School	Geraldton Primary School
Gidgegannup Primary School	Gingin District High School
Glen Huon Primary School	Glendale Primary School
Glengarry Primary School	Gnowangerup District High School
Golden Bay Primary School	Goollalal Primary School
Goomalling Primary School	Gosnells Primary School
Grandis Primary School	Greenmount Primary School
Greenmount Primary School	Grovelands Primary School
Guildford Primary School	Gwynne Park Primary School
Halidon Primary School	Halls Creek District High School
Halls Head Primary School	Hammond Park Primary School
Hampton Park Primary School	Hannans Primary School
Harmony Primary School	Harrisdale Primary School
Harvey Primary School	Heathridge Primary School
High Wycombe Primary School	Highgate Primary School
Hillarys Primary School	Hillcrest Primary School
Hillman Primary School	Hilton Primary School
Hollywood Primary School	Honeywood Primary School
Hopetoun Primary School	Hudson Park Primary School
Illawarra Primary School	Inglewood Primary School
Jerramungup Primary School	John Butler Primary College
Jolimont Primary School	Joondalup Primary School
Jurien Bay District High School	Kalamunda Primary School
Kalannie Primary School	Kalbarri District High School

Kalgoorlie Primary School	Kalgoorlie School of the Air
Kambalda Primary School	Kapinara Primary School
Kardinya Primary School	Karratha Primary School
Karrinyup Primary School	Katanning Primary School
Kelmscott Primary School	Kingsley Primary School
Kinross College	Kinross Primary School
Kojonup District High School	Koondoola Primary School
Koorana Primary School	Koorda Primary School
Lake Gwelup Primary School	Lake Monger Primary School
Lakelands Primary School	Landsdale Primary School
Lathlain Primary School	Leda Primary School
Leeming Primary School	Little Grove Primary School
Lockridge Primary School	Lockyer Community Kindergarten
Looma Remote Community School	Maddington Primary School
Madeley Primary School	Maidens Park Primary School
Makybe Rise Primary School	Malvern Springs Primary School
Mandurah Primary School	Marangaroo Primary School
Marble Bar Primary School	Margaret River Primary School
Marri Grove Primary School	Maylands Peninsula Primary School
Meadow Springs Primary School	Medina Primary School
Meekatharra District High School	Melville Primary School
Menzies Remote Community School	Merredin College
Midvale Primary School	Miling Primary School
Millars Well Primary School	Millen Primary School
Mindarie Primary School	Mingenew Primary School
Moorditj Noongar Community College	Moorine Rock Primary School
Morawa District High School	Morley Primary School
Mosman Park Primary School	Mosman Park School for Deaf Children
Mount Barker Community College	Mount Claremont Primary School
Mount Hawthorn Primary School	Mount Helena Primary School
Mount Lawley Primary School	Mount Lockyer Primary School
Mount Magnet District High School	Mount Manypeaks Primary School
Mount Pleasant Primary School	Mount Tarcoola Primary School
Mukinbudin District High School	Mullaloo Beach Primary School
Mullewa District High School	Mundaring Primary School
Mundijong Primary School	Munglinup Primary School
Nannup District High School	Narembeen District High School
Narrogin Primary School	Narrogin Senior High School
Nedlands Primary School	Neerigen Brook Primary School
Newborough Primary School	Newdegate Primary School
Newton Primary School	Nollamara Primary School
Noranda Primary School	Norseman District High School
North Balga Primary School	North Cottesloe Primary School
North Fremantle Primary School	North Morley Primary School
North Parmelia Primary School	North Perth Primary School
North Tom Price Primary School	North Woodvale Primary School
Northam Primary School	Northam Senior High School
Nulsen Primary School	Nungarin Primary School
Nyabing Primary School	O'Connor Primary School
Oakwood Primary School	Oberthur Primary School
Ocean Reef Primary School	Ocean Road Primary School

One Arm Point Remote Comm School	Ongerup Primary School
Orelia Primary School	Osborne Primary School
Palmyra Primary School	Pannawonica Primary School
Parkerville Primary School	Parkfield Primary School
Parkwood Primary School	Pearsall Primary School
Phoenix Primary School	Pinjarra Primary School
Port Kennedy Primary School	Poseidon Primary School
Quairading District High School	Queens Park Primary School
Quinns Rocks Primary School	Rangeway Primary School
Rapids Landing Primary School	Ravensthorpe District High School
Rawlinson Primary School	Redcliffe Primary School
Richmond Primary School	Rivergums Primary School
Riverside Primary School	Riverton Primary School
Rockingham Beach Primary School	Rockingham Lakes Primary School
Roebuck Primary School	Rosalie Primary School
Roseworth Primary School	Rostrata Primary School
Salmon Gums Primary School	Samson Primary School
Sawyers Valley Primary School	Scaddan Primary School
Secret Harbour Primary School	Serpentine Primary School
Settlers Primary School	Shark Bay School
Shelley Primary School	Singleton Primary School
Somerly Primary School	Sorrento Primary School
South Ballajura Primary School	South Coogee Primary School
South Hedland Primary School	South Kalgoorlie Primary School
South Lake Primary School	South Newman Primary School
South Padbury Primary School	South Thornlie Primary School
Southern Grove Primary School	Southwell Primary School
Spearwood Primary School	Spring Hill Primary School
Springfield Primary School	St Jerome Primary School
St John Bosco's College	St Vincent Primary School
Subiaco Primary School	Success Primary School
Sutherland Dianella Primary School	Swan View Primary School
Swanbourne Primary School	Takari Primary School
Tambellup Primary School	Tambrey Primary School
Tammin Primary School	Thornlie Primary School
Tom Price Primary School	Toodyay District High School
Tranby College	Trayning Primary School
Treeby Primary School	Treendale Primary School
Tuart Forest Primary School	Tuart Hill Primary School
Two Rocks Primary School	Upper Swan Primary School
Waggrakine Primary School	Walpole Primary School
Wandina Primary School	Warnbro Primary School
Warriapendi Primary School	Weld Square Primary School
Wellard Primary School	Wellstead Primary School
Wembley Downs Primary School	Wembley Primary School
West Balcatta Primary School	West Beechboro Primary School
West Busselton Primary School	West Byford Primary School
West Greenwood Primary School	West Leederville Primary School
West Leeming Primary School	West Morley Primary School

Westfield Park Primary School	Westminster Primary School
White Gum Valley Primary School	Wickham Primary School
Willandra Primary School	Willetton Primary School
Winterfold Primary School	Winthrop Primary School
Wirrabirra Primary School	Wongan Hills District High School
Woodlands Primary School	Woodlupine Primary School
Woodvale Primary School	Wundowie Primary School
Wyndham District High School	Yakamia Primary School
Yanchep Beach Primary School	Yanchep Lagoon Primary School
Yanchep Rise Primary School	Yangebup Primary School
Yarralinka Primary School	Yerecoin Primary School
Yokine Primary School	York District High School
Yuluma Primary School	Yuna Primary School

CORONAVIRUS — EXPOSURE SITES

286. Hon TJORN SIBMA to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Health:

I refer to WA Health deciding against the publishing of the list of COVID exposure sites except for major outbreak venues and superspreader events.

- (1) As the decision was made “due to widespread transmission of COVID-19 throughout metropolitan and regional Western Australia”, are we in the endemic phase of the virus?
- (2) What are the thresholds for WA Health to determine that a major outbreak or superspreader event has occurred?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) No.
- (2) WA Health is currently working on updating its processes to use SafeWA QR data to determine exposure sites of significant concern. These might be locations where, during a specific time, more cases are detected who were likely infectious at that time or may have been exposed at that time, than one would expect from the current background rate of transmission in the community.

COMMUNITIES — POLICE RAID

287. Hon PETER COLLIER to the minister representing the Minister for Police:

I refer the minister to question without notice 250 asked on Thursday, 24 March 2022.

- (1) What is the total number of documents allegedly leaked by the female Aboriginal woman whose home was raided by police on Friday, 18 February 2022?
- (2) What is the total number of documents allegedly leaked by the eight public servants employed by the Department of Communities who were reported to Western Australia police?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The following information has been provided to me by the Minister for Police.

The Western Australia Police Force advise that a response to this question cannot be provided within the time frame. The honourable member may wish to place the question on notice.

CORONAVIRUS — CARE AT HOME PROGRAM

288. Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Health:

I refer to the COVID care at home program.

- (1) What is the cost of the service provided by Calvary and Medibank to date and the expected total cost?
- (2) How many positive COVID-19 patients are currently being supported by the COVID care at home service as of today's date?
- (3) How does the program integrate and share information with the public health system and a patient's regular general practitioner?
- (4) How many patients has the program supported to date?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) The cost of Western Australia's COVID care at home for the first month of the program to 28 February 2022 is \$281 998.27 including GST. The estimated contract cost of the program is \$39 600 000 including GST over two years, noting that this cost is dependent upon the number of patients who access the service.
- (2) As of 9.00 am on Tuesday, 5 April 2022, 777 patients are currently being monitored by WA COVID care at home.
- (3) The program shares patient information with the patient's consent, with their general practitioner or specialist should they require anti-viral medications in addition to when they are discharged from the program. Patients are encouraged to advise their GP or specialist should they be diagnosed as COVID-19 positive. For patients who are referred for escalation to the hospital setting, Calvary–Medibank completes an iSoBAR—identify-situation-observations-background-agreed plan-read back—form to ensure a streamlined, linked clinical handover process with the relevant hospital service provider.
- (4) As of 9.00 am on 4 April 2022, a total of 2 406 patients have been monitored by WA COVID care at home.

GOVERNMENT REGIONAL OFFICERS' HOUSING — BROOME

289. Hon NEIL THOMSON to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Housing:

I refer to the availability of government worker accommodation in the Kimberley, specifically in the regional centre of Broome.

- (1) How many vacant Government Regional Officers' Housing properties exist in all suburbs of Broome presently?
- (2) How many of the houses in part (1) are available for immediate tenancy?
- (3) How many GROH houses are under construction in all suburbs of Broome?
- (4) How many existing private dwellings have been purchased for GROH housing for the financial 2021–2022 year to date?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of this question.

- (1)–(2) GROH properties are provided to a client agency to meet their need for housing. It is not uncommon that client agencies may have allocated vacant properties to enable them to recruit and deploy suitable employees, including teachers and police. As at 28 March 2022, 33 GROH properties in Broome were vacant with confirmed incoming tenants.
- (3)–(4) Ensuring regional communities have access to critical state government workers, such as teachers and police officers, is essential. The McGowan government is investing \$200 million to the GROH program across the state, investing in spot purchases and new builds, refurbishing properties to bring stock back online and maintenance to ensure stock is maintained to a high standard. In Broome, 14 GROH properties are at various stages of planning and delivery, which includes five properties currently under construction through a build-to-lease arrangement with a local developer. No properties have been spot purchased in Broome for GROH housing in the 2021–22 financial year to date. The Minister for Housing is exploring all options to fast track the delivery of GROH housing where it is needed, including modular, timber and pre-fabricated builds, leasing opportunities and partnerships with local government.

SOCIAL HOUSING — COMMUNITY HOUSING LTD — GERALDTON

290. Hon STEVE MARTIN to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Housing:

I refer to the Minister for Housing's media release on 25 January announcing \$58 million to refurbish community housing properties.

- (1) Of the \$6.7 million allocated to Community Housing Ltd in Geraldton, how much has been allocated to housing in Geraldton?
- (2) How much of that money has been spent to the end of March 2022?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(2) Of the \$6.7 million awarded to Community Housing Ltd under the social housing economic recovery package grants program, \$690 939 is allocated for 11 projects in Geraldton. Grant payments for these 11 projects are expected to commence in the second quarter of 2022. The member may note that the media release states that the referenced location is defined by the organisation's postal address provided in the application and is not necessarily the location in which the projects will be delivered.

CORONAVIRUS — OMICRON WAVE — PEAK

291. Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS to the Leader of the House representing the Premier:

I refer to the number of new daily COVID cases, the daily hospitalisation rate of COVID patients and the number of COVID cases in ICU.

- (1) Has Western Australia reached its peak of new daily COVID cases?
- (2) If no to (1), how will the peak be measured and when is it expected?
- (3) Given the modelling suggested peak hospitalisation during COVID of 411 to 475, how does the current hospitalisation rate compare?
- (4) Given the modelling suggested peak ICU rates during COVID of 51 to 56, how does the current hospitalisation rate compare?
- (5) Given these numbers, will the Premier now commit to releasing to the people of Western Australia a plan to transition out of COVID restrictions, and when can we expect it?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

Unbelievable! I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(5) The peak of Western Australia's new COVID-19 daily cases will not be known until it is achieved. The Department of Health publish a biweekly report each Tuesday and Friday on Western Australia's COVID-19 outcomes. Each report compares actual cases, hospitalisations and ICU admissions against scenario modelling.

CHILDREN IN CARE — WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN

292. Hon NICK GOIRAN to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to the answer to my question without notice 208 in which the minister informed the house that two children in the care of the CEO of the department have been reported to WA Police as missing.

- (1) Have these children been found?
- (2) For how many days have each of the children had their whereabouts recorded as unknown?
- (3) Has the department formally reported each of these two children to WA Police as a missing person on more than one occasion?
- (4) How many other children are in the care of the CEO with whereabouts currently recorded as unknown?
- (5) Further to (4), how many have been reported to WA Police as a missing person?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

The term “whereabouts unknown” may lead to the assumption that every child with a placement type of “unknown” is a missing person, not in contact with caseworkers and unable to be supported by the Department of Communities.

- (1) Yes.
- (2) Child one was recorded in a placement type of unknown for nine days. Child two was recorded in a placement type of unknown for five days.
- (3) Yes.
- (4)–(5) As of 5 April 2022, there are seven children recorded in a placement type unknown. Six of those children are in contact with the Department of Communities. One has been reported to WA Police Force as missing.

PERTH CITY DEAL — SWAN RIVER CAUSEWAY BRIDGE

293. Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE to the minister representing the Minister for Finance:

I refer to the media statement issued on 17 March entitled “Major boost for the Perth City Deal” which confirmed the Swan River cycling bridge had increased in cost from \$50 million to \$100 million.

- (1) Why has this project doubled in price?
- (2) How many tenders were received for this project and what were the highest and lowest bids received?
- (3) Has cabinet approved the increased expenditure towards the Swan River bridge?
- (4) If yes to (3), why has this project been prioritised despite being significantly over its original budget, yet no tender was accepted for the Geraldton Health Campus redevelopment?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

Honourable member, this was referred to the Minister for Transport, so that is who has provided the answer. I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(4) As outlined in the joint media statement issued on 17 March 2021, both the state and commonwealth governments have each allocated an additional \$25 million towards the Swan River bridge project. The additional Perth City Deal funding was required to address the current challenging construction environment and labour market, allow design improvements, and enable more manufacturing work to be undertaken locally. It is important to note, this project is supported and funded by the federal Liberal–National government.

**NATIVE FOREST — LOGGING — TRANSITION PACKAGE —
AUSTRALIAN WORKERS' UNION**

Question without Notice 202 — Answer

HON SAMANTHA ROWE (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [5.04 pm]: I would like to provide an answer to Hon James Hayward's question without notice 202 asked on Tuesday, 22 March, which I seek leave to have incorporated into *Hansard*.

[Leave granted for the following material to be incorporated.]

- (1) Yes.
(2) No.
(3) No.

Since the announcement of the worker programs, there has been strong cross-sector support for these worker programs; including from the Forest Industry Federation of WA [FIFWA], local governments and broader industry.

- (4) No, the Funding Agreement is Commercial in Confidence.

NATIVE FOREST — LOGGING — PROCESSORS

Question without Notice 84 — Correction of Answer

HON SAMANTHA ROWE (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [5.05 pm]: On behalf of the Minister for Regional Development representing the Minister for Forestry, I would like to provide a corrected answer to Hon Dr Steve Thomas's question without notice 84 provided on 15 March. The answer covered all parts (1) to (3) of the question; however, I would now like to table the information relating to part (1), while the answer for parts (2) and (3) remains the same. I seek leave to have the response incorporated into *Hansard*.

[Leave granted for the following material to be incorporated.]

- (1) The current sawmill contracts are set out as below:

Contract No	Contract Name	Contract Expiry Date	Species	Product Sub Type	Contracted Tonnes per Annum
3004	Parkside Milling Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Karri	3rd Grade Sawlog Native	2,330
3006	Yornup Mill Pty Ltd / ND & BJ Holdsworth t/a Greenacres Mill	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	5,347
			Jarrah	Residue Bole Log	200
			Karri	1st Grade Sawlog Native	620
3007	Middlesex Mill Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	3,305
			Marri	Sawlog Native	992
			Karri	1st Grade Sawlog Native	2,000
3008	Parkside Milling Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	1st Grade Sawlog Native	21,040
			Jarrah	2nd Grade Sawlog Native	5,260
3009	Hexan Holdings Pty Ltd t/a Whiteland Milling	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	18,160
		31/12/2023	Marri	Sawlog Native	3,240
		31/12/2023	Karri	1 st Grade Sawlog Native	1,860
3013	Middlesex Mill Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Dead Firewood	100
			Jarrah	Green Firewood	400
			Karri	Residue Log	500
			Karri	3rd Grade Sawlog Native	2,000
3029	Jarrahwood Australia Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	10,000
3034	Plain Pty Ltd t/a Harris Wood Machining	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	3,000

3035	Plain Pty Ltd t/a Harris Wood Machining	31/12/2023	Blackbutt	Bole Sawlog	400
			Marri	Residue Log	500
3036	CJ Matters Pty Ltd t/a Redmond Sawmill	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	8,000
			Karri	1 st Grade Sawlog Native	0
3037	CJ Matters Pty Ltd t/a Redmond Sawmill	31/12/2023	Wandoo	Bole Sawlog	1,000
3039	Hexan Holdings Pty Ltd t/a Whiteland Milling	31/12/2023	Blackbutt	Bole Sawlog	350
			Sheoak	Sawlog Native	250
			Marri	Residue Log	1,000
3040	Denmark Spot Milling Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	1800
3041	Denmark Spot Milling Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Blackbutt	Bole Sawlog	100
3043	Dwellingup Sawmills Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	5,500
3045	Perenti Timber Recovery Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	1,080
			Jarrah	Whole Bole Sawlog	300
3046	Perenti Timber Recovery Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Blackbutt	Bole Sawlog	50
			Sheoak	Sawlog Native	0
3053	West Coast Timbers Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	450
			Marri	Sawlog Native	273
			Marri	Sawlog Native	1,091
3058	Ian Collins t/a Muschamp Milling	31/12/2023	Marri	Residue Log	1,000
3060	JR & A Hersey Pty Ltd	12/03/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	2,000
			Jarrah	Whole Bole Sawlog	3,000
3062	Shane Little t/a Little Nut Farm	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	270
		31/12/2023	Jarrah	Residue Bole Log	600
		31/12/2023	Jarrah	Whole Bole Sawlog	500
3063	Shane Little t/a Little Nut Farm	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Dead Firewood	250
			Jarrah	Green Firewood	1,000
			Wandoo	Bole Sawlog	0
3065	Fastace Investments Pty Ltd t/a Danny's Firewood and Timber	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	900
			Jarrah	Residue Bole Log	300
3067	FL & JR Shaw t/a Shaws Timber	31/12/2023	Blackbutt	Bole Sawlog	0
			Jarrah	Dead Firewood	100
			Jarrah	Green Firewood	500
3069	Forest Floor (WA) Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Residue Bole Log	400
		31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	360
		31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bore Sawlog (Whole)	200
3070	Forest Floor (WA) Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Blackbutt	Bole Sawlog	0
			Sheoak	Sawlog Native	0
			Jarrah	Dead Firewood	200
			Jarrah	Green Firewood	800
			Jarrah	Stored Green Firewood	200
			Wandoo	Bole Sawlog	0
3077	Yornup Mill Pty Ltd & ND & BJ Holdsworth t/a Greenacres Mill	31/12/2023	Blackbutt	Bole Sawlog	0
			Jarrah	Dead Firewood	400
			Jarrah	Green Firewood	400
			Karri	3rd Grade Sawlog Native	150
			Wandoo	Bole Sawlog	0
3080	Rockbridge Holdings Pty Ltd t/a Rockbridge Milling	31/12/2023	Karri	3rd Grade Sawlog Native	2,000
3088	Wesbeam Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Karri	LVL / Peeler	15,000

3089	Parkside Milling Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	1,000
3091	Parkside Milling Pty Ltd	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	0
			Jarrah	General Purpose Sawlog	44,600
			Marri	Residue Log	2,000
			Marri	Sawlog Native	5,000
			Jarrah	3rd Grade Sawlog Native	7,440
3106	G & P Giuntoli t/a Chowrup Timber Mill	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	800
6012	Raymond James Gilchrist t/a Alex Bridge Timber Mill	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog	250
6015	AM & KL Brotherton	31/12/2023	Karri	3rd Grade Sawlog Native	500
21-059	Jarrahwood Australia	31/12/2022	Jarrah	Green Firewood	4,000
		31/12/2022	Jarrah	Whole Bole Sawlog	1,500
		31/12/2022	Marri	Bole Sawlog Combined	10,000
		31/12/2022	Marri	Dead Firewood	0
		31/12/2022	Marri	Green Firewood Debarked	0
		31/12/2022	Marri	Green Firewood	0
21-085	Trustee for R&H Building Solutions t/a R&H Timber Products	31/12/2023	Jarrah	Bole Sawlog Combined	5,000

NOTE:

- Contracted units of '0' include products that are interchangeable with other awarded quantities, or that are delivered subject to availability and have no minimum allocation.
- Firewood and residue type products have been included as the customer either recovers/sawmills the higher quality portions, or, is a recognised sawmiller and buyer of higher quality native forest products.

TREASURER'S ADVANCE AUTHORISATION BILL 2022
Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural) [5.06 pm]: I return to my remarks on the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2022 in the remaining time that I have available to me. As members who were paying attention to my contribution prior to question time would know, I was examining a number of issues with the procurement of rapid antigen tests, a matter that is directly relevant to this authorisation bill because it is one of the four matters listed that result in a total of some \$1.6 billion required by the state prior to 30 June. Just before I move on from rapid antigen tests, the last point I was touching on before question time was the impact that the state's procurement has had on other supply chains. Members will have to keep in mind that until late January, it was unlawful to sell or procure rapid antigen tests in Western Australia, except for in very rare and limited circumstances. Our supply chains in Western Australia were not developed; they were not mature; they were not advanced. That is why I believe we had to rush offshore very quickly and procure 110 million tests at a cost of almost \$600 million, of which the commonwealth can pick up half the tab.

What has also occurred is that a number of small businesses, particularly pharmacies, have made significant investments in procuring rapid antigen tests. I met a pharmacist just recently. They are at a community pharmacy—a small business. They had spent \$80 000 procuring rapid antigen tests, which they tell me are now largely unsellable because of the way in which rapid antigen tests have gone from being unlawful to the market being absolutely flooded with them. I said in my remarks that obviously the government has an obligation first and foremost to the health and safety of the community, but I think this was a missed opportunity to utilise the supply chains that already existed, particularly outside Perth, for our community pharmacies. Just about every town in my electorate has a community pharmacy whereas they may not always have a doctor, a police station or even a local government office for that matter. I think the commonwealth used that opportunity better in terms of its program for pensioners, with free rapid antigen tests being made available to that cohort through the community pharmacy network. I make that point in concluding my remarks on the rapid antigen tests.

A PowerPoint presentation was made available to members during the briefing from the Department of Treasury. On page 3 of that PowerPoint presentation, there is a dot point that states —

Additional funding under TA —

That being an abbreviation for Treasurer's advance —

must be approved by the Parliament before funds can be drawn in remainder of 2021–22 (hence to be declared 'Urgent')

Of course, we have not quite seen the urgency that was reflected in these briefing notes or in how the bill was dealt with upon its arrival in this place, I think on 22 March. The bill was introduced and first, second and third read in the Assembly on the same day. In fact, I think only on the day prior did the opposition learn that this bill existed at all. The bill sat in the Council for the ordinary period of time, in accordance with standing orders. The bill has not been declared urgent. That leads me to the question: at what point, based on the current projection, will the state run out of money? A degree of urgency did seem to exist at some point between 29 November, which was the cut-off date for the midyear review, and 22 March when this bill was first, second and third read in the Assembly, and today, being 5 April. I would like to get an appreciation of the current position of the state's finances with regard to the supply of cash. I would also like to know whether it is still the case that the projection that is shown in tabled paper 1035, as tabled by the Treasurer in the other place, remains accurate or whether some form of updated information can be provided to the Council this evening on this matter. It would be good to get a sense of where we are at on that matter.

A few other things that are listed in the allowances that are provided for in the \$1.6 billion are for what are called “issues emerging”. I refer to a question that I asked just now in question time, although under our new system we are not allowed to have the answer until it is emailed to us, so I cannot use the answer now when I am on my feet after question time, but I have just checked my filing cabinet for the question. The question was about the COVID care at home program, the suppliers of that program being Calvary and Medibank. I was told that the expected cost of that program is, if I am not mistaken, \$39 million over two years. Interestingly, very little of that has been spent to date—from my recollection, the figure is \$278 000. Given where we are at with community transmission of the disease, we have spent under \$300 000 out of a projected cost of \$39 million. This is the sort of program that perhaps will not land on the full expenditure that has been estimated, certainly not in the remaining period of this financial year, noting that the answer provided information over two years. That expense may well fall under “Other COVID-19-related costs” or “Buffer for unforeseen issues”, or it may not be in the Treasurer's advance at all. It may be a matter that was appropriately considered and budgeted for in September of last year in providing the appropriation bills to Parliament.

Therefore, there would be some benefit to members in considering the four line items that are found in this very short summary of the \$1.6 billion that is required. It would be useful if that could be provided in the minister's second reading reply, or perhaps additional information could be tabled, or we could have an exchange during the committee stage and further explore these four line items that vary between \$164 million and \$634 million in value.

I want to finish on a question that I also asked in question time today about the prioritisation that seems to be going on within government. In recent days, the cost of the Perth city campus of Edith Cowan University has blown out by \$158 million, and the project still has a green light. The cost of the Swan River pedestrian–cycle bridge, which was planned to cost \$50 million, has blown out to \$100 million, and that project still has a green light. We are talking about the COVID-19 response. One of the most disappointing aspects of the performance of the McGowan government over the last five years has been its failure to deliver its election commitment to the people of Geraldton for the Geraldton Health Campus project. That project has effectively been abandoned in the short term. An unreasonable budget was applied to that project. The election commitment was in the order of \$45 million. There was no money in the government's first budget. In the first budget that did have money in it, it went to \$73 million. It then crept up to \$82 million. Interestingly, before the election, a document was created by an organisation called Project Midwest. It largely comprises government entities at a local, state and federal level. They estimated the cost of the redevelopment of the hospital to be \$120 million. It is interesting to compare this project and the lack of information that we have been able to access, particularly through question time in this place, about what is going on with that procurement process with the government decisions around rapid antigen testing, the Swan River pedestrian bridge and the Perth city university campus. If the investment in that project had been made five years ago when the McGowan government came to power, it could have played a very important role indeed in the COVID-19 response. Much of the last two years has been consumed by COVID. COVID-19 is literally the explanation, but also the excuse, for every government decision, yet this important piece of health infrastructure has been under significant stress for a very long time. I say to the minister representing the Treasurer that no person would be more pleased than I if he were able to confirm in his second reading reply whether some of this \$2.32 billion in the Treasurer's advance—or \$2 320 million, just a few crumbs—has been able to fall the way of Geraldton and the midwest. This project should not be put on hold. It should not be put on the never–never. It should have been delivered years ago. All we have is a redeveloped car park and a front entrance to a hospital that cannot be used.

I could certainly have said a lot more if more time was allowed in a debate like this, but unfortunately it is not. I look forward to the minister's reply, and to hopefully understanding some of these issues more fully once we get to the committee stage of the bill.

HON NICK GOIRAN (South Metropolitan) [5.18 pm]: We have just heard from Hon Martin Aldridge that the government has apparently procured the equivalent of 40 rapid antigen tests for each person in our state—40! As the honourable member indicated, it will obviously be the case that a proportion of our community will need more than that, but 40 on average for every single Western Australian seems truly remarkable. I hope that the minister representing the Premier in his capacity as Treasurer will be able to respond to that concern.

This is not the only example of the Premier in his capacity as Treasurer coming to Parliament and asking for more money. In fact, we have had a series of expensive debacles in our state involving the Attorney General, and I think it is fair to describe these expensive debacles as a pattern of behaviour. I would like members to remember the phrase “pattern of behaviour”.

Looking at the record of the McGowan Labor government, it would seem that it is unfamiliar with or perhaps has forgotten the fact that court matters are expensive. I draw members’ attention to the fact that courts have scales of costs. The scale of costs applicable in the Supreme Court for contentious matters includes a daily rate of \$6 820 for a Senior Counsel; that is, it is considered reasonable for a Senior Counsel or a Queen’s Counsel to charge a daily fee of \$6 820. I hasten to add that that is only what is called the scale of costs; that is not the limit of the amount that can be charged. But Mr McGowan and, it would seem, Mr Quigley seem content to be constantly using the services of expensive Senior Counsel in Western Australia at the rate of at least \$6 820 a day for their pet legal projects.

I intend to take members through four expensive debacles involving our Attorney General. The first of those, of course, is this sequel performance that will see the Attorney General this Friday—perhaps sooner, because apparently he is away on urgent parliamentary business over the next couple of days—jetting over to Sydney to once again provide evidence in this dramatic case involving the Premier and his friend Mr Palmer. This defamation trial involving the Premier and that businessman has now descended into a situation whereby the first law officer of Western Australia has admitted that he gave wrong, incorrect or mistaken answers during his cross-examination, and he has asked to fix those wrong answers that he gave under oath in a Federal Court.

To give people some context about how extraordinary, peculiar and unusual this expensive debacle has been, I draw to members’ attention an article written on 24 March this year by a senior reporter from *The Australian*. He wrote —

Western Australia’s Attorney-General has asked the Federal Court for a “do-over” of his evidence in the defamation trial between Clive Palmer and Premier Mark McGowan.

John Quigley made the extraordinary request in order to correct what were described as mistakes in the testimony he gave while under oath earlier this month.

The application was strongly opposed by lawyers for Mr Palmer at a special urgent hearing in Sydney on Thursday.

High-profile lawyer Bret Walker SC, who is representing Mr McGowan in the case, ...

I pause there to remind members that the Premier is using Senior Counsel. Remember what I said earlier: the going rate for Senior Counsel, certainly for a Western Australian case in the Supreme Court, is more than \$6 000 a day. How much is Mr Walker asking the taxpayers of Western Australia to pay for Mr McGowan to continue these ego games that he plays with billionaires, which we now find involves the first law officer in Western Australia having to redo his evidence?

The article continues —

High-profile lawyer Bret Walker SC, who is representing Mr McGowan in the case, told the hearing that Mr Quigley had notified him that he had given “wrong, incorrect or mistaken answers” during his cross-examination at the hands of Peter Gray SC.

Those of us who get responses to questions from the Attorney General will be very unsurprised by the notion of wrong, incorrect or mistaken answers. Nevertheless, this happened under oath with the first law officer of Western Australia. The article continues —

Mr Palmer’s barrister Barry Dean said the application should not be granted, saying it effectively amounted to Mr Quigley asking the court to start over.

“After a comprehensive and very effective cross examination, (Mr Quigley) effectively comes before this court and says ‘I want a re-do, I want to start again, here’s an affidavit,’” Mr Dean said.

Mr Dean said the two different accounts sought to be presented by Mr Quigley meant the Attorney-General could not be treated as a credible witness.

The first law officer of Western Australia is described here as not being a credible witness. In some moments’ time, I will go to the notion of what a model litigant is or should be. One would think that the first law officer of Western Australia would be familiar with that; nevertheless, the article continues —

Mr Dean said the two different accounts sought to be presented by Mr Quigley meant the Attorney-General could not be treated as a credible witness.

He noted that there was a risk that Mr Quigley had an opportunity —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Jackie Jarvis): Member, I note that there is a link between the Treasurer’s Advance Authorisation Bill 2022 and the cost of the legal case, but I am struggling to understand the link of where we are going with this now. I will just ask you to reference the bill before us.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Acting President, there will be no trouble there whatsoever, because, you see, the Premier of Western Australia, who is also the Treasurer, has two roles. He is involved in this legal case, which is costing the taxpayer of Western Australia a massive amount of money. He is coming back to Parliament now and asking for more money. In part, it is because the Attorney General, in an extraordinary case, is going back to the court and saying, “I need to fix my errors that I gave under oath.” The taxpayer of Western Australia should not be paying for that.

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The Leader of the House is very, very comfortable with the taxpayers of Western Australia paying for the Attorney General to have to give his evidence not only once, but twice. He has now had to go and give evidence on two occasions. That is what we call a sequel. He seems to think it is maybe like being a musician or a musical performer and if he is not happy, he gets to do it again, or maybe a film star who says to the director, “Stop; I want to have a do-over.” It does not work like that in a court of law. If the Attorney General swears in a court of law that he is providing true responses, it is extraordinary for that individual to then say afterwards, “No, I’d like to have another opportunity.” Forgive me if some of us take the taxpayers of Western Australia’s funds very seriously, unlike the McGowan Labor government.

The article goes on to state —

He also noted that Mr Walker had the opportunity to confer with or re-examine Mr Quigley about the apparent inconsistencies in his testimony immediately after the cross-examination but made the “forensic decision” not to do so.

“In the cross-examination of Mr Quigley, it was quite apparent to anybody watching or listening to that proceeding that there were significant issues in his evidence,” Mr Dean said.

“Throughout his evidence, he seemed completely apprised of the consequences of what he said, on no less than 16 occasions he referred to either his oath or swearing to the court, there was no ambiguity whatsoever in his evidence.”

This is what has transpired on the other side of the country at the cost of the taxpayer of Western Australia. The Premier is coming here now with this bill and asking for more money—no wonder, because his first law officer has to jet over to Sydney in a couple of days’ time, or, as I say, maybe as soon as tomorrow, because apparently he is away on urgent parliamentary business, unable to answer any questions over the next couple of days while Parliament is sitting because he needs to practise for his next performance in this sequel. That is what will be happening over the next couple of days. He thinks it is some kind of game.

Justice Lee, who is presiding over this case, specifically said on 28 March this year that this is not a game. Interestingly, for the benefit of the Leader of the House, who probably has not had an opportunity to read the reasons for decisions, they were delivered on 28 March this year after two hearings—on 24 March and also on that day. I will quote from the judgement, in which Justice Lee said —

After hours, and eleven days ago, my chambers received an unusual communication from the solicitors for Mr McGowan. It was in the following terms:

We wish to bring to his Honour’s attention an issue concerning the evidence given by Mr Quigley under cross-examination in these proceedings on 9 March 2022. In broad terms, it has been brought to our attention that Mr Quigley wishes to have attention drawn to what he says are mistakes in his evidence.

In light of this, please let us know whether his Honour considers it appropriate to make any directions.

Mr Palmer’s solicitor is copied to this correspondence.

Justice Lee goes on later in his judgement to say —

Before going further, I should remark that it appears to have become increasingly common for communications to be made to chambers without first having secured the consent of the opposing party to the content and dispatch of the communication.

Who is providing this communication? None other than the lawyers for Mr McGowan, the Premier of Western Australia. When the Premier or the Attorney General or the state of Western Australia are involved in a court action, they ought to be model litigants, and here they are chastised once again by Justice Lee, simply thinking that they can —

Point of Order

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is not at all the practice of this house to kind of delve deeply into matters that are on foot in the courts. I appreciate a reference to a matter that is ongoing but the honourable member now seems to be reading out and quoting from various elements of a matter —

Hon Nick Goiran interjected.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am raising a point of order.

Hon Nick Goiran interjected.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Just take a big deep breath and calm down.

Acting President, I seek your guidance. My observation is that it is not the normal practice for this house to go so deeply into a matter that is currently on foot.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The Leader of the House shows a breathtaking misunderstanding of what the sub judice rule actually means. There is nothing that I have said today —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Jackie Jarvis): Member, I will take some advice, if that is okay.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In response —

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Can you please take a seat. I will take advice.

Members, my understanding is the convention exists not to prejudice matters that are currently before the court. I think at the moment there is a fine line that may not have yet been crossed. I will ask Hon Nick Goiran to make sure his comments do not prejudice any future actions, particularly those that are currently before the court, and bring his comments back to the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill. There is no point of order at this stage.

Debate Resumed

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Thank you, Acting President. Rest assured, unlike the Leader of the House, I am incredibly familiar with the sub judice rule. In fact, I would like one day for the Leader of the House to stand up and explain what the rule actually consists of. She may be unfamiliar with the fact that it is a convention —

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Member, the point of order has been dealt with. I ask that you return to the matter at hand.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: On that note, I would like to speedily return to the public document, which is the reasons for judgement. It would be quite extraordinary if a member of Parliament was not able to read or quote from the reasons for judgement, which are on the public record, something that the Leader of the House has obviously not had the opportunity to do. As I said, it is quite extraordinary in this case that the judge is chastising Mr McGowan and his lawyers because of the communications that are going on. That is a statement of fact on the public record at the moment that does no prejudice to the particular case that is yet to be determined. But it does prejudice the reputation of Western Australia when we have a Premier and an Attorney General acting in this fashion, and then we have the Leader of the House who cannot even be bothered to read the reasons for judgement and tries to interrupt the debate instead.

On the public record, in accordance with this judgement, paragraph 7 on page 7 reads —

This application arose in circumstances explained by an affidavit of one of the solicitors acting for Mr McGowan —

One wonders how many solicitors are getting paid for Mr McGowan in this particular case, and for the Attorney General to attend a secret performance on Friday. People want to know about the Treasurer's advance bill. How much of that is being spent on this matter? That would be a good question to get an answer to, if the McGowan government was true to its word and its standard of gold transparency. Members will understand if I will not hold my breath.

Justice Lee, quoting from the affidavit of one of the solicitors for Mr McGowan—remember, he has multiple lawyers we are all paying for—went on to say —

On Tuesday, 15 March 2022 Clayton Utz [Mr McGowan's solicitors] received notice that Mr Quigley wanted to file a correcting affidavit in relation to his oral testimony given in this matter on 9 March.

On 17 March 2022 Mr David Grace QC, —

That is a name that members will want to commit to memory —

who I understand to be retained by Mr Quigley —

In other words, Mr Quigley has David Grace, QC, another QC, involved in this case —

sent Clayton Utz a copy of the Quigley Affidavit. **The Quigley Affidavit identifies mistakes Mr Quigley says were made during his oral testimony.** A copy of the Quigley Affidavit was subsequently provided by Clayton Utz to the Applicant/Cross-Respondent's solicitor and by the Respondent/Cross-Claimant's Senior Counsel to the Applicant/Cross-Respondent's Senior Counsel. As at the time of swearing this affidavit, the Applicant/Cross-Respondent has refused to consent to the Quigley Affidavit or its contents being disclosed to this Honourable Court.

That is hardly surprising, given that the judge goes on in this judgement, a public document, to say that an opportunity had been provided for re-examination, which was expressly declined. The judge went on in paragraph 11 to say —

The Court is not engaged in some sort of game: if the current state of the evidence needs to be clarified to give a complete impression, then such clarification should be allowed ...

It goes on to say —

Counsel for Mr Palmer have made it plain that Mr Quigley is a witness whose credit is squarely in issue. The notion of a witness being cross-examined as to his credit and thereafter preparing an affidavit, on the basis of advice given by senior counsel retained by him, with the intention that this affidavit is then to be read in the trial, is as strange as it sounds.

That is what Justice Lee said about this debacle that the Premier and the Attorney General have embroiled themselves in, which now sees the taxpayer of Western Australia assisting Mr Quigley to jet back over to Sydney to perform for a second time.

Justice Lee concludes at the end of this judgement —

It does not seem to me that I should deal with the issue of leave to receive further evidence of Mr Quigley in the abstract. Rather I should allow him to be re-examined should Mr McGowan wish and, should any specific question posed (and objected to) require leave, I should then consider whether leave or permission should be granted to ask the specific question by reference to the mandatory s 192 factors and any other relevant consideration.

The point of all this is that those matters will be determined by the court, but the Western Australian taxpayers continue to fund these things, thanks to Mr McGowan in his capacity as Treasurer running back to Parliament and asking for more money. This is the first of four cases that I want to bring to the attention of members—expensive debacles involving the Attorney General.

The second case I bring to members' attention is Crawford v Quail, another incredibly expensive exercise. The Leader of the House will be able to cool her jets for a moment because, in news to her, this case has finished so there is no possibility of any breach —

A member interjected.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: That is a very good question, honourable member. That is an intelligent interjection. I only wish that the member's leader would do the same thing. The relevance to this bill is that the taxpayers of Western Australia had to fund this matter this financial year, and the government has now come back to this place and is asking for more money. If the Leader of the House holds her horses, I will take her through exactly what was said in the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations. On 21 October 2021, I specifically asked the very hardworking parliamentary secretary, who is away on urgent parliamentary business—it probably really should be the Attorney General —

... how much of the total appropriations have been used for assisting either of the parties in the recent Supreme Court matter of Crawford and Quail?

Hon Matthew Swinbourn responded —

I cannot give the member a very precise answer in terms of the exact amount there because I do not have them before me at this particular point in time, but I am aware that currently the State Solicitor's Office has incurred \$274 725.87, GST exclusive, until 20 October 2021.

I pause there and say that although Hon Matthew Swinbourn said he was not in a position to provide a precise answer, I thought it was quite precise. Nevertheless, in due course, he might provide an even more precise answer than \$274 725.87, GST exclusive. That is how much money is involved—more than a quarter of a million dollars had been spent at that point in time, according to evidence provided to the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations.

I then asked —

What proportion has been allocated to assisting either of the parties?

Hon Matthew Swinbourn, in his capacity as parliamentary secretary said —

My advice is that those amounts relate to President Quail and that at this point in time they have not incurred any expenses in relation to Magistrate Crawford, although it may be possible that at some later time she might seek funding under the relevant guidelines that relate to seeking public funds to support legal proceedings. That may happen at a later date.

Has that happened? Is that another reason we now have a situation in which the Premier, in his capacity as Treasurer, is riding back to Parliament not only to assist his Attorney General to jet back over for a sequel performance in Sydney, but also to deal with Magistrate Crawford's costs. Is that what is going on here? It would be very good to find out that information. I am sure that if we ask about it under clause 1, we will get no response: "Sorry, member, we don't have that information." That information is available! It does not matter how much notice members give to this government; it will go out of its way to make sure it provides as little information to Parliament as possible. It is no wonder that we are in the fourth month of the year after only five sitting weeks, such is the McGowan government's obsession with ensuring it provides the least possible amount of accountability to Parliament and the people of

Western Australia. The government is quite happy to spend the money for sequel performances and all the rest of it, but here we had an extraordinary case whereby the President of the Children's Court was involved in litigation with a magistrate in the Children's Court. We know that it cost at least a quarter of a million dollars. According to the very precise answer from the parliamentary secretary, it was \$274 725.87, GST exclusive. In that matter, which happened in this financial year in the Supreme Court, these proceedings were on foot before Justice Allanson.

Who do members think represented President Quail? Remember that \$274 000 has been spent just with respect to President Quail—the Attorney General's friend. Who was representing President Quail? It was Mr David Grace, QC. Remember, that is the same person that the Attorney General has recently retained to assist in providing information to the court in regard to his mistakes and wrong answers. Mr David Grace, QC, who is not in any way implicated in these things, is continuing to be paid by the taxpayer of Western Australia because of the Attorney General, the Premier and others. He is a very, very experienced Queen's Counsel, and quite entitled to be charging in accordance with the rate. I simply draw to members' attention that that means more than \$6 000 a day. Maybe the minister representing the Treasurer, who is very keen to spend all this money on all these court actions, could let us know how much exactly Mr Grace is being paid, not just in the Crawford v Quail matter, but his hourly rate in representing the Attorney General at the moment. That is to say nothing of Bret Walker, Senior Counsel, who has also been retained for Mr McGowan. How many QCs and SCs do we need to defend the McGowan government in all these debacles? It is incredibly expensive! They might say that they have no choice but to defend themselves in these things. One thing is for sure: the Attorney General had a choice to tell the truth at the time he was giving evidence under oath. Obviously that did not happen, because he has made the admission himself. So, now, this is costing money. Mr McGowan had a choice to launch counterclaims and all the rest of it and have these ego games with billionaires. They made a choice, and choices have consequences. At the moment, the taxpayer of Western Australia continues to fund these things.

Speaking of pattern of behaviour, the Deputy President might recall I indicated earlier that these four expensive cases—these debacles involving the Attorney General—demonstrate a pattern of behaviour by the Attorney General, and by association the Premier, who continues to allow all this to go on. Pattern of behaviour was front and centre in a matter before the Supreme Court. It was none other than the Attorney General's friend, his preferred counsel, Mr Grace, QC, in the Supreme Court on 11 October last year. I quote from the transcript, in which Mr Grace, QC, stated —

... one can see a pattern of behaviour that has continued over the years.

And this pattern of behaviour, as will be revealed in the evidence, includes doctoring reports of experts that have been provided to the court in relation to matters in which Magistrate Crawford presided, and during the course of adjournments of those matters, making wholesale amendments to reports and sending them back to the report writers for rewriting and endorsement. That's one example.

Mr Grace, QC, funded by the taxpayer of Western Australia, in accordance with the provisions allowed by Mr McGowan and Mr Quigley, goes on to say —

And I might say, in relation to the issues of the doctoring of reports, that was also not related to the parties involved in the case—not revealed. So the interference in the administration of justice, and exactly the way that repeated higher courts of authority in Australia have admonished judicial officers against acting in that way, seemed to be oblivious to Magistrate Crawford. What Magistrate Crawford does is that she, repeatedly over time, has adopted procedures which are antithetical the proper administration of open justice.

Those are the words of David Grace, QC, funded by the taxpayer of Western Australia. The parliamentary secretary told us that the case for President Quail cost more than \$247 000. David Grace, QC, is saying those things in open court before a judge in this case. Given that David Grace, QC, is assisting and advising the Attorney General on correcting the record in the court in Sydney for various reasons, including that, we can assume that when David Grace, QC, says something in open court, he means it; it is true. David Grace, QC, has said that as far as he is concerned there is this pattern of behaviour, which includes the doctoring of reports. Do members think that the Attorney General, who has had this matter drawn to his attention on multiple occasions, is going to do anything about this? He indicated he will do nothing of the sort. In fact, when we were last sitting—not that we have had that many sitting weeks this year because the government wants to shield itself from too much question time—there was an occasion when I drew this to the Attorney General's attention. The response came through the Attorney General's hardworking parliamentary secretary, Hon Matthew Swinbourn, who said —

The Attorney General has not received any complaints of the type described. The matters were asserted in the Supreme Court as part of litigation that was ultimately discontinued at the request of the plaintiff.

What is the Attorney General saying? Surely he is not casting any aspersion or slur on his favoured Queen's Counsel, Mr David Grace, QC. He has said it in open court. The Attorney General is right, through his parliamentary secretary, that he has asserted this in open court. His preferred counsel has said that about the doctoring of reports in a court in Western Australia. The Attorney General has a duty to do something about that. But he is too busy giving wrong and inaccurate information to courts of law to have time to investigate when a magistrate is accused of doctoring reports, evidence tampering and the like. Why would he have time to do that? He has to jet over to

Sydney for a sequel performance, while nobody is going to do anything about the doctoring of reports referred to in a court in Western Australia: “Nothing to see here. Let’s just move on. Let’s pretend it never happened.” This is despite the fact that his preferred Senior Counsel said in open court that this is what has occurred. Surely the assertion was not unfounded. Surely the assertion was made after considering all the evidence. Surely the Senior Counsel would not have been trying to mislead the court. Surely not, because had that occurred, we know that Mr Grace, QC, would have quickly gone back to the court to correct the report, like he is asking Mr Quigley to do now. In the meantime, the Attorney General—who knows whether this was one of the occasions when he was telling the truth or otherwise—has told the Parliament of Western Australia —

The Attorney General has not received any complaints of the type described.

He has not received any complaints of the type described, yet when we consider the same transcript from the Supreme Court, we have information about the evidence that was going to be tendered and had been made available to the parties through the discovery process. I quote again from page 186 of the transcript of that day. Mr Donaldson, who was representing Magistrate Crawford, said —

There was a second letter of 7 September that your Honour will see in due course and it also records in the next paragraph that he disclosed, that is Judge Quail disclosed to the Attorney General at least a brief outline of the matter concerning W —

The letter “W” is used there, for the benefit of *Hansard* —

and the findings that had been made. And that is confirmed in the next paragraph when one takes time in construing that handwriting. So your Honour will see in inverted commas it was said by Judge Quail that her Honour had “misled parties,” and that’s recorded in this note.

Yet, it’s said there at the bottom of that paragraph:

My view would not justify two houses.

And, again, your Honour, we will say that it is simply not a credible position that Judge Quail genuinely thought that her Honour had misled parties in a matter before her yet conclude that that was not sufficiently serious for her Honour to be dealt with pursuant to the provisions of the Magistrates Court Act. And then the next paragraph says:

He agrees, move back to Magistrates Court.

That must mean the Attorney General. And then, “Stephen won’t agree” ...

That is obviously making reference to the Chief Magistrate. The Attorney General told the Parliament of Western Australia, and specifically the Legislative Council through his representative when we last sat on 23 March 2022 —

The Attorney General has not received any complaints of the type described.

He pretends that he knows nothing about these allegations of evidence tampering, despite the fact that he knows full well. Not only that, but of course I had already drawn this to the attention of the Attorney General last year. It really depends which version of the Attorney General we get. Whether someone is in the Legislative Council or in a court in Sydney, they are not really sure whether they are going to be told the truth. In respect of all these matters, on 17 November last year, the Attorney General, through his representative, said —

It is not appropriate for the Attorney to address matters involving individual judicial officers.

Why not? If he is not going to address these matters involving individual judicial officers, who is going to do it? It is certainly not going to be the Leader of the House—she cannot even be bothered to read the judgement on what has happened in these matters. Somebody in government needs to do something about it. But the Attorney General is too busy jetting off to Sydney, at taxpayers’ expense, to do a sequel performance and provide supposedly new information to the court or correct evidence and the like.

As I say, this is only the second of the four expensive debacles involving the Attorney General funded by the taxpayers of Western Australia. The third one I want to bring to members’ attention is a matter that is before the Public Service Appeal Board. I asked about this in question time and the parliamentary secretary who ordinarily represents the Attorney General was away on urgent parliamentary business, but his capable friend filled in for him and proceeded to say—this is according to my notes; this is not even the uncorrected *Hansard*—that this matter is subject to ongoing litigation. Keep in mind that we are talking about an intervention by the Attorney General. It is on the public record. Questions about this have been asked previously. The Attorney General has intervened in this Public Service Appeal Board matter and one of the questions that was asked that the parliamentary secretary did not respond to was: Is the intervention ongoing? Is it or is it not? Is the Attorney General continuing to intervene in these proceedings? That should be simple for any member of the McGowan government to answer, but apparently they cannot answer that; instead they have to say that this matter is subject to ongoing litigation. We know that, because the former Labor staffer in the electorate office of the member for Kwinana is on the public record consistently complaining about the treatment that she is receiving from the McGowan government and WA Labor, which she says she gave years of service to. We know that the litigation is still going, but the point is whether the

Attorney General is still involved and whether it is happening at the expense of the taxpayer. Maybe the minister who is representing the Treasurer on this bill can indicate how much money in this Treasurer's advance is going towards the ongoing blocking and obstruction in that particular case. It is all very well for the McGowan government to shield its failed health minister, the Deputy Premier, from giving any evidence about his former electorate officer in this unfair dismissal case, but members should keep in mind that it is not happening at the cost of Mr McGowan or Mr Quigley, or Mr Cook for that matter. Not on your life! It is happening at the expense of Western Australian taxpayers. One wonders how many more QCs or solicitors are involved in that case. We do not know the answer to that, because in yet another cover-up, the government has indicated to us that it cannot answer these questions because it is subject to ongoing litigation.

This government's obsession with choosing obstruction and secrecy over accountability and transparency is evident for all of us to see. These are merely three of the four cases that I wish to bring to members' attention. What we do know about this hide-and-seek case of the member for Kwinana, who definitely does not want to give any evidence in this case, is that there has to have been some extraordinary expenditure by the taxpayers of Western Australia, because not only are there those who are involved in the defence, but also the Attorney General has intervened in the case. There is no good reason—it is not going to affect anything with the case—that the Attorney General cannot come clean about how much that cost, least of all if the intervention has finished. But if the intervention is ongoing, it is probably a signal to indicate to the former WA Labor staffer that this government will stop at nothing to make sure that this case goes nowhere. They will use every resource that the taxpayer of Western Australia can give to them to ensure that this former Labor staffer does not see justice and does not even get the opportunity to have the case heard in a timely fashion. Instead, the Attorney General is making sure that he intervenes in the case and that it is going to take as long as possible. So much for access to justice!

It is no wonder that former member for the Greens in this place Hon Alison Xamon called on the Attorney General to issue model litigant guidelines. When the first law officer chooses when he is going to tell the truth in court, continues to intervene in cases to make sure that his friend the member for Kwinana does not have to give evidence, is otherwise involved in these sequel performances to give further evidence, and is disinterested in investigating allegations of evidence tampering, it is no wonder it is costing the taxpayers so much.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Prior to the interruption for the dinner adjournment we were considering this request by the Premier of Western Australia in his capacity as the Treasurer, who is coming back to Parliament for more money. The McGowan Labor government has an insatiable appetite for seeking more and more money—taxpayers' money, mind you—in order to fund these debacles involving our Attorney General. These are very expensive court cases that the Premier continues to allow to go on. Sometimes he is even responsible for instigating them. Prior to the adjournment I had taken members and the house through three of these expensive debacles, being, of course, the now infamous sequel that the Attorney General is involved in that will see him jetting over to Sydney at the end of this week, possibly as early as tomorrow, at the expense of the taxpayers to have a do-over with respect to his evidence, realising that he has apparently made mistakes and provided wrong answers. Meanwhile, he continues to do absolutely nothing with regard to the allegations that have been made against judicial officers, including the doctoring of reports and evidence tampering—matters that he knows full well because his own expensive QC has been involved in all these matters. Then we found him intervening in the unfair dismissal case involving the member for Kwinana. He continues to allow that member to play hide-and-seek with the Public Service Appeal Board and is not willing to go and provide any evidence with respect to his longstanding former Labor staffer.

The fourth of the cases I bring to members' attention is another expensive debacle involving the Attorney General and is a matter that most members should know quite well because it was the subject of quite a lot of interactions with the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges of this house. I have asked in recent times for an indication from the Attorney General as to how much this has all cost. One of those matters—there were two related matters—is that of the Attorney General of Western Australia and the President of the Legislative Council. For those who are not familiar with it, we had the first law officer of Western Australia unsuccessfully trying to sue the President of the Legislative Council, at great cost to the taxpayer. I had asked questions about this and the Attorney General then wrote to the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations on 15 December last year, disclosing some of the information. But in more recent times, we know that the amount has increased, because I asked about this matter when we were last sitting on 23 March this year. The information that has been provided is that the State Solicitor's Office spent a combined total of 1 244 hours and 18 minutes and that the Solicitor-General spent another 171 hours on it. Members right recall at the beginning of my contribution on this bill that I indicated to them what the scale of costs is in the Supreme Court for contentious business. The amount that can be charged by a senior solicitor in Western Australia is just shy of \$500 an hour. Of course, if the person is a Senior Counsel, it is well in excess of \$600 an hour. Once we start to add all those figures together with respect to those significant hours that have been put in, we are talking about hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money because the Attorney General decided to sue the President of the Legislative Council—another expensive debacle involving this particular individual. This is why I say there is a pattern of behaviour. There is no one isolated case here. It is extraordinary that the Attorney General of Western Australia is seeking to redo his evidence in a Sydney

court. That is extraordinary enough. Some members opposite might want to simply dismiss that as one-off, but we can see that this is not a one-off incident. In actual fact, the McGowan Labor government continued to spend taxpayers' money time and again on expensive, unsuccessful court actions, including the Attorney General trying to sue the President of the Legislative Council, without success. In fact, it is remarkable that after all this time we still have on the record a report in the Parliament that the government refuses to deal with. The report is none other than the sixty-first report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. Members may not be aware that it actually includes an indication at paragraph 5.44 at page 101 that states —

The following correspondence indicates that some further investigation into the role played by the Attorney General in this whole matter may also be required.

This is hot on the heels of the committee indicating at paragraph 5.43 —

The actions of the SSO in implementing its own procedure, to the deliberate exclusion of the Legislative Council, for assessing whether parliamentary privilege applied to the confidential emails and other documents of former Members of the Legislative Council and their staff, in circumstances where it knew that the Legislative Council had an active interest in the matter, is a matter of grave concern and potentially warrants further inquiry.

It is not the State Solicitor's Office, but the Attorney General—the first law officer—who still needs to appear before the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges of Western Australia to give some answers. That is never going to happen while the McGowan Labor government ensures that this particular report is buried and never sees the light of day. This person has a pattern of behaviour of giving wrong information to the Parliament. He will not go and investigate cases of evidence tampering and is not interested in anything except when it involves his mate the member for Kwinana. Then he makes sure that he intervenes at great cost to the taxpayer to ensure that that person does not have to give any evidence. The Attorney General then intervened in the CCC matter that saw them unlawfully benefit from those procedures. It is a disgrace.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Emergency Services) [7.07 pm] — in reply: I thank all members who made a contribution to the debate on the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2022. I acknowledge the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition and thank him for indicating that the opposition will support the bill before us.

As was outlined in the second reading speech, the annual Treasurer's advance limit is set automatically by the Financial Management Act 2006 and is, as Hon Dr Steve Thomas pointed out, calculated at three per cent of the amount appropriated in the previous financial year. For 2021–22, this equates to a Treasurer's advance limit of \$820.5 million. This Treasurer's advance authorisation bill seeks to increase this limit by \$1.5 billion to \$2.32 billion. Honourable members may be interested to know that there have been 12 Treasurer's advance authorisation acts since 2000. In the last 22 years there have been 12. This includes one in 2020 and another in 2021, both of which were required to provide the government the capacity to respond to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. That is all the Treasurer's advance authorisation bill does. It provides the authority to meet high-funding requirements and does not commit the state, as Hon Dr Steve Thomas pointed out, to any additional spending. Any unspent capacity under the Treasurer's advance lapses at 30 June 2022. It is not a blank cheque; it is there for a finite period of time. To illustrate this point, the Treasurer's advance was increased from \$658 million to \$1.66 billion in 2019–20, with \$824 million drawn against this amount. Similarly, in 2020–21, the Treasurer's advance was increased from \$689 million to \$1.44 billion, and \$989 million of that was drawn down. The bill will seek \$1.5 billion in case access to appropriation funding is required at short notice before 30 June 2022. The midyear review forecasts that \$723 million of the Treasurer's advance funding would be required at that time. Since then, the government has begun acquiring rapid antigen tests to support the state opening up and to avoid the challenges that were faced in the eastern states when RATs were unavailable. I note that the need for RATs emerged after the midyear review and at the time when there was a worldwide shortage and global competition for such tests were ramping up. Honourable members will recall that the more transmissible Omicron variant made it apparent that the polymerase chain reaction test system was not going to manage on its own and we needed to do something different. No-one knew of this issue until Omicron arrived in Australia in late 2021. This led us to require RATs to meet testing demand, and the government moved to a direct approach procurement model to suppliers to acquire RATs as quickly as possible. This avoided the need for a lengthily competitive tendering process.

It is not known how long we will need RATs for or, indeed, how long the pandemic will last. We now have adequate supply to ensure the government can support people, whether it is for them to go safely to work or for children to go safely to schools, and that testing clinics are not overrun. More broadly, though, we face the additional costs of dealing with COVID, identified by frontline agencies, which includes acquiring personal protective equipment, maintaining the level of tracing and tracking that continues to occur, testing, cleaning and so on.

Agencies have also identified other 2021–22 funding requests that the government is looking at as part of the budget deliberations. We have set aside a further \$505 million, as has been previously mentioned, which is a buffer, for any new funding needs that we do not know yet about—for example, more business support, a natural disaster response or, indeed, a challenging flu season. All those things could be ahead of us. Anyone will be able to see exactly what

the Treasurer's advance was spent on during 2021–22. The coming 2022–23 budget will include details of increases in 2021–22 since the midyear review, including the regular appendix updating on the forecast outturn for the Treasurer's advance. The final outturn will be reported in the 2021–22 *Annual report on state finances*, which will be released later in the year in September. These documents also provide detail of current and capital allocations authorised by the Treasurer's advance.

The timing of spending is dependent on many variables; however, this bill is about providing the funding sources when the spending proceeds. If spending accelerates in the final months of the year, this bill must be in place to support these outlays. I am pleased that Hon Dr Steve Thomas raised in his contribution the recent commentary by Standard and Poor's Global Ratings, which highlighted the state's very strong financial position relative to other jurisdictions. In the report it assessed Western Australia's financial management to be very strong, and that the current government has displayed a track record of robust cost control. Standard and Poor's comments are very encouraging, and I highlight that this government continues to manage the state's finances to deal with the challenges of the pandemic in a positive and sustainable way. It is important for me to remind the house that after years of negative commentary, the current government has started to restore our finances and has achieved an improved credit rating outlook after the Liberal–National government lost our AAA credit rating around a decade ago.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas also made a number of comments about revenue. I would like to remind the house that this bill is about the legal authority to release consolidated account funds; the bill before us is not about revenue. The honourable member noted that he was interested in the use of the \$723 million portion of the original \$820.5 million Treasurer's advance for this financial year. I am happy to point out that significant information is available in the midyear review, which I think the member may have referred to. Appendix 4 shows which agency appropriations were expected to be above budget, and appendix 3 explains most of the material increases in expense and asset investment spending that drives these changes.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas also questioned the contribution that is subject to the 2022–23 budget process. Budget submissions from agencies always include movements and financial forecasts for the current year, the budget year and across the forward estimates period. Agency submissions have identified potential cash needs totalling \$634 million, as was noted in the papers that were tabled in other place. It is a long-term convention that budget deliberations are treated as cabinet-in-confidence. The Expenditure Review Committee is actively assessing that information to determine the need for further funding in 2021–22. It is fair to say that some will be knocked back and others may well be supported or deferred to 2022–23 or beyond. But others will have to be dealt with in this 2021–22 year.

The allowance for these requests errs on the side of caution, and it provides the funding for these requests before the budget deliberations are complete. Consistent with the long-term practice of all governments past and present, I will not be in a position to reveal the details of matters that will be detailed in the budget, but that would not be a surprise to members.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas interjected.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: You know I always like to help you out, honourable member, but I will not be breaking that convention.

A number of honourable members have asked about the buffer. The buffer this year is around \$505 million. It is large, but it is not as large as the \$1 billion buffer that was applied for in the 2020 bill. I have already noted that the purpose of the buffer is to deal with matters that are yet to emerge this year. The size of the buffer is guided by our experience through the year so far. The midyear review was just two months old when the \$723 million Treasurer's advance was apparent. The acquisition of RATs has a post-midyear review impact on state appropriation, estimated at about \$294 million. The level 2 business support package that was recently announced comes with an estimated \$72 million cost. Over the past couple of years of dealing with the pandemic, we have learnt that things come out of the woodwork at the strangest of times and we as a government have to be as nimble as we can to respond to those things and help out the community when we can and when appropriate.

Since the midyear review was released in mid-December, we have announced four rounds of business support funding totalling \$232 million. Should businesses make claims for all these packages before 30 June 2022, that funding needs to be available through the passage of this bill. Those packages include two rounds of nightclub assistance programs; the December small business assistance grants; two rounds of small business financial counselling and advisory services assistance; the international education industry assistance support program; the student quarantining industry support program; the university services for students support program; a tourism support program; the tourism deposit refund support program; the travel agent support fund; the event suppliers program; the waiver of liquor licensing fees; the tenant relief scheme; the landlord rent relief scheme; the alfresco support program; the performing arts, theatres and cinemas assistance program; the small business hardship grants program; payroll tax waivers for large hospitality businesses; and the COVID-19 commercial sporting franchises support programs.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: I don't suppose that is in a form that you can table?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is not. It is in my speech notes. I will give them to Hansard, and perhaps they might give you a copy.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: We'll get it off Hansard.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: During the break, I asked the advisers to go away and look through the press releases that have been put out so I could at least name that assistance so we could have that before us.

There are large increments to the budget and we need the larger buffer available to address them. The increase to the Treasurer's advance being sought in this bill is significant. However, I am sure that members can appreciate that this capacity is required to provide the government with the flexibility to respond to the challenges that have been and are being presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hon Martin Aldridge raised the issue of the urgency of this bill. What makes it urgent is that as the financial year end approaches, the need for large funding for the items we have discussed continues to emerge. Agencies must have cash available when it is needed. Treasury cannot release the funding without the legal authority of this bill. The honourable member characterised this as—I think his words were—running out of money. The state is not running out of money, as Hon Dr Steve Thomas noted, but there are legal mechanisms to allow for the release of those funds. That is what the bill before us does; the money is there, but the Parliament needs to authorise the release of those funds.

Finally, I note that the Under Treasurer's certification was raised by Hon Martin Aldridge. The certification is included in each budget and midyear review. It outlines the cut-off date for decisions and parameters that are included in each financial report. In the case of the 2021–22 midyear review, this was 29 November 2021, at which time allocations of \$723 million had been made against the Treasurer's advance. The certification is a requirement of the Government Financial Responsibility Act 2000, and enables users of the state's budget papers and midyear review to understand the timing of issues dealt with in the reports, be it the budget papers or the midyear review. In the context of this bill, items arising that will utilise the remaining \$97 million of the automatic Treasurer's advance, plus the additional \$1.5 billion sought in the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2022, have all emerged since the 29 November 2021 cut-off date for the midyear review.

I have no doubt that other COVID-19-related pressures will emerge between now and 30 June this year. The increase in the Treasurer's advance, including the buffer of around \$500 million, will provide the government with the capacity to respond to these challenges and any others that may arise, such as natural disasters and the upcoming flu season. Once again, I thank all honourable members who have made a contribution to the debate thus far, and I commend the bill to the house.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

Committee

The Deputy Chair of Committees (Hon Dr Brian Walker) in the chair; Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Emergency Services) in charge of the bill.

Clause 1: Short title —

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I thank the minister for a pretty fulsome reply to the second reading debate. Sadly, given what he said, I suspect that we will be limited in the amount of information that we can extract from him this evening. Should he feel the opportunity to slip the 2021–22 budget surplus our way, we would greatly appreciate it; we would not tell more than two or three people each! My plan is to do what we can in the clause 1 debate. This is a three-clause bill, so we could do this either in clause 1 or clause 3. I do not know whether the minister has a preference.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I am happy for you to do it now.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It really does not matter. Some papers were tabled in the other place, being tabled papers 1035 and 1036. The minister did not table them here during his reply to the second reading debate. Would it be appropriate to table the equivalent documents for the elucidation of members, so that other members, not that we have a great abundance of them, would potentially have the capacity to look at them? I will start with that.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Noting that those members who are participating in the debate have a copy of the documents in front of them —

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: I have.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The Leader of the Opposition does, as does Hon Martin Aldridge. Notwithstanding that fact, I am happy to table the 2021–22 Treasurer's advance summary document, and the second document is the Treasurer's advance summary of drawn downs forecast in the 2021–22 midyear review.

[See papers [1201](#) and [1202](#).]

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: As I obviously have these documents, I know that the bill before the house refers only slightly to what occurred in the Treasurer's advance drawn downs forecast, which is the paper that was originally tabled in the other place as tabled paper 1036 and refers to the \$723.2 million. I have a couple of quick questions. Again, it will depend on what information the minister has available to him. On the second page is a \$30 million item, which is the COVID-19 test isolation payment. Is the minister in a position to give us any information about what the requirement and draw down on that has been?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not in a position to give the member that. My advisers tell me that only a small amount has been drawn down. The information is held by the line agency as opposed to us. We are presuming that because RATs have been available, people have been able to use RATs and that has generally negated the need to access this payment.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The government might expect a question without notice on that at some point to the minister representing the Minister for Health.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I suspect it might be, and I suspect that might curtail the committee stage of the bill a bit and we might move on to the rats and mice fairly soon—boom boom. I said that deliberately!

Hon Stephen Dawson: That is Communities; it is not the Department of Health. When you ask the question, you can ask it to the right minister.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The question on the \$30 million will be to Communities. I suspect that the answers to lots of other questions will be similar in that the minister will not be able to break down for us how it will be. I take the minister to the second tabled paper, which is the bits of information that we have on this bill and has the 2020–21 amount of \$723.2 million rolled in. Effectively, four areas occupy the rest of this appropriation—the COVID-19 rapid antigen tests, other COVID-related costs, various agency costs and the buffer. I calculate all those as adding up to \$1.5973 billion. If we add that to the \$723.2 million, we end up with \$2.32305 billion. Again, I suspect that this may be an unrewarding exercise, but what information can the minister give us on what the \$164 million for other COVID-related costs is expected to be expended on?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The \$164 million relates to three agencies in the main—WA Health, police and schools. It will provide these agencies with funding to meet costs such as testing and vaccination rollouts, more masks and personal protective equipment, contact tracing and tracking, police and border controls, quarantine accommodation costs, and enhanced school cleaning. Enhanced school cleaning has been happening essentially since the beginning of COVID, albeit that it has waxed and waned at various times; there has been more cleaning at various times depending on the risk in the community.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I assume that the numbers that were developed for this particular expense were done so on a departmental estimate of costs, and, if that is the case, I am presuming that the minister probably cannot give that to us and that the best place to chase that is in budget estimates. I assume that it is based on an estimate of cost rather than a guess from Treasury. Can the minister give us a reference point of where it has come from?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is what agencies have sourced through the budget process, and, yes, it can be teased out during estimates, but it may well appear in the budget papers on 12 May.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The next item of \$634 million is for various other agency costs.

Hon Stephen Dawson: That's the budget process one?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The minister is not able to give us any information on the expected expenditure for that. I am not going to win this, but I might as well ask the question: is the minister able to give us an indication of how much is likely to be attributed in 2021–22 versus 2022–23? That would be an interesting figure in itself, but, again, the minister may not be able to give it to us.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Sorry; I am trying to find any bit of information I can glean out of this. Like I said, I will swap you—if you drop me the budget surplus, I will let this go! Is the minister able to give us a breakdown as to what is likely to be specifically 2021–22 expenditure versus 2022–23 expenditure? Given that it relates to the 2022–23 budget, I do not suppose the minister can even break it down into what will be expended before 30 June and what is likely to be after that point.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I cannot really. This includes funding that agencies have sought through the budget process for money that they would like to spend, if they can, by the end of the financial year. If not, they would seek to spend it in the next financial year. Some of it depends on grants, for example, and how quickly grants can be processed. Some of this amount also relates to, for example, the extra costs that the government needed to fund as a result of the fires that we have had this fire season. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services gets funding, but over and above the norm: if it has to expend extra amounts because of a significant fire season, as we have had

with four level 3 events this year, it seeks additional funding through the budget process. I cannot give the member a breakdown in terms of what is what. It would also potentially include the continued National Disability Insurance Scheme rollout. The number of people in the scheme has been higher than estimated.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: By way of interjection, NDIS could potentially be in that figure, too?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Some of it may well be, but it would not necessarily be a big amount. That type of thing would be included in what agencies seek to recoup. We have not hit the budget cut-off date yet so active deliberations are still happening —

An opposition member: What is that date?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Am I at liberty to share that? I am told that it is normally a month before the budget.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The government is pretty close to the cut-off date. Normally, all the bun fights have happened by now; it is the last-minute panic from ministers. I do note that, federally, a minister briefly threatened to resign if they did not get their way. We are looking for some courage.

Hon Stephen Dawson: You live in hope, honourable member!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Be brave, minister; be brave, minister. “A very courageous decision”, said Sir Humphrey.

Hon Stephen Dawson: And a very courageous cabinet.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: There you go!

There is no point asking for much detail on the buffer because a buffer is obviously there and it is unspent as yet. The minister indicated that there was a buffer of \$1 billion at one point. Perhaps Treasury officials can give us an indication of what a normal buffer process calculation looks like for Treasury. Treasury has a standardised approach for everything, so I would imagine that it has a general approach to calculating a buffer. This one seems on the higher side compared with some. Can the minister give us an indication of whether there is a standardised way of working this out, or was it simply a rounding exercise in which Treasury went to the nearest half a billion dollars, if you will? I am interested to know.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: There is no calculation. I guess it is based on what we have experienced thus far and what we know may well eventuate—the business payments, for example. If I look back at the buffers in the early years, I see that the buffers were around \$150 million to \$365 million. The last few years have been extraordinary in the sense that we have been dealing with the pandemic and it has thrown up some curlies. Since the Financial Management Act 2006 was changed, the buffers have been as low as \$70 million but equally up to that \$1 billion, depending on what is in the system and what is anticipated. It is basically a guessing game; what could go wrong? Having been through the last two years and having seen what we have had to deal with during the pandemic, there is an element of: that could happen again, so build that into the buffer for next year.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I thank the minister for his reply to the second reading debate. The second reading speech made it clear that at the midyear review, the Under Treasurer believed that the forecast Treasurer’s advance that would be required was in the order of \$723 million. The amount pursuant to the FMA that can automatically be authorised is the sum of \$820.5 million, leaving a surplus of \$97 million unallocated at the midyear review point. I think the minister reiterated those figures during his second reading reply, so they are well known. My questions are: At what point was it known? Was it at the midyear review point or at a time subsequent to the midyear review that a further authorisation in this form was required?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I think it is fair to say that at the midyear review it was expected that there may well be a need for a Treasurer’s advance authorisation bill this year, but the extent of what was needed was not known at the time, and it is has only transpired since then with things like the bushfires and the purchase of rapid antigen tests. The effect of Omicron was not anticipated at the midyear review. Since that time, we have learnt what it has done in and its impact on Western Australia.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Thanks for that response, minister; that is a reasonable view. This bill was read in in the Legislative Assembly on 22 March. I think the opposition learned about it the day prior. For want of a better word or expression, what was the cut-off date for the assessment that the authorisation of \$1.5 billion was required? Obviously, we have talked about the cut-off date for the midyear review being 29 November 2021 and the budget cut-off date being roughly one month prior to the budget being handed down. What was the point in time at which Treasury ran its calculations and spat out the figure of \$1.5 billion?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The numbers started coming in in late January, but the decision to push “go” and move forward was not made until sometime in February. I also draw the honourable member’s attention to the *Government mid-year financial projections statement* from December 2021. There is a section headed “Statement of Risks” on page 32, which talks about the changes since the 2021–22 budget and future COVID-19 costs and states —

Continued uncertainties remain as to the impacts of COVID-19 (including emergence of the recent Omicron variant) on the State’s health system and economic conditions, once border controls are eased.

It was essentially flagged in the review that there would be tough times ahead in relation to budgetary matters and that we needed to be ready for that.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Noting that a view was formed at some point in late January, or that information was starting to form in late January, with a decision being made in February, and given that we are standing here on 5 April, is the amount contained in the bill still current and accurate?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The short answer is yes. Agencies continue to put in supplementary funding requests even after the budget. If there was a big flood, for example, this week, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services or the Department of Communities or whoever was leading the charge for that event or incident would seek further funding from Treasury. So, yes, absolutely. But as I pointed out to Hon Dr Steve Thomas, the \$505.3 million was an estimation of unforeseen issues. We hope that it will not be spent, and that it will not need to be spent, but it could well need to be.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I thank the minister for that answer. I want to turn now to the tabled paper titled “2021–22 Treasurer’s Advance—Summary”. The shadow Treasurer has already asked questions about the four line items and the minister read into *Hansard* some explanation, at least with respect to the other COVID-19-related costs. The buffer is obviously as it states—unknown and unallocated, I guess—and the various other agency costs are subject to the 2022–23 budget process. I want to understand this a little bit more. I understand the answers the minister has provided to date in his reply to the second reading debate and in response to the shadow Treasurer. He may need to educate me on this, because I am struggling to understand the connection with the 2022–23 budget. The Treasurer’s advance is, by design, only applicable between the date that this bill receives assent, or maybe the day after—I will have to check the commencement clause—and 30 June. I am struggling to understand the connection with the 2022–23 budget bills which are, in effect, bills to authorise the appropriation of funds for the next financial year. If it is anticipated that there is a need for \$634 million between now and 30 June, why is it a matter that is subject to the 2022–23 budget?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If the member reads that sentence, it refers to the 2022–23 budget process. The government has an annual budget process. That is the time, essentially, when all agencies get to submit their requests. Later in the year, we have the midyear review, but not every agency gets to put a submission in as part of that. The annual budget process is the time that agencies put their requests in. That starts after the midyear review and closes in the lead-up to the budget, earlier in the year. It is only during that process that people can submit, as part of that process. They are under active consideration now, so I am not at liberty to say what it is or what the breakdown is. From the requests we have had from agencies, hundreds of millions of dollars have been requested as part of the process, and agencies want to start spending the money now, whether it is for grants or whatever, so the process would start now. If all the agencies got their stuff ready and done on time, that money could potentially go out the door before the end of June this financial year. But that line talks about the budget process, as opposed to the budget year, because the budget process happens once a year, and the process for the 2022–23 financial year is right now.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I think we are progressing, but this is a thoroughly confusing matter for me. The cut-off date for the budget is pretty much imminent, if we are going on this general one-month rule. I am interpreting the minister as saying that the 2022–23 budget process is also considering and approving expenditure for the 2021–22 financial year.

Hon Stephen Dawson: By way of interjection, that’s correct.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I would have thought that if this is new expenditure, these projects are likely to be in advanced stages, if you are going to shovel \$634 million out the door somewhere between tomorrow or the next day, and 30 June. We are talking about a period of less than 90 days. That is the first point I would make. The second point is: how does that then flow into the 2022–23 appropriation bills if that does not happen? Let us say we achieve only 50 per cent of that \$634 million out the door. Given that we are so close to the budget cut-off, how do we then adjust the 2022–23 appropriation by that order to take account of the fact that it is going to be a 2022–23 appropriation of something that is funded under the Treasurer’s advance?

Hon Stephen Dawson: Sorry, I didn’t catch the first bit.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: My second question was: how do you re-profile? It may be just another midyear review matter that ends up being dealt with in December, but I do not believe that the government can get \$634 million out the door by 30 June on new projects that are pending approval, waiting for this bill to pass. The minister can prove me wrong, but if the government does not do that, how will it then re-profile the 2022–23 budget approvals? The money will, in effect, become an appropriation in the next financial year, because this Treasurer’s advance will expire on 30 June.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Most of it is supplementing existing services that are run by agencies. For example, some agencies will have shortfalls because we have reduced fees. One of the things we have done during COVID-19 is reduce fees for certain government services. As a result, some agencies will have shortfalls. There is also the example I gave of the bushfires. Extra resources have been expended by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to fight those fires, whether it was on trying to access extra aircraft or whatever else. Bear in mind, agencies

still need the approval of the cabinet and the Expenditure Review Committee to get that money back. Treasury would scrutinise the bids by agencies to make sure that they have spent appropriately, so there is a rigorous process. It is about shortfalls that exist currently, but an element of it will be new that will be required to go out the door as quickly as possible. Some of it, for example, will be for COVID-19.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: If you do not mind, I might have a little crack at this. I understand that in that \$634 million—bearing in mind that what we are doing today is an appropriation to spend rather than an actual expenditure, so it will enable an expenditure—those things that are enabled and get spent in this financial year will be seen in the *Annual report on state finances*. There might be some things that are applied for in this financial year that actually do not get spent, but will be spent. I imagine that there will be some crossover between what is in that \$634 million. This is effectively an accounting mechanism whereby the government is empowered to spend the money, if required, before 30 June. If it does not happen until after 30 June, it will probably be empowered in the appropriations of the budget, but what the government might have spent theoretically before 30 June will remain unspent. We have to remember that the appropriations bill in itself is not expenditure; it is the money that is being made available to be expended. The minister can tell me whether I am wrong, but I imagine that the catch-up will be to allow for it with the appropriations in the current bill. If it is expended in the meantime, it is covered. If it goes into the 2022–23 financial year as expenditure, it will be ultimately double covered. The money will effectively not come under this appropriation, it will come under that appropriation; therefore, it is simply the way it is accounted for in the books. I think that is how it works. If I am wrong, the minister can let me know.

Hon Stephen Dawson: That is correct.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: If I accept the minister’s last comment that a lot of these are existing programs for which additional expenditure is required, then I find it hard to accept that these are cabinet-in-confidence matters. If the story is that these are existing programs and services that need more money, that matter should be disclosed to Parliament, whether it be via examination in the Committee of the Whole or through question time or through a committee. It should not be subject to cabinet’s consideration of next year’s budget, because it is about a potential expense likely to be incurred in this financial year. The minister may well consider it as part of the budget process, but I do not accept fully the argument that this is a cabinet-in-confidence matter. Can the minister tell us how much of that \$634 million is recurrent expenditure versus capital?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No, I cannot. It is all captured in the budget process. We are not doing anything different from what governments have done in this state for a very long time. This is how budgeting works in this state. It is not a case of the government doing something different to help itself out. This is how it has always worked and this is how we will continue to do it. The information that the member seeks will be released as part of the budget process. He will see there the anticipated spend; but, obviously, it is anticipated because we do not know what will be spent until the end of the financial year. As Hon Dr Steve Thomas pointed out, that information is disclosed in the annual report that comes out at the end of September.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: The minister took exception to my reference to the state running out of cash and confirmed that the state is awash with unexpected cash, so I will reframe that comment. The state is running out of authorised cash to spend. How close are we to running out of authorised cash to spend?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We have lots of cash and various agencies have got cash, but it may not be authorised and, therefore, some of it may be in restricted accounts, for example. This process will allow for the release of that money so that agencies can expend it. For example, both the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, because of the fires, do not have a great deal of cash on hand. It has been the policy of governments—both governments—for the last few years for those agencies to come back as part of the budget process to recoup what they may have spent during the fire season, for example. It does not sit neatly. It cannot be planned for ordinarily. We cannot plan for a disaster or a big fire season. Agencies have a limited amount of money to do the general stuff, but if there is a big event, they need to come back as part of the budget process to recoup that.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I understand that process. My question is: in the big Treasury supercomputer that somebody pushes “enter” at five o’clock each day, have any of our agencies run out of cash?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No-one has run out of cash.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: We got there in the end.

A significant proportion of my contribution to the second reading debate was spent dealing with the procurement of rapid antigen tests, which is the first line item on the Treasurer’s advance summary—\$294 million—and which the Council is being requested to authorise this evening. I have a number of questions on this. I know that some of these questions were raised in the Legislative Assembly, so I am hopeful that the minister has similarly been equipped with a brief on this line item of the Treasurer’s advance summary—some \$300 million. The Under Treasurer’s certification occurred on 29 November 2021. According to the Legislative Assembly *Hansard* of 22 March, the Treasurer confirmed that orders were placed on 14 or 15 December. If we work with the 14 December date, that is 15 days after 29 November.

The Under Treasurer's certification says —

This Mid-year Review is based upon Government decisions that I was aware of or that were made available to me by the Treasurer, together with other relevant information known to Treasury, on or before the Mid-year Review cut-off date of 29 November 2021 and which have a material effect on the State's financial projections.

Is it the case that the Under Treasurer of Western Australia was not aware that there was going to be an expenditure of \$578.9 million some 15 days after this certification?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am told that the orders were placed in December and January. The certification that the Under Treasurer gave is correct and Treasury certainly stands by that.

The number of RATs purchased was determined via health advice to ensure that adequate supply would be available, noting the global competition to secure supplies. As noted by the Premier in the Legislative Assembly debate on this matter, it is not known for how long the RATs will be required and how long the pandemic will go. But I can now say that we now have adequate supply to ensure that the state government can support people to go safely to work and children to go safely to schools, and to ensure our testing clinics are not overrun.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: The first point that I will make is a comment. I find it quite extraordinary that the Under Treasurer of this state would not be aware of a nearly \$600 million liability being incurred by the state of Western Australia 15 days after giving an Under Treasurer certification to the midyear review. I find that extraordinary. The minister has just made a statement about ensuring that we have—and we do now have—an adequate supply of rapid antigen tests. I understand from questions without notice in this place that we have placed an order for 110.7 million tests. Can the minister confirm whether that remains the case and how many of those 110.7 million tests have been received by the state, which would confirm his comment that we now have an adequate supply of tests?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am happy to confirm that the member is correct that 110.7 million rapid antigen tests have been ordered. The member will have to ask the line agency how many have been received. Obviously, the Treasurer in the other place is also the Premier and he would have personal information because he is the head of government. Treasury officials are with me today, but rapid antigen tests have been ordered by Health and by Finance. We are not aware of how many they have received and the best time to ask those questions would be either during question time or in the estimates hearings that are coming up soon.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: These are pretty basic questions that go directly to the expenditure that the minister is seeking for us to authorise. I appreciate that the minister may not have the agencies—two are involved in this procurement process—at the table. If the minister does not know how many rapid antigen tests we have received, on what basis has the minister informed the Legislative Council this morning that we have received an adequate supply of them?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The Premier's office has advised me that we have plenty of RATs now and we have made an order that will futureproof the state. If the honourable member is suggesting for some reason that tonight I should have an answer to every question on every issue for every agency across government that gets a dollar out of the budget, the member is wrong. That has never been the case. Tonight we are asking for an appropriation of an amount that agencies can spend. What it is spent on is up to those agencies. If the honourable member is suggesting that I should know every single cent and every single dollar that every agency is spending, he is wrong and he is showing a lack of understanding of how the budget process works. The bill before us allows for an appropriation. We are asking for an advance. The agencies may or may not have spent that yet, but I will not be answering questions about every single dollar in every single agency.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I am not asking the minister about every expenditure in every agency. I am asking the minister about one of his four line items, which comes to an amount of \$294 million. It is a significant expenditure, which, clearly the Under Treasurer of the state had no knowledge of 15 days before somebody whacked \$600 million on the credit card.

I suggested during the second reading debate that I suspected that the \$294 million that is showing as required for COVID-19 rapid antigen tests is only a portion of the expenditure, because the answer to a question in this place confirmed that the actual cost of the procurement of the 110.7 million tests is \$578.9 million. Can I confirm why the Treasurer's advance requires only \$294 million? It could be one of two scenarios. One is that a portion of that expenditure is being incurred by an existing appropriation or an existing Treasurer's advance pursuant to the Financial Management Act automatic provisions. The other is that, as I suspect it is, the commonwealth is reimbursing the state for a portion of the procurement.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: There is the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response whereby the commonwealth provides 50 per cent funding contribution for purchasing rapid antigen tests. On 2 March 2022, government submitted an estimated expenditure of \$494.4 million under the NPCR for RATs and \$247.2 million had been received, which is 50 per cent of that amount.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: We will obviously not get a huge amount of cabinet-in-confidence information out of the minister, unfortunately, so I might have to take the minister back, if I can. Again, we will see what information he has available. I suspect he might be able to answer this question. In the original Treasurer's advance, under the three per cent variation in recurrent funding, education is down for \$25 million, and the first dot point in that category reads —

- an update of Education's Depreciation and Amortisation expenses resulting from a change in the value of the Department's fixed assets (\$10.6m);

I have always had a bit of an issue with how government departments treat depreciation in particular because it is not as though they effectively replace an asset. They go cap in hand to cabinet and through the budget process. It seems to me that the \$10.6 million might not have been a cash transfer as such but a bookkeeping effect. If it is a cash transfer, I presume it is to fund some form of asset management, for example; otherwise, I presume it is a mechanism, in which case I am not sure that it needs to be in an appropriation either in the normal FMA three per cent variation or otherwise. Again, apologies if the advisers do not have the information in front of them, but it seems an unusual expense to put into a forward appropriation. If we can get an explanation, that would be useful.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is a non-cash appropriation. It came out of the Auditor General's process so it came out of the annual reporting cycle. I am told that the FMA requires that even with non-cash appropriations, it be listed.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is one of those accounting anomalies, and I suspect it might be when no actual cash changes hands. There are no transfers as such. It reflects a re-evaluation of assets. It is unusual. I find it one of those weird accounting mechanisms that we are putting \$10 million of expenditure into an appropriation bill when no money changes hands. Again, it is probably something for budget day. I do not know whether the officials can tell us how common an event that is and how often this occurs. I will bring it back up on budget day if they do not have that information, but I make the point to the chamber that it is one of those odd anomalies that probably should be dealt with in a different way.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I can say the appropriation is straightforward. It came out of the OAG's annual reporting process that it needed to be dealt with in the act in this way.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I might disagree with the minister about whether depreciation in government centres is quite straightforward. I think it is a twisty, windy beast at the best of times. You take your life into your hands to address it, but anyway, maybe that is just me.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Because it came out of the audit process, it needed to be dealt with.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes, it is odd. Let us call it an anomaly and perhaps move on. The longer I am at it, the more I find that budgets are full of anomalies. That was hard to get out at this time of night!

I turn to the next page under capital funding. I note the \$176.3 million in approved items under the capital. The second-bottom line in the health system has the additional 70 general and 40 intensive care unit beds. It kind of relates back to the \$227.2 million on the first page of that document. It relates to the operational costs of WA Health and lots of these things. Again, this might be a question for health; it might not be one the minister can answer. I just note that such level of intensive care patients for COVID is sitting in single digits for the most part at the moment. I know it will creep a little bit higher as hospitalisations do. I think hospitalisations are up to 240-ish today, and the modelling at this point was something like twice that. We are expecting 50 to 60 ICU patients as we hit peak. I do not think there is too much doubt, despite the lack of answer to my question in question time this afternoon, that we are around about peak. I wish everybody would have a bit more faith in the modelling that the government has presented, because I think it has been remarkably successful to date. There has been some very good work. The funding was ostensibly for 40 intensive care beds. Do we know whether those beds exist in terms of capital infrastructure and are staffed according to the recurrent budget? Given that we have generally had fewer than 10 ICU COVID patients, does it mean that if the beds exist, they are hosting patients with other diseases—or do we not have that information available to us?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We do not have access to real life data at health. All we can say is the Department of Health was funded to provide, open and start these beds, but the information about what has opened is held by the health department.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: While we are on this tabled paper that we are examining now, which is the *Treasurer's advance: Summary of drawn downs forecast in the 2021–22 mid-year review*, I mentioned in my second reading contribution an interest in the line items "All other recurrent items" and "All other capital items". Are the Treasury officials at the table in a position to provide a breakdown of that \$56.4 million and \$29.4 million respectively?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I draw the member's attention again to the *Government mid-year financial projections statement* of December 2021, page 131: everything under \$10 million should be listed.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: You will be pleased to know that I have added it up!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Okay, so it should be there.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: That is helpful. I will have a look at that. The other thing that drew my attention on the capital funding page is in the section entitled “Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries”; it says that \$13.6 million of the \$723.2 million is attributable to bringing forward funding for stage 3 of the market-led proposal of the Victoria Quay screen production facility, mainly for professional and legal fees. I do not know a lot about this project, but is this not the infamous Fremantle film studio for which I believe the government made a \$20 million commitment? It would appear, if it is, that we have spent \$13.6 million on professional and legal fees, and now it appears to be known that the project is not proceeding.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I think the member used the word “infamous”. I would not suggest that anything is infamous. This certainly relates to the film studio. The bringing forward of that funding allowed for the planning to take place. The planning included legal advice in relation to that project. It is still a live project for government.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: We are coming to the end of information gathering. I might just chuck these things in. The minister is probably not in a position to answer and I might have to chase the answers under other areas, but in the capital funding in the same document, there is \$4 million in the commission for Main Roads for the Bunbury Outer Ring Road. I note that the commonwealth chipped in another \$320 million last week on top of that, as it turns out, \$16 million of which was for an intersection that is actually nowhere near the ring road. The member for Bunbury jumped on top of that and got the first press release out, so well done for him, I suppose. If the minister has any ability to elucidate on any of that, it would be useful.

Just another one, while I am here, and, again, it depends how much detail the minister has got, but there is a fair bit of money coming out in relation to the Burrup—the Burrup sea water supply and particularly \$25 million for the Burrup Strategic Industrial Area. Again, I suspect the minister is not in a position to give us a breakdown of either of those, but I thought I would ask the question.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Honourable member, no, I am not. All we have got at hand is the *Government mid-year financial projections statement*. The member would have seen on page 114, for example, that it mentions Burrup Strategic Industrial Area infrastructure. I have nothing at hand in relation to the \$4 million of additional funding for the outer ring-road.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I might finish with this. I thank the minister and his officials for the information they have been able to give us. I will give the minister a last chance to tell us the budget surplus in advance if he needs it. No? It was worth a try! I just finish with this comment then: obviously the tabled paper, whatever its new number is now, the Treasurer’s advance summary of drawn downs forecast, can be read in combination with the midyear review Treasurer’s advance document, which is appendix 4, which starts on page 129. For the information of members, the two lots of information, which are set out very differently, can be combined.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: A mind merge can be done with the *Treasurer’s advance: Summary of drawn downs forecast in the 2021–22 mid-year review*, which was the document the minister handed out, and the Treasurer’s advance document, which is appendix 4 of the of the midyear review. There are bits of information in each that are missing in the other, but the total numbers are accurate. I just make the point to members. If they are looking to break it down and they are not sure, and they combine the two documents rather than treat them separately, they will get a pretty good feel for how that that original \$732 million is apportioned. It is hard to read one without the other because the tabled paper does not do anything under \$10 million, whereas the midyear review Treasurer’s advance document certainly does. It has more detail but less explanation, if that makes sense. It has more financial detail, but it has less information about what the projects are about, so the two read together, if members are looking to understand, is a good way to examine what is going on with that particular document.

We would obviously love to have the equivalent going on for the as-yet determined Treasurer’s advance of \$1.5 billion, and the sooner we can get that information the better. But otherwise, I think we have garnered all the information that we are going to get tonight, and the opposition remains in support of the bill.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 2 and 3 put and passed.

Title put and passed.

Report

Bill reported, without amendment, and the report adopted.

Third Reading

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Emergency Services) [8.20 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a third time.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [8.21 pm]: I will make a very brief contribution to the third reading debate. I want to thank the minister and his advisers for their assistance and the members who contributed, particularly Hon Neil Thomson, Hon Martin Aldridge and Hon Dr Brian Walker, who all made a contribution. Like all of these bills, to some degree we kind of grant the government permission, so we sort of sign it a blank cheque with an appropriation bill because there are always variations that occur. It is not an unlimited blank cheque, but it is kind of a blank cheque. I appreciate the goodwill with which the minister has approached this. Obviously, we would have liked a lot more detail than he was able to provide. Obviously, we do not take that personally. It has been a partly interesting debate, but I think it will get much more interesting and much more willing when we come back in a month's time to debate the budget itself. We will hopefully get a lot more detail out of that. With that, I thank members for their contributions.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a third time and passed.

ANIMAL RESOURCES AUTHORITY AMENDMENT AND REPEAL BILL 2021

Second Reading

Resumed from 15 March.

HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [8.23 pm]: I indicate that I am the lead speaker for the opposition on the Animal Resources Authority Amendment and Repeal Bill 2021. Before I get to the technicalities of the bill, it is late on a Tuesday. I have not been in the house all day, but on post-derby Tuesday I need to point out that there is some purple in the room, which is not surprising, but there is one surprising person who is wearing purple, and it is good to see that the Leader of the House —

Several members interjected.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: It is close enough. The Leader of the House has come over to the purple army. Congratulations, Leader of the House. That is the biggest news of the day as far as I am concerned.

We will move on to the Animal Resources Authority Amendment and Repeal Bill 2021. I will outline the basis of the bill. In layman's terms, we have gone from talking about the funding of RATs to the defunding of rats and mice. It is late on a Tuesday, members, so I will take some liberties. This is actually an important piece of legislation. I will let the minister know that it is for process purposes rather than ideological purposes that we will not be supporting the bill, but it is a significant piece of legislation, surrounding a significant organisation, which is the Animal Resources Centre.

I will outline what will bill intends to do. It will provide for the government to exit the ownership of the Animal Resources Centre and operational control, in effect, and set up the sale of whatever assets are remaining from that important authority. It puts a deadline on the state's ownership of the Animal Resources Authority and the Animal Resources Centre. That is the part of the bill that we have some concerns with. We received a very useful briefing from some advisers yesterday and they assured us that processes are in place. There are purchasers, if you like, waiting in the wings and discussions have been taking place with the government, which is appropriate. However, none of that is guaranteed. It is likely, but it is not guaranteed, and for those reasons we will not be supporting the bill.

I thought it might be useful to outline some of the great work that bodies like this one do. This is a major centre in Australia. It is based here, obviously, and is funded by the state government, but it exports animals for medical research all over the country. I thought I might spend a little time explaining some of the great work that has happened because of organisations like the one we are discussing.

An American organisation, the Foundation for Biomedical Research, explains that research into cows helped create the world's first vaccine. Vaccines have been extremely topical of late. The first vaccine was to end smallpox, which was a scourge for hundreds of years. Studies with monkeys, dogs and mice led to the polio vaccine. Drugs used to combat cancer, HIV/AIDS, Alzheimer's disease, hepatitis and malaria would not have been possible without animal research. I do not think anyone is particularly comfortable looking behind the scenes at animal research, but it is necessary and has been extremely valuable in many fields. For example, cancer deaths have been on a continuous decline in the world since the 1990s. Some of that work, again, has been around research done with rodents and other species. That good work is lowering the mortality rate in some important areas. Many of the cancer-fighting drugs would not be possible without the use of mice in that research. For example, chemotherapy was first developed by using modified mustard gas to reduce tumours in mice, and that has led to important developments in the vital fight against cancer.

The bill does a number of things. Effectively, it winds-up ARC. The reason for the bill given by speakers in the other place and in the briefing was that ARC is, effectively, not making a return and needs a top-up from the government on a regular basis. I will, in a very brief committee process, be inquiring about how much and for how long and whether it is unusual for government-owned entities to not make a return. I will talk more broadly about

animal research. I might talk about some of the good work that ARC has done. That good work was highlighted when, in the middle of last year, there was some media speculation that ARC was going to be wound-up. Obviously, the research sector caught wind of that. Just some of the remarks that were made when that news became public include those made by Malcolm France, who is the former president of the Australian and New Zealand Laboratory Animal Association. He is reported to have said that the imminent closure of the Animal Resources Centre —

“obviously is going to leave a huge gap in the supply of animals to many universities and medical-research institutes” ...

He is also reported to have said that the facility is —

... “the only major producer of animals specially for sale” to Australia’s 43 universities, more than 50 medical research institutes, and other government and commercial research organizations, so the “overall reliance on ARC is very high”, and the loss of these animals is likely to be very problematic, says France.

This institute is held in enormously high regard right around the country. He went on —

Closure of ARC would not just affect the many medical research programs that depend on these specialised strains of mice and rats, there is also the potential loss of the technical expertise required to breed them.

Breeding the highly specialised strains of mice and rats required for medical research is very demanding. Of course, animal welfare should be top priority but to ensure that research data are reliable, a huge amount of effort also has to go into other aspects of their breeding, especially the genetics.

There is a lot at stake here. From the briefing and the discussion of this bill in the other place, we heard that negotiations are in train and we have an expected purchaser to take on this facility, but this bill will put in place a cliff face and if that purchase does not take place, this research—this data—will be gone and lost.

I have talked about the great work that ARC does. Hopefully, during the minister’s reply and in the committee stage, we will tease out whether the 30 June 2023 date is actually a cliff face. From my reading of the explanatory memorandum, if this legislation is put in place, the authority will be abolished after 30 June 2023 and the necessary administrative steps will be taken to formalise the resolution of matters. There are some concerns around that. I turn back to the discussion about whether the authority needs to be self-funding. In his second reading speech, the Minister for Emergency Services said —

Critically, section 16(1) of the Animal Resources Authority Act states that the authority must be self-funding.

Clearly, the authority has not been self-funding. I am not sure for how long, but it has not been self-funding, so evidently it can survive being topped up and propped up by Treasury. Therefore, either it has been acting in contradiction of the act or it is possible that it is self-funding. Obviously, that leads to the point that was raised in the briefing we received from the CEO of ARC that one of the outcomes of this decision will almost certainly be a rise in prices by the commercial operator. In effect, we are talking about privatisation. We are going from a government-controlled entity to what will be a private something. One of the results, according to the CEO, is likely to be a rise in the price of these animals for medical research. I am keen to know: did the government consider putting that price rise in place? I believe ARC is losing a small amount of money every year, so did the government consider keeping ARC in government hands and putting up the price? I would appreciate some detail around that.

There are a number of issues concerning the jobs at ARC. There are 64 staff in the current organisation, and from the briefing that we received, it was quite clear that that model is not sustainable, so there is some doubt about the jobs of those 64 staff. Hopefully, some staff will be picked up by the new organisation, providing, of course, it stays in Western Australia. Again, I am keen to hear from the minister during the second reading reply or during the committee stage whether there are any guarantees that this organisation will not be sold interstate or to an international purchaser.

I would also like to address some of the concerns raised in the other place in response to the contribution of Minister Cook. Only 16 per cent of the animals that ARC supplies to the research community are used in Western Australia. We send animals to other parts of Australia and possibly overseas. This is apparently a concern because the government is funding that, and I would like to know whether it considered a price rise to try to break even or get close to breaking even.

There is the issue of the lease at Murdoch University where this facility is housed. The lease is due to expire and I believe Murdoch wants to take back that building to repurpose it for other uses. Was that a contributing factor in the decision to wind-up government involvement in this organisation? Minister Cook said —

We do not want to see this facility wound up, but at the end of the day, it is not the role of the state government to continue to prop it up when there are other, more appropriate models of governance and resourcing that can be brought to bear.

I am interested in the governance point. Was there an issue with the governance that is currently in play? Is a more suitable form of governance required? I am unaware of that. It was not raised in the briefing, but it was raised by the minister in the other place. One other issue that we need to discuss is that if the research does go international, what will be the impact of importing research animals into this country?

I would like to mention some of the good work done by this body. There is an organisation called the Jain Foundation and it was created to find a cure for—I will certainly mispronounce this—dysferlinopathy, which is a group of muscle diseases that have a slow progression of muscle weakness and wasting and can affect multiple parts of the body. The foundation's focused strategy includes funding and actively monitoring the progress of scientific research projects and key pathways to find a cure. The Jain Foundation is a very strong supporter of the lab rats distributed by ARC. That is just one of a number of examples in which ARC does some great work.

To recap—this will be a brief speech in the second reading debate, and we can get through this quite quickly—we are talking about the privatisation of a government asset. Members would expect me, as a conservative, to support that and I do, but it is about the timing and the process. The briefing was quite clear that that is in hand, but I do not know why this could not have been done in another way that guaranteed that the bid was accepted, if you like, and then we could have wrapped this up. I am sure the minister will explain exactly why that model was chosen. This is an important piece of legislation because it affects a very important organisation that does really important scientific work in this country. I hope that risk of June 2023 does not eventuate. From the briefing, we were told that a suitable suitor might be found for the ARC assets in the middle of this year. Talking about assets, I inquired in the briefing about the actual assets and liabilities of ARC but was not able to get an answer. It is clearly not the building at Murdoch—that is owned by the university. Therefore, could the minister outline what is actually for sale.

Hon Stephen Dawson: It's that minister.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: I apologise!

Hon Stephen Dawson: We've had a change.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: My apologies. Could the Minister for Regional Development outline what in fact the assets and liabilities are of the organisation? That will be the conclusion of my remarks. I look forward to a fairly brief committee process, minister.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [8.39 pm]: I will make a few comments on the Animal Resources Authority Amendment and Repeal Bill 2021. It may come as no surprise to members that I have a little experience with rats and mice.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Well, you are in the Liberal Party!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I was just waiting for that! Members will have noticed that I was looking across the chamber when I said that! There are rats and mice on one side; snakes on the other. That is probably enough of Noah's ark for today, Mr Acting President. I was egged on by the Minister for Regional Development, who not infrequently leads me astray as she sits there quietly—I do not think she ever sits there quietly!

Obviously, I have had some experience with animals. I have been in a couple of different laboratory animal facilities over a great number of years—more years than I care to remember at this point—and there are a couple of things I would like to suggest. As part of my course, I spent some time working in the equivalent production centre in Brisbane. It has been said on a number of occasions that this unit in Perth is special and that it exports around the country. I am interested to know how many of these facilities still exist. I have been to the ones in Queensland and Melbourne, and I would be surprised if they had all disappeared. The first thing we should think about is how many of these facilities exist around Australia. A suggestion has been put—not tonight but at other times—that this might be the only one. My suspicion is that there might be others around the place.

Having some experience of this, I will relate some stories. When people work in these facilities for a while, the general rule is that if they did not like rats, they learn that they are actually not bad creatures, and if they thought they were going to like mice, they are quickly disabused of that. The reality is that rats are much easier to work with and generally better tempered than mice.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: That's a really interesting observation. Why is it so? What has a rat got over a mouse?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They might feel less threatened because they are that bit bigger, but the number of vet students who walked out of that building eventually —

A government member interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I missed that. If we are going to start doing jokes about that, lawyer jokes might have to come into it, and then I will be in all sorts of strife. Let us steer clear of that as well.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: I wouldn't have thought that you would think that size is everything!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Maybe we will get to lawyer jokes! Maybe we will have to. The minister graduated as a lawyer, did she not?

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: But I don't feel defined by it.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Okay. Perhaps we will leave it at that. There are other legal professionals in the house, if not necessarily in the chamber at the moment.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Hon Michael Mischin has done very well for himself.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: We had better be cautious about what we say about being able to extrapolate the results on experimenting with lawyers instead of rats! That is why we did not go there, Hon Pierre Yang. Interestingly, the number of times that a vet student walked out —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: I think you would also acknowledge that your particular profession is one that has had probably the most challenges in terms of personalities. You have acknowledged that.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Every profession has. Certainly, the veterinary profession has plenty. Do not worry; there are some unusual characters. I do not have time to go through anecdotes about all the vets I have known over the years; if I did, we would be here for a long time.

The point I was going to make is that lots of vet students walked away with a pet rat after those months of training, but nobody that I am aware of walked away with a pet mouse.

Several members interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I had a pet rat, which my poor departed mother ultimately inherited as I moved on and did other things. She said it passed from natural causes, but I was not entirely convinced. Like most pet rats, it was called Basil, because that is the first name one goes to. They are remarkably good animals to have as pets. These were laboratory rats, so they had to be kept separate. That is very different from what goes on in the wild, but they do make reasonable pets.

I go back to the point of the bill. My first question is: how many other facilities exist? If the worst-case scenario happened and this facility was privatised and for some reason it fell over, burnt down, exploded or whatever else, apart from barbecued rats and mice, what would the result be? My question was: what other capacity exists around Australia? I think that is the bit that has been missing in the debate. Perhaps the facilities that I knew and worked in many years ago no longer exist, but I would have thought it likely that a number of other capital cities have laboratory rodent-breeding facilities, and I would be interested to know how many of those still exist. Obviously, if it is possible to export those animals to other states and probably overseas, by definition we are capable of importing them as well. Those animals are bred in very hygienic conditions to make sure there is no contamination from other diseases. One would assume that other facilities exist, so under a worst-case scenario, we could find this resource. The Perth centre may be of the view that its animals are of a particularly high quality or that it breeds specific strains that are of particular use. I certainly know that the Brisbane centre felt exactly the same way. There was not really a reflection of what else is out in the marketplace in either the second reading speech or the explanatory memorandum.

I am obviously fully supportive of this Labor government's privatisation agenda. I think it is great. I think the privatisation agenda of the Labor Party should be encouraged.

An opposition member interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is only little rat steps, in fact—little, tiny, scuttling steps—but every bit down the path of economic conservatism is to be absolutely welcomed. I do not want to get in the way of that or discourage the government from going down the privatisation path, because the government has been going in the opposite direction.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: You are going to support the legislation, are you?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I am going to let the minister walk it through unabridged and unattacked, because I like to see —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: These rifts between the seats —

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: No, there is not a deep rift at all. As I said, we are brothers in arms. Obviously, we are keen to see the government embrace privatisation. The more it does that, the more we should encourage it. I just wanted to ask those fairly simple questions—that is, who else is out there in the marketplace, and what is the comparison?

I understand that universities obviously do not like losing a facility. Universities are a bit like government departments; no government department likes to lose assets. As Sir Humphrey said, the minister is out there to garner the budget for departments to look after—a bigger budget is better and all those things. I understand that the university does not want to lose an asset. It will obviously promote the facility that it has, and that is completely understandable. But because we are effectively debating privatisation, we should be having a really good review of precisely what the government is proposing to market and privatise. That is the bit that I think has been missing in the debate so far. It is like putting up a business case before one invests; we want to know precisely what the asset looks like. Hon Steve Martin quite rightly asked for a list of the assets. That was a very sensible, business-like position to take. The next step is in terms of what else is in the marketplace and what this centre is competing with, both in Australia and overseas. There is obviously a significant production of laboratory animals all around the world. It is not that complicated a procedure. There are obviously facilities out there. I am interested to see what other major centres there are in the Australian scenario. In an ideal world, the Animal Resources Authority Amendment and Repeal Bill 2021 will pass and the government will privatise the service. Hopefully, it does so within a situation of some

competition. When the tender documents go out and we start down the process, I will be interested to see whether the ownership shifts to other existing centres around Australia, which might see an economy of scale, for example. There might be a value in that. I doubt that we are in a position to know any of those things at the moment, but in time I would be interested to know precisely what the options look like for alternative ownership.

It is a pretty specialist field, members. It is probably not the sort of investment that people would make with their superannuation, for example, or if they were looking to invest their retirement funds in something. It is a field that requires a fair bit of specialised knowledge so I would have thought that there are probably a limited number of highly professional organisations that would be interested in this type of investment. Some universities might be, for example, but I would have thought in particular other laboratory animal centres around Australia might be the prime target for this sort of thing. I am interested in who else is out there in terms of those organisations and whether the government is suggesting that there is a definitive difference between the animals that are produced in this centre versus animals that are produced elsewhere. I guess most centres have their own specific strains but in my view there are lots of similarities—they are based or designed to be as uniform as possible, because it is the lack of uniformity that interferes with scientific results. We are basically looking at a line to the point in the early days when there was probably a significant amount of in-breeding of laboratory animals just to get those very uniform lines of genetics. I believe we called it line breeding at the time and in the breeding of some other animals they still call it line breeding, but there was certainly in-breeding to try to get these very fine lines. Hopefully, there is enough line development going on that we do not have to have those anymore. Other centres that I worked in had their specific lines as well and different lines within the centres for different targets of research. I am assuming that all that still exists around Australia. The government is going out to the marketplace with this privatisation to market this thing and I will be interested to see what the government thinks its market advantage might be and why this line of animals is of significant value or of greater value than a line of animals being developed elsewhere.

Obviously, there is the cost of transport. Again, I am going back a long time but my memory is that the cost of an appropriate packaged box of rats or mice was not that great. We wanted them pretty quickly. We wanted them in air transport if possible and delivered quickly but, from memory, I do not think transport was a huge cost. I do not think that the issue is getting them there quickly. I am interested in whether the minister can give us some advice on what the market advantage is, how that looks different and why this is a good purchase for another company.

Without going into the gory details of my life in those environments—I do not think that will necessarily help, despite the fun we had a bit earlier—those are the critical questions for me. If I run through them, it is the other facilities that exist in Australia, their product versus the product that comes out of the centre in Western Australia and what market advantage this line might have. Those are good and critical questions and if we do not quite get it right, when we go into the committee stage—Hon Steve Martin wants to ask a few quick questions—I might jump in and try to refine that a bit. I think those are the critical questions.

I encourage the government to continue down the privatisation path. If it wants a few suggestions about what else it can look at, I am more than happy to provide them. By the way, just before I finish, I am absolutely with the Leader of the House—that is not purple. Hon Steve Martin made an outrageous comment about the football and he will be severely chastised in the fullness of time.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [8.55 pm]: I have to say in advance that from a clinical point of view, I agree with everything that Hon Dr Steve Thomas mentioned, although I am going to disagree with him and I will explain why in a short while. The scientific points he made were quite correct. I tell the house in advance that I will be supporting the Animal Resources Authority Amendment and Repeal Bill 2021.

I suspect that it is fair to say that no one individual could possibly know all the details of all the statutory bodies that exist in the state. I am not overly embarrassed to say that I knew nothing about this excellent facility that will soon cease to exist. Hearing about its excellent work has made me think that the facility is worth a great deal of money because it is certainly a business that is viable throughout the world, providing reliable high-quality animal research models here in Western Australia for more than 40 years. Fine. In that sense, I could be sorry to see it go—but I am not. Animal research is an emotive subject. I had a look at the history of animal research. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the gory details that he would spare us and I am very glad that he did so because they are gory indeed. Even now dealing with animals is really quite an emotive subject.

My brother-in-law qualified as a surgeon in Beijing. When he emigrated to the United States, he was not able to work as a doctor because of the differences in law and education—he was an excellent cardiac surgeon—so he went to work in a facility in Washington where he operated on rats by performing cardiac surgery and measuring the effects of the drug-eluting stents in the hope that they would save people who were having a heart attack rather than performing coronary artery bypass grafting. The stents are very complex, very small and very technical and he performed this surgery to understand how well they would function in animals—would they have clots with the blood flowing and would people who have these stents be subject to an early death because of stuff that was not discovered in the animal experimentation? It is highly specialised work with highly specialised animals. Each one of those animals died as a result of that test. I could say that, yes, it is understandable because it was for the greater good of mankind. I understand that—I just do not like it. My personal view is of horror.

Looking at what happened in the not-too-distant past, I wonder whether we should really be doing this. At a philosophical level, I discussed this with one of my sons just a few months ago. We have a sorry history in Australia of doing the same thing on humans with the experimentations that were done on Indigenous people in the 1920s and 1930s to help us understand how the human body reacts to pain. It was thought to be okay in those not-too-distant times. Were they ethical experiments? Of course they were not. But could we then ask whether, given that those experiments had taken place and the genie had been released from the bottle, we are allowed to use the results of those experiments to carry on with medical research elsewhere and develop products? Can we use the products of such experimentation to make further advances in medicine? The question then becomes much less clear. It is not that easy to decide whether or not it is ethically based. I think we would move forward, certainly, but the nasty questions would remain. The same could be said, I would think, for animals. We can perhaps all agree that experiments should not have happened in the first place, but society has moved on and we no longer seek to justify those other treatments so, yes, we will use the research findings and move on.

Also, I have to confess that I am a hypocrite—I have discussed this with my boys—because I happily eat meat but I will not and could not kill a cow to provide myself with beef. This is stupid; I know it is stupid, but it is the way I am, and I suspect many people are like this. If I can name the cow, if I can stroke the cow and if I can say, “How are you doing today, happy cow?”, I am not going to put a bullet in its brain or slit its throat. It is like my pet dog; I am not going to harm my pet dog, and I am much the same with most animals. I make a few exceptions, but I would not do that to the animals that we like to eat. From that philosophical standpoint, I am not opposed to animal studies in general.

It could well be that with our recent scientific advances, having based our science on hundreds of years of experimentation on animals, are we now in a position to create the modelling that will, at a molecular level, allow us to do simulated experimentation on a computer in an artificial intelligence environment? Could we then dispense with animal experiments in the first place? The answer is, to some degree, yes, but not for everything.

I think we are reaching a stage now at which our reliance on animals is a lot less. Breeding animals with dementia or with specific cancers is all very well and good; we have the expertise to do that, but it just does not sit well with me. Again, this is my hypocrisy. As a medic, I will use the medications that we need, based on the animal studies, but it does not sit well with me. There are benefits from that, but I am just not comfortable with it.

In that sense, I welcome the Animal Resources Authority Amendment and Repeal Bill 2021 because it soothes my conscience a little to know that less of this will happen in WA. But there is another problem, and that is that we are exporting 80 per cent of these animals to other parts of Australia for very good purposes, but other parts of Australia are not helping with the funding of the organisation here, and I think that is a little unfair. I do not think it is right. This is being done because it is losing a lot of money, and that is another very good example. If we are going to lose a large amount of money for a service that other people want but are not prepared to pay for, the question is: why should we take the financial hit? I would very much welcome an answer to that question. Could it be that with this impending closure, other organisations could look at the potential and take it over? I think they could. Would they do so without this bill going forward? Possibly not. If we are going to pay for it, they are going to sit back and say, “Well, keep on paying for it.”

In a sense, the practical and the philosophical align here for me, in that it is a financial consideration, but it also aligns with my desire to not hurt animals. The member for Wanneroo also made a valid point, observing the 80 per cent. That is really a situation that was made by the other place and cannot be allowed to continue. I believe the state government approached the commonwealth government to see whether more equitable funding could be found, and it was rebuffed. I think the right answer is that if that is the case, we will simply close the business.

I have concerns about the remaining 20 per cent of animals that are used here. Are we going to be suffering? Are we going to lose essential components of research in Western Australia? That is a very valid question and I would very much like to hear the minister’s opinion on that in Committee of the Whole to see whether that question could be happily resolved. I expect to be able to support this bill despite the answer that I expect to receive in that process.

I believe negotiations are currently underway but are very much commercial-in-confidence, so I do not expect to hear any information about that in this house yet. That will be plan B. It could be that the government is confident that it has progressed things to such a point that the provider in the future will say, “Yes, okay. We’ll take this on.” I am not expecting to hear about that; that is not something that would be in the remit of the debate on this bill.

I will simply take a moment to commend the Animal Resources Authority on the work it has undertaken for the past 40 years and its staff of 65 individuals. I wonder what will happen to their jobs, by the way. I wish them every success under new ownership and new governance, which I anticipate will be coming. I think the proposition the government has made is actually valid, so we will see what happens. In the hope of getting some clarification about this, the identification of a service provider in the course of the minister’s reply and the time frame so that it all falls into place, I anticipate that we will be supporting this bill.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (South West — Minister for Agriculture and Food) [9.04 pm] — in reply: I thank members for their contributions. Some very interesting topics have been raised. In particular, Hon Dr Steve

Thomas's love for rats is noted and we will follow his progress on that! Some very valid points have been made about this facility. I want to start by acknowledging the great work of the Animal Resources Centre's team. Kirsty Moynihan and the 65 personnel who work at ARC have really done outstanding work, but we know that we are at a point when change is required. It is not just because we are no longer prepared to subsidise all these research institutions in the eastern states. As has been said, around 80 to 85 per cent of the product is going east and the cost to the state over the last five years has been about \$5 million. That is a little over \$1 million a year that we are subsidising the centre, mainly for the research effort in the eastern states. The critical thing that has led to having to act now is that the lease at Murdoch is about to expire and the need for a new and modern facility is present. This is the time when we need to put this operation on a more secure footing.

We are very confident in the process that has begun. It began in December and it has seen three very serious proponents come forward and there will not be an issue about the ARC as an entity surviving in terms of its skill set because of the strength of the people in the particular product. Hon Dr Steve Thomas asked what asset we have here. I guess the real guts of the asset is the live biological stock and the genetic strains that have been developed to specifically be useful in the research that has been undertaken. As Hon Steve Martin said, that research has been really important in treating many diseases. The genetic stock really is the guts of the value in this asset, plus the people and their expertise.

We are confident, from the expressions we have had to date, that there will be very serious and important players who want this. We are also confident that there is a very strong argument that this should remain in Western Australia. That is one of the problems we have had with some of the federal approaches to various issues—for example, plant quarantine. They want all major, serious plant quarantine to be based in one facility in Victoria. That will lead to a particular vulnerability. If there is a problem in that facility, there is no redundancy in the system, so we have argued very strongly, in terms of plant quarantine, that it is unwise to concentrate all the efforts in one facility. I think there is an even stronger argument not to put all our eggs in one basket because biosecurity risks can occur and compromise the research endeavour. There have been some very constructive conversations with the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy, the federal body that invests in research infrastructure, which recognise the need from a national point of view to preserve that capability and not just to have Western Australia fund it exclusively, which also recognises the very real benefit of this facility not being concentrated in one part of Australia. There are very, very strong reasons pointing to the maintenance of this facility here in Western Australia, but with a better balance of funding, recognising that this facility will provide a resource for the whole nation and not to expect Western Australia to fund it. I think the process that has commenced will begin to engage federal entities like NCRIS to come to the party and work out how to make sure that that happens.

I must say that I would have taken Hon Steve Martin's concerns a little more seriously had it not been for the performance of the Liberal and National Parties on InterGrain. When I became the Minister for Agriculture and Food, one of the first things that was on my desk was a request for me to sign-off on the sale of InterGrain, which is 50 per cent owned by the state government, to an eastern states entity. It was an unbelievable decision, particularly because we wanted to make sure there was a grain breeder in Western Australia that was seriously focused on Western Australian conditions. The biology of Western Australian conditions is not different from the eastern states. Its grain growing environment is different and WA has very different soil types and climatic conditions from the eastern states. But there was this proposal to sell-off InterGrain. I have to say that one important thing that we have been able to achieve in the agricultural world is to stop the sale of InterGrain, to restore faith in InterGrain and to build it up so that it is now an absolutely thriving and expanding entity in a grain industry that is worth in the order of \$10 billion per annum. I have to say that I find that opposition to the rationalisation of a much smaller entity that serves the whole nation is perhaps a little bit of opposition for opposition's sake.

But the member did talk about some interesting things. He talked about research on animals that led to the smallpox vaccine. But it was not research on animals; it was research on milkmaids. As a little informative aside, the developers of the smallpox vaccine noticed that milkmaids who got cowpox did not get smallpox, so it was the experiments on humans rather than on animals that led to that, quite rightly, very early vaccine wherein one would be scratched and a bit of cowpox would be rubbed onto the skin. Interestingly, one of the first anti-vax regimes was during the American War of Independence when George Washington demanded that all his troops have the cowpox treatment and the anti-vaxxers were around even then, opposing that.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas wanted to know what was the guts of the asset. As I said, it really is the intellectual property over biological stock and genetic strains and the expertise of personnel.

Hon Dr Brian Walker raised some very interesting issues. He talked about the moral dilemma of research and that it might be unethical. This was a big issue after the Second World War with both the Japanese experimentation in Nanjing and Dr Mengele and company's research in Germany. Notwithstanding the fact that people said that research would not be used, we all know that it was used in subsequent medical developments. But there is a moral dilemma and we cannot paper over it. In fact, today I was in Broome announcing some very interesting funding packages, including one to an extraordinary company, Marine Biomedical, that will be making human bone repair materials from pearl shell nacre. The idea is to use pearl shell, which is far superior to any other artificial bone substrates. This firm, in partnership with UWA and Willie Creek Pearls, will be setting up a laboratory with the assistance of

a regional economic development grant. The CEO of that company spoke today about the issue of the ethical challenges of animal research and even human trials and the movement away from animal experimentation. I do not think that we have got to a point at which we necessarily will be able to do that and make the progress that people perhaps want, but it is a very valid issue and it is one that I am sure will engage the minds of many biology researchers. Even just from a timeliness point of view, in terms of vaccine trials and some of the newest vaccines that are being developed, shortcuts are being sought to some of the lengthy and very large-scale human trials by the use of digital modelling. There is change afoot, but I certainly think that at this point in time, within all the acknowledged ethical dilemma, which is the same ethical dilemma that the member observed when we eat meat—although I guess I am one of those people who is more realistic about the chain of life; things eat other things and that is just how biology works and we just have to do it as humanely as we can—that is the very essence of the nature of biological existence.

With that, I appreciate the concerns and the interest of members. I think this is the right time to put ARC onto a new and firm setting. I am optimistic that with a federal government that is perhaps not so busy finding possies for its former colleagues to fund, it can spend a bit more time on the important scientific infrastructure that we as a nation need funded, and we will be engaged with the federal government and get proper National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy support for this facility as it goes forward into its next phase.

But again, I say to Kirsty and the team that we really do appreciate the skill and the work of the 65 people at the Animal Resources Centre, and we will make sure that it has a very positive pathway going forward. I thank members for their support and I thank even those who do not support the bill for their comments.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

Committee

The Deputy Chair of Committees (Hon Peter Foster) in the chair; Hon Alannah MacTiernan (Minister for Agriculture and Food) in charge of the bill.

Clause 1: Short title —

Hon STEVE MARTIN: The minister raised a number of issues in her second reading reply that I would like to get to. This will not be a long committee process. The bill is fairly limited in its clauses. I understand the negotiations are ongoing and there are some commercial-in-confidence matters that I do not need to know about, but will the minister tell us about some of the negotiations, if she can? Will something in the negotiations guarantee that the facility, or what is left of the facility, will stay in Western Australia?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: Yes, a clear provision in the proposed contract will require the facility to remain in Western Australia. When we think through the logic of it, it makes sense from that quarantine position to have a diversity of centres and also the expertise that is available, because a lot of the capability is obviously with the people.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: That is good news. The minister mentioned the InterGrain model; I agree that the minister made the right call on that. That is a partnership model between the state and some other entity. Is that a part of the negotiations or is that being considered in this instance?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: No, that model is not being contemplated here. As I said, it is important to understand that this product goes all around Australia. In fact, 85 per cent of it goes over east. There has been a lot of engagement, shall I say, with the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy entity and with universities. I am confident from what I have seen that entities with the right qualities are interested in taking over this facility.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: Could I inquire about the comment—the minister emphasised it less than was the case in the other place—that this organisation has needed a top-up. The minister said \$5 million over five years, so it would be approximately \$1 million a year. That was the reason or some of the reason given for the decision. I talked a little bit about how section 16(1) of the act indicates that the authority has to break even or better. Can I get an indication of how many other organisations of this nature do not meet this obligation? Is the provision in this act unusual? Let us pick another one, such as the Forest Products Commission, for example, which we have discussed recently. Is it common across those types of organisations or is it unique to this authority?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I think what is unique to this authority is that it provides a national service. The majority of what it provides is for a national research endeavour. I think it is important to understand—I think we have made this point—that it is not only about the ongoing financial assistance that has catalysed this decision to move forward here. A big decision has to be made because we are coming to the end of the lease term at Murdoch, and we have to look at the development of a new facility because, even if we were able to extend the lease on the facility at Murdoch, as I understand it, it is really subpar for what we need going forward. This is a time when all these issues have catalysed and we need to work out a path to go forward. Through the science portfolio, we have developed a view that the right partners will be available, and given that it currently provides a national service, we will find the right funding vehicle to deliver a new facility that will enable the organisation to go forward for the next 25 years.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: The minister mentioned a federal organisation in her second reading reply. I did not catch it; I think she used an acronym.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: It is NCRIS.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: That is the one. It coordinates a federal response in this sector. Will the transfer of ownership from a state entity to private organisation, for example, affect the relationship between the federal body and the new form of ARC? Is that a state government to federal government relationship or can a private body seek or leverage federal funding through that organisation?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: NCRIS's capacity is for not-for-profit generally, but it can obviously work with universities. One of the things that became very evident to me when I was in federal Parliament is that the WA government had—not exclusively during that time, but particularly under the Mr Barnett years—gone it alone and had not been out there in the face of the federal government to get our fair share of federal infrastructure, including the NCRIS infrastructure, which is really important. The data supply lines and the fibre cable that it provides across the nation into universities are well in advance of anything that the national broadband network provided. The sort of research infrastructure that this organisation can provide is really important, so I think that however this plays out in the negotiations that go on, there definitely is a role for some federal assistance in getting the project underway.

I know that the member was talking about the time, but, as I said, the lease is expiring. We are going to get the problem resolved. We are not just going to kick the can down the road. This has been talked about and contemplated for a while. We have to act and we have started the process under the minister, Roger Cook. The process has been started. We have serious expressions of interest. We are negotiating with those proponents. We are absolutely confident that we can have this underway and in place within the time frames that are set out in the legislation.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: On the expiration of the lease for the Murdoch facility—again, I do not need to know the details, if, in fact, it is taking place—are any of the negotiations about the state providing a home for the new version of the Animal Resources Centre? Is that being considered? That would be a one-off capital spend.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Sorry. What was that?

Hon STEVE MARTIN: Do any of the discussions that are taking place around the transfer of the ownership of ARC involve the provision of a facility—a home—for ARC that the state provides?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: Just to clarify, the lease with Murdoch expires on 31 December, 2023. I understand that it might be open to a short extension of that time, but the three proponents have all been required to submit what their plans would be for a facility. That is all now under negotiation.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Can I just check, because I do not think the minister was here to supply the information in the second reading response, what other laboratory animal producing facilities exist around Australia? What else is out there in the marketplace? We are exporting 84 per cent of our product, or whatever it is. Is Western Australia importing other lines as well? How big is this marketplace?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: There are a number of smaller facilities around Australia that are considerably smaller than the ones that we have here. Perhaps the most prominent of those is the one in Sydney, which is the Garvan Institute of Medical Research, but they are all considerably smaller than the facility that we have here in Western Australia.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: Are there biosecurity concerns? The best case would be that it stays here, which would be great, but the worst case would be that it moves east or overseas. Is the minister aware of biosecurity issues about importing animals for animal research?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: As I said, a provision is built into the contract that this facility is to stay in Western Australia. I do not think anyone is suggesting that we would not have a facility here. Of course, I think I set out the risks of just having one facility and that we, in fact, need to have facilities at a number of locations because if we have a single facility, we have a vulnerability. In terms of imports, there is always a problem with importing animals or animal products into Australia. We have seen this with some of our recent problems with the importation of even bee semen. One of the current issues we are dealing with is whether we should import the lumpy skin disease cow virus into Australia for experimentation. There are a range of views about whether we should allow the lumpy skin disease virus to enter Australia for research or whether it will have an alleged “Trumpy” Wuhan effect! Of course there is an issue. There is no argument here that Western Australia should have an animal research centre; the issue is what is the appropriate vehicle for that and how we ensure this facility that has been providing animals around Australia is best funded and how we best build a new facility so that it can be functional over the next couple of decades.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: I have only a few more questions. The minister in his contribution in the other place mentioned a review that was undertaken before this legislation was put together. Can the minister give us some details about that review? Was it an internal review? Was some external work done? Was it done by the organisation itself?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I understand there have been a number of reviews over quite a number of years, all of which have pretty much come to the same solution. The last review was completed in 2018 and was undertaken by Treasury and Deloitte Australia, which provided some advice. As I said, I am advised that there has been quite a number of reviews but the last one was completed in 2018. It went to the Expenditure Review Committee and a decision was made to go down this path.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: I might be reading too much into it, but I just want to touch on the point I raised about the minister's comments on governance and resourcing. Clearly resourcing is an issue, at \$1 million a year over the last five years. The minister referenced appropriate models of governance. That review was done by Treasury so that was about the dollars, quite clearly. Have there been other concerns around governance or am I reading too much into that comment from the minister?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: The governance issues raised were never of a non-financial nature. The reference to governance was about the ability of the entity to right its ship economically. There has not been any suggestion of any lack of control over the ethical side of the operations. ON My understanding is that animals are provided only if there has been a proper ethics process that the purchasing entity can show that they have appropriate ethical sign-off for. There has been nothing in those findings that in any way challenges the efficacy in that regard, so the reference to governance is the ability for the organisation to financially right the ship.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: Minister, I certainly was not casting any aspersions on the government; I was following up on that quick comment from the minister. I have a couple of last questions about the 64 staff who are currently employed at Murdoch University in the ARC organisation. There are a couple of clauses in the bill, which I will not go through individually, that deal with the 64 staff. Obviously, if this is going to a private/university-based model, one of the ways to make it pay its way is to cut some staff. Can the minister briefly outline the provisions that deal with the retention or otherwise of those staff and what arrangements might be in place, please?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: Yes, thanks, member; this is an important consideration. There has been a number of steering committee meetings and a summary of options is available to ARC staff. One option is redeployment within the public sector. A second option is for staff to be offered a voluntary severance scheme. The third option is for staff to apply for a transition payment following an offer of employment with the new entity, taking on the assets of ARC. The fourth option is for residual staff to be transferred to a nominated agency. We certainly see that a significant number of the staff will be offered employment with the new entity. Some people will want to transfer elsewhere in the public sector and others will take the voluntary severance scheme, so there are four options available to any existing staff.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 2 to 16 put and passed.

Title put and passed.

Report

Bill reported, without amendment, and the report adopted.

Third Reading

Bill read a third time, on motion by **Hon Alannah MacTiernan (Minister for Agriculture and Food)**, and passed.

CITY OF KALGOORLIE–BOULDER — JOHN WALKER

Statement

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.45 pm]: What is a politician if not a mouthpiece for their constituents? Who said that? I did, and I strongly believe in that. I rise tonight on behalf of the Kalgoorlie–Boulder community who, over the better part of a decade, have been done a disservice by their local government, the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder. What I will tell members tonight will serve as a strong case study for the reform of the local government act.

On 26 March, the *Kalgoorlie Miner* ran this front page. For *Hansard*, I am holding up the front page of 26 March that says, “Picture of life under former CEO: City staff speak out on culture of bullying, sexism and racism”. Look at this front page, members—shocking. This might seem like a pretty shocking condemnation, but not to me. Over the last two years, countless staff, current and former, councillors, and other members of the community have raised some pretty disturbing concerns about the goings-on at the city.

When the cultural survey of 2021 results, which triggered the *Kalgoorlie Miner*'s headline, were released publicly, I was not surprised. The consistent descriptions within the culture report were: endemic bullying and harassment, open discrimination, highly inappropriate aggressive behaviours, dishonesty and a lack of integrity, inequality, sexism, casual racism, no management of poor performance, lack of accountability, and lack of governance. I stand here today, members, to make sure this report and the incidents of bullying, harassment, sexism and racism—there is

no such thing as casual racism—are not swept under the rug, because I know that the people of Kalgoorlie–Boulder deserve better. For those who were unfortunate to be subject to, and I quote from the report, a “toxic” organisational culture that is “not a psychologically safe place to work”, they will certainly not forgive nor forget, unless we see some drastic changes done immediately at the city.

In an ideal world, the people who have lived this experience would have been able to stand and tell their truth. Unfortunately, we have a case in which it seems the former CEO has goaded people into speaking out just so he can sue them or invalidate the non-disclosure agreements of staff who have worked underneath him. For instance, last week, from his new posting in Lismore in New South Wales, the former CEO John Walker said on ABC radio in reference to this survey, according to my notes —

“Because if anyone wants to take me on, if they want to take on any commentary that might defame me or cause me some damage then they will hear from my solicitors”

I do not know how tone deaf one man needs to be. When you are talking about a bully being in the spotlight for bullying, perhaps threatening people for speaking up is not the best way to clear your name, John. I also note that he said “solicitors” plural, like he has more than one lawyer on retainer. That must be nice. That is probably because he was paid up to \$400 000 a year to do what he did at the city. He continued to receive this attractive sum when he was stood down while being investigated for workplace misconduct. It was close to \$400 000 a year, more than what the Premier is paid. But in the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder, what is good for the goose is not good for the gander. While the CEO was able to convince the council to ensure his yearly raises, he was also hit with a \$2 million back pay claim by the employees. That is right; the man who is paid more than the Premier of this state thought it was prudent to short-change his workers. I am a union man and I can tell members that \$2 million in unpaid wages is a disgrace—an absolute disgrace.

When it came time to face the music, John Walker ditched across the Nullarbor in his City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder paid for car. When the community rightfully questioned why the man who had left under a cloud was able to ride off into the sunset in a ratepayer-funded vehicle, the mayor, John Bowler, assured the community the car would be returned. He later clarified that the cost of the car being returned would be comped by the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder, much to the dismay of some councillors. We also know that Mr Walker was given a comfortable payout, the sum of which is shrouded in secrecy because the city chose not to provide the information to ratepayers. I know that the current Minister for Local Government has proposed a raft of changes to ensure better transparency in local government, and I would welcome that; it may have made a difference in this situation. What we do know is that the CEO got paid out and also received a three per cent pay increase, despite the findings of the March 2021 investigation into workplace misconduct. The investigation found, according to my notes—listen closely to this, members —

... Mr Walker’s conduct is so serious that a court is likely to be satisfied that the termination without notice is a lawful method of terminating the employment relationship between him and the city.

It also found —

... the Investigation Report reveals a pattern of behaviour which is inappropriate for someone in a senior role of CEO and gives rise to a finding of serious misconduct and a right to terminate at common law without notice in accordance with clause 11.3(1)(e) of the contract.

These damning findings were not enough to convince the majority of CKB councillors to send John Walker packing, though, and eight out of the 13 councillors thought it fit to reinstate him and give him a pay increase. It was Mr Walker who pulled his own plug, secure in the knowledge that he would have a soft landing on the other side of the country, with a nice little pay packet as a sweetener.

Following his departure, the city began a review into workplace culture. This survey garnered 176 responses and there were more than 120 participants in focus groups. I will table the report to make sure it is on the record, but let me just highlight a few things. The data indicated that the culture at the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder had deteriorated over the past five years and trust in the leadership had been severely eroded. It is worth noting that Mr Walker started in 2015. Another interesting excerpt from the cultural survey said that a significant number of comments also suggested that individuals had attempted to raise claims relating to discrimination and harassment. However, the view was that these cases had been settled with legal agreements to make the issue go away, and nothing had been done to change the behaviours in the organisation. Settled with legal agreements—wow! Twenty-seven individuals specifically said the organisation was toxic. One worker said the leadership under the previous CEO was toxic and that the leaders learnt to copy his behaviour. The culture of the leadership is toxic. In the net culture score, between plus 100 and minus 100, the city scored minus 56. The average across local governments is 47. It was minus 56 under the leadership of the former CEO, John Walker.

A shift in thinking is needed. The administration leadership and elected leadership need to turn things around. As we know, local government elections were held last year so the council has had a bit of a refresh. The mayor, John Bowler, was not up for re-election and remains the mayor. He has overseen this disaster and is now unapologetic about it. Councillors who were not even part of the council during this period apologised at the meeting on Monday

night. Unfortunately, Mr Bowler does not seem to have the same appetite for change. He has all but dismissed the findings of the report and continues to shower Mr Walker with praise. In the face of mounting evidence of misconduct, last year he released a glowing recommendation of the former CEO, which I will also table. Instead of acknowledging the misdeeds, Mr Bowler instead blamed the community of the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder. Referring to the community sentiment against Mr Walker, Mr Bowler said, according to my notes —

For the first time in my life I'm ashamed of my home town.

The mayor said he considered Mr Walker a good person and a friend, and that the best thing he had done was to be part of the selection committee that had appointed him to the top job. Mr Bowler said that in the five and a half years since, he had not let him down.

A truly weird hill to die on, John. Surely, this is untenable. Surely, he needs to have a closer look at the leadership that he wants to attract to the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder.

Like I said at the beginning, I bring this story to light not to condemn Mr Bowler, although I know that people who have suffered would disagree with that. I want to shine a light on the fact that the items released in the survey were well known to the community and the workforce, both current and former. As the report mentions, and from the people who have told me, complaints were made to the employer, to councillors, to the mayor and to the investigators, and surveys were also conducted, but the mayor remains, and the CEO has a new posting and a considerable payout. The only people who were punished are the ones who remained, to the detriment of their physical and mental health, or the ones who left and took a financial hit.

I would like to think the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder is isolated, but I know that is not the case. I urge the CKB to do better. I urge it to take a serious look at where it is heading into the future. I know that the Minister for Local Government, John Carey, has got true reform planned, and hopefully we will see that come to fruition. This type of situation is not good enough for the people of the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder. It is a disgrace that it has gone on. I feel sorry for all the staff, all the workers and all the councillors who have suffered.

SUSAN BROWNING — TRIBUTE

Statement

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [9.55 pm]: On 4 March 2022, the ABC lost one of their most distinguished news announcers. She was an extraordinary woman, and also my treasured friend. Her name is Susan Browning, and this is part of the eulogy that I delivered at her funeral last week.

While today is an opportunity to celebrate the life of Susan, I begin by offering my sincere thoughts and love to Marie and Roy, Cally, Anne, Jenny and Libby, and Susan's extended family. My contribution today on my lifelong friend Susan surrounds a wonderful period of her life. It surrounds the magnificent community of Kalgoorlie and also university life in the incomparable era simply and yet affectionately referred to as the 60s and 70s. My words will attempt to capture that period in time to offer an insight into the early years of Susan's life and also the lives of those around her. I speak on behalf of everyone who shared those wonderful years.

Having been born in Perth, for the most part Susan's childhood and adolescence were lived in Kalgoorlie. She lived a charmed life in weatherboard and corrugated iron roof homes in Campbell Street, and then in Piccadilly Street with her parents, Roy and Marie, and sisters Cally, Anne, Jenny and Libby, apart from a year in England in 1970. When the Brownings arrived in Kalgoorlie in 1966, Susan commenced year 2 at North Kalgoorlie Primary School. Coincidentally, I lived a few blocks away in a very similar weatherboard and corrugated iron roof home next to my parents' corner store in Ward Street. I also attended North Kalgoorlie Primary School year 2 in 1966, and thus began a beautiful friendship.

North Kal was a wonderful school in all respects. It was a time when the curriculum was ferociously norm-referenced, standards were unambiguously defined and adhered to, values were constantly impressed upon us, and life was completely uncomplicated. It was a time when we rode our bikes to school and walked to the Cremorne or Majestic Cinemas or the Twin City or Viewway drive-ins. It was a time when we played a multitude of sports, and winning was important. It was a time when Hannan Street was the sole shopping precinct, resplendent with Hicks, Hamilton's and Montgomery's. It was a time when the only fast food was fish and chips. It was a time of Choc Wedges, Wagon Wheels and Mexi Cola.

It was a time of Mr Hayes and Mrs Isbister and Mr Robinson. It was a time of Peta Linto, Sue's bestie for life, and Gillian Burkett, Heather Brown, Ian Macliver, Mark McCulloch, Lyn Pope, Gail Barrett, Gina Isbister, Yvonne Armstrong, Brett Foster, John Langford, Norm Sharp and Michael Willoughby just to name a few. It was a time when all that really mattered was our family and friends. It was a time when the seeds of a treasured friendship with Susan Browning were sown for all of us. Life was good.

The beginning of the 1970s brought an end to our primary school days and we all made the significant transition to Eastern Goldfields Senior High School, or EG. While the confines of our beloved North Kal, or the numerous other primary schools in Kal, offered a degree of security that we relished, the magnitude of EG offered a plethora of

additional opportunities, not least being a wide circle of new friends. Of course we had the inconvenience of elevated academic expectations, most prominently bestowed upon us with the introduction of the Achievement Certificate, whereby we were categorised as advanced, intermediate or basic level—not a discriminatory label in sight!

The wonderful annual musicals *Oliver!*, *The White Horse Inn*, *The Pirates of Penzance* and *Fiddler on the Roof* were an added dimension for us. Roy produced all of them. They were another unique opportunity to spend time with our friends.

In our final two years at EG, we moved to the new brick and tile high school in South Kal. We actually had air conditioning and a gymnasium, and we even had a grassed oval, just to name a few of the “luxuries”. We had Literature with Miss Prime, History with Mr Terry and Maths with Mr Martin, and Roy Browning was our deputy principal. I might say that the supervising staff who took us to Country Week in year 12 probably pushed the boundaries of responsible “pastoral care” somewhat when they took us to Dirty Dicks for our special night out.

Our school ball was at Kalgoorlie Town Hall, and the band was Bryan Dennis and the Country Club. Dennis used the fame from his appearance at the 1976 leavers’ ball by evolving into Kevin Bloody Wilson. So if you ever wonder where Susan and I or any of our peers inherited our occasional “choice” language, blame him!

We all completed our graduating exams—the tertiary admissions exam—at the Kalgoorlie Civic Centre in November 1976. Our “afters” was a party at the Pascoe’s and then we all drove to the Viewway Drive-in to watch *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. We were all there, of course—all of the North Kalgoorlie crew plus the interlopers: Rhonda Bassett, our head girl; Graeme Pascoe, our head boy; Linley Liddicoat; Deb Fletcher; Shane Nicholson; Paul Tonkin; Gayle Sheed; Ben Barnes; and dozens of others. Almost without warning, we had completed school and needed to contemplate life beyond compulsory education. A number of our cohort did what was expected and chose to secure jobs in Kal. However, the 1976 leavers were unique in that many more than usual made the conscious and bold decision to move to the big smoke—to uproot and seek new opportunities in Perth. For all of us, the move to Perth was met with a combination of both excitement and trepidation—it was the end of certainty. Having said that, we were all delighted when the postman arrived in mid-January 1977 with our TAE results and pretty much unanimously informed us that the world was our oyster—we had been accepted into our preferred courses of study.

Susan and I both chose further study at the University of Western Australia. We both boarded at St Columba Residential College, along with our good friend Rhonda Bassett, and our collective bond grew stronger. It was an extraordinary period in our lives. Tertiary study provided new opportunities to learn, grow and achieve. In addition, the tertiary lifestyle provided a plethora of new friendship bonds with Sandy Keay, Marian Young, Mirium Angus, Phil Grant, Glenn Patterson, Miles Dracup, Paul Fitzpatrick, Neil Jilley and many more. Having said that, we also had the undeniable security of our Kal group, which was spread widely throughout numerous residential colleges at UWA and the Western Australian Institute of Technology, which is now Curtin University. Peta Linto was pretty much a de facto St Columbian! Uni and college life were exceptional.

We had Rotto, Greasies, Steves, dinner dances, flagons and the tavern. On Friday nights, we slept at the front of the Entertainment Centre to secure tickets for front-row seats to Elton John, Billy Joel, Fleetwood Mac or any of the plethora of other artists who swamped Perth in the 70s, which was when artists wrote good music. We caught the 72 bus to Cottesloe Beach or into the city. We had the Cinecentre and, of course, we had a much more elevated expectation with study. There were no gap years and no part-time units. The expectation was quite precise. The window known as “opportunity” was restricted to a degree at best, honours at most, and then it was time to get a job. So as the 70s appeared to rush to an unwanted end, the circle to our preparation for employment and adulthood was almost complete. Those years were just so special; Whitlam and Fraser were our Prime Ministers; *Rumours* and *Hotel California* were our albums; and *The Deer Hunter* and *Rocky* were our movies. We lived in the 70s with the Skyhooks—the 70s were our decade. They were good days, they were uncomplicated days, and they were days when “consequences” was nothing more than a noun because we had our family and we had our friends. I simply cannot imagine those wonderful years without Susan. We all experienced our childhood and adolescence with her and she most definitely added value to our lives.

We all have our own unique and treasured memories of our lives with Susan, each one combined to create a wonderful tapestry in the life of her magnificent and yet complex world. Personally, I am devastated about the loss of my extraordinary friend. Susan has been an essential component of my entire life. Over the past fortnight as I have logged on and opened my personal file and clicked on “Susan Browning Eulogy”, I have found myself consumed with grief. I am in absolutely no doubt that I am not alone with these emotions. The halcyon days of Kalgoorlie will forever elicit treasured memories of my friendship with Susan, as will the decades that succeeded those times. I particularly remember one especially memorable occasion. It was Friday, 11 March 1977. We had just commenced the next chapter of our post-Kalgoorlie lives. It was our second week at UWA and St Columba. Life was good, life was exciting, life was deliciously unpredictable. My parents took Susan and me to our first ever concert. They picked us up from St Columba and we had dinner at Uncle Dominic’s in Northbridge. We then went to the Entertainment Centre to watch ABBA—an extraordinary experience in all respects. My folks then dropped us back at St Columba and we literally sprinted to the uni tavern, where we got absolutely smashed—it was the best night ever.

Suffice to say, almost without warning, those colourful uni days passed and we were swept into the big wide world in which we had to make decisions about our destiny. While our lives diverted for the decades to come, we never lost touch, and on each and every occasion that we subsequently caught up, it was as though we had never been away.

After Susan returned from Tasmania to retire following a distinguished career with the ABC in Perth and Hobart, Susan, Cally and I made the conscious decision to resurrect the good old days. Of course, we had aged considerably; however, our spirits remained intact. We were much more mature and refined, thus we established our “pasta and piss” nights. I absolutely adored those nights, not purely because they gave us an opportunity to reflect and reminisce of days gone by, particularly the Kal and uni days, and our current escapades, and not because they gave us an opportunity to engage in hours of meaningful political debate, with Cally on the far left, me on the centre right and Susan always at her brilliant pragmatic and compassionate best. More importantly, they provided each of us with an opportunity to reveal our true souls with trusted friends—not merely our experiences, but also our vulnerabilities. I am very grateful to Susan that she genuinely used those occasions to make me feel so valued as a friend. After literally decades of friendship, she felt completely and absolutely secure in the knowledge that we could talk about everything, including her constant struggles. We would laugh, cry, hug and talk for hours. Those times were so very special. I am really going to miss those nights, mate.

I have no doubt that my story will be replicated by hundreds, those who are here today and many beyond, with stories of humour, gratitude and admiration. In isolation, they will not purely be stories of what Susan means to each and every one of us. They will represent a truly remarkable woman. They will construct a rich tapestry of everything that Susan represented. Although I wish in vain that Susan acknowledged these strengths, it does not and should not diminish who she was—the sincere Susan, the intelligent Susan, the articulate Susan, the mischievous Susan, the compassionate Susan and so much more.

Susan fought and she fought and she fought until she could fight no more, and now she is at peace. As difficult and heart-wrenching as it is for us to accept, she really is at peace. We are all feeling melancholy today, so very sad that our Susan has gone and yet so very grateful to have had such a wonderful woman in our lives. From the bottom of my heart, personally and on behalf of all your family and friends, particularly from those from the early years of your life, Susan, you were absolutely magnificent, mate. Thank you.

CITIPLACE CHILDCARE CENTRE

Statement

HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan) [10.05 pm]: I rise this evening to discuss another council, so it must be the night of councils. On Tuesday, 22 March, there was an agenda briefing session at the City of Perth, which I am very happy to say the councillors do attend. It was attended by the mayor, Basil Zempilas, who we all know is a very famous TV and radio personality; the deputy mayor, Di Bain, who members will be surprised to know is a professional marketing and communications expert; and also—apologies for any mispronunciation of names—Sandy Anghie; Catherine Lezer; Rebecca Gordon; Clyde Bevan; Brent Fleeton; Liam Gobbert; and Dr Viktor Ko. In fact, everybody was there, which I have to say is very commendable. At that meeting, at 5.43 pm, they turned the recordings off and went into an in-confidence meeting. They had a discussion on point 18.2 of the agenda, “Service Review”. We do not know what it was because it was in confidence. A week later, on 29 March, the council met again, and we are assuming—the minutes are not available; it was in confidence—that the discussion on agenda point 18.2 was a discussion about closing the Citiplace Childcare Centre. I am not sure whether members in the chamber know where the Citiplace Childcare Centre is; I would be surprised if they did, because unless they travel by train into the City of Perth, they would not know it was there. It is actually located at the train station. It is very hard to find because there are no signs. If someone drives past it, they cannot see it is there. In fact, the first time I visited it, I was very surprised by where it is. I was surprised where the children were. The children love standing and watching the traffic and everything going about, but drivers cannot see them.

That centre has been there since 1989. At the council meeting on 29 March, the City of Perth decided that it is going to close the centre at the end of September this year and hand that facility over to a for-profit centre. I am a wee bit confused here, because that centre was opened as a community-based centre, and, if I believe right, it was under some federal grant for occasional care centres. Basically, it was gifted to the City of Perth. My understanding is that the City of Perth is going to close it and give it to a for-profit centre. Understandably, the parents are absolutely devastated. This is a community-based centre that the City of Perth says is running at a deficit of half a million dollars, which is pretty scary. I point out that during the COVID pandemic, this centre was not eligible for JobKeeper payments because the staff were employed by the City of Perth, so that had a huge detrimental effect on it. I have also been informed—I have not verified this; I will be very clear—that the City of Perth actually took over \$600 000 a year from the centre for corporate services. Are members telling me that the City of Perth would take \$600 000 from a centre that is half a million in the red? I do not quite know about that. The City of Perth also referred to the fact that there are only 53 children at the centre out of 71 available places. That is a 75 per cent occupancy.

I point out that the centre is the cheapest in the 6000 postcode. There are eight centres in the 6000 postcode, and of those there are 597 places available. The mayor mentioned in his ABC radio interview last week a current report,

which he did not name, but I am again assuming it is the Mitchell Institute report from Victoria University, *Childcare deserts & oases: how accessible is childcare in Australia?* The City of Perth is one of the areas in Perth that, according to population, has enough spaces. However, the City of Perth's long-term financial plan actually states that the city is home to 32 000 residents and has 14 000 businesses, but has a workplace of 134 000 people. I make the assumption that the families attending these centres do not actually live predominantly in the City of Perth. They would be workers coming in from outside Perth. So where is a really good place to have a childcare centre? Would it not be really good to have a place in a train station, where parents can get the train in, drop their children off, go to work, and remember to pick them up again before they get on the train again and go home—because I am sure it happens? Would that not make sense? Would that not make a business so valuable that on the day of the announcement of its closure, three for-profit services contact the City of Perth interested in taking over the licence when it closes?

I wonder why they would make that decision. I wonder why they would spend less than 10 minutes discussing whether they should close a centre that they have never actually visited. I wonder why they would close a centre that they do not market, that does not have a website and that has significantly lower fees than any other service in the CBD; we are talking potentially hundreds of dollars per week. Did they not look at any of that before they made the decision to close? How about a centre that, in the city's long-term financial plan, has one mention on page 22? Does that say to us that this is a centre that the city had any prospect of looking at or thinking about or planning for its future? It does not say that to me.

To me this sounds like a bunch of bean counters said, “Oh, we can save some money. We'll just pack that off to the for-profit sector.” The for-profit sector makes billions of dollars out of Australian taxpayers. If I lived in the City of Perth, I would be horrified that my city council was going to do this. We have a sector that is profiteering off the backs of children, yet we have a council that wants to close a centre that has staff who have been there for a very long time. The staff there will all be entitled to very long redundancies, by the way—up to 52 weeks plus notice, so that is a significant amount of money for the City of Perth.

When we are talking about children, the most important people in a child's world are their educators and caregivers. For a centre to have such consistent staffing over a very long period of time in a sector that cannot attract and keep staff tells us about the quality of that centre. It is a centre that, even through COVID and at a time when the City of Perth itself is offering grants to businesses to come back to the city centre because a lot of people are working from home, it has 75 per cent occupancy at a centre that it does not advertise on the market. Wow! Just imagine what this place could be like if the city actually put a bit of effort and time into it: market it, look at a business plan and actually look at solutions, while the people in Perth can continue to keep their centre, instead of just doing a quick and easy fix by packing it off to some profit-making conglomerate that will end up reducing wages, reducing the number of staff and reducing the overall quality.

I say: shame on you, City of Perth. Shame on you, Basil Zempilas. I hope you come out of your lovely big ivory tower and go down and meet with the parents of the City of Perth and actually discuss the future for these children. Thank you.

The PRESIDENT: During his contribution, Hon Kyle McGinn sought to table two documents: Culture Survey 2021 and a document entitled “Departure of John Walker, City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder”. Those two documents are tabled.

[See papers [1203](#) and [1204](#).]

NIGEL PRATT

Statement

HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan) [10.15 pm]: Tonight I wanted to make a few comments about our former Clerk, Nigel Pratt. As members would know, last Thursday, 31 March was Nigel's final day of employment working for this chamber. We know that he was here for an extended period of time. I wanted to talk a little about his history here. Prior to commencing his employment with the Legislative Council in March 1999, he worked as a lawyer in private practice for about a decade. When he commenced employment here, he started as an advisory officer in the Legislative Council committee office. He worked primarily on the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, which, as we know, is one of the busiest committees in this Parliament, even today. One of the many significant inquiries he was involved in was the inquiry into drug testing under the harness racing rules and the common law damages claims under the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Amendment Regulations (No. 11) 1999. Nigel became the Clerk Assistant (House) in 2002. In that role, he helped to organise the historic Kalgoorlie regional sitting of the Legislative Council in September 2004. I think there are only two of us still in the chamber who actually participated in that very eventful sitting.

Nigel resigned from the Legislative Council in July 2007 and moved to the greener shores of Tasmania to become the Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Council in that Parliament. He subsequently returned to Western Australia and was appointed Clerk of the Legislative Council, and Clerk of the Parliament, from February 2014. Although many of his colleagues were still here—most of them had not left—unfortunately for Nigel, there had been a few changes.

One of those was a very significant change with a new set of standing orders that had been introduced in 2012, so he had to get his head around those. In 2016, Nigel provided significant advice to President House on the power to recall the Legislative Council during an adjournment and to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges regarding contempts committed by public servants who had knowingly misled the Legislative Council in answers they had drafted for ministers in response to parliamentary questions. As members would be aware, between 2019 and 2021, Nigel was involved as a party in Supreme Court proceedings that resulted in one of the most significant and clearest judicial statements on the nature of parliamentary privilege.

I have always regarded Nigel as a very experienced Clerk and a very good manager of his staff. He had integrity, he was meticulous, calm, always professional, played a straight bat in his dealings with MPs, was very knowledgeable on procedure and standing orders and he worked as part of a very good team in this place, backed up by his Deputy Clerk, Paul Grant. During my time as Presiding Officer, I know he was very focused on having a diverse team functioning in the Legislative Council. He was very particular about employing staff from a wide range of backgrounds. That gave us the benefit of that diversity of experience. He also moved staff around a lot, so they were upskilled in a variety of tasks and roles, not just in this chamber but certainly over in the committee office. He was very keen to ensure that succession plans were in place for the future. Part of that was making sure that people who worked here had an understanding of each of the roles that people played throughout this chamber. I think that is very important. I think that we are very fortunate. I acknowledge and congratulate Sam Hastings on his recent appointment as the Clerk of the Legislative Council. I do not know whether Sam will continue the very long tradition of ukulele playing at the staff Christmas party. I am sure the staff will miss that, but that is a little side to Nigel that I think people will not be aware of.

The other thing that always impressed me about with him was that he had his staff's back, not only when they were here, but he would go out of his way to look out for and help people who had left and were going through difficult times. I saw him angry on only a couple of occasions when his staff had not been treated appropriately by a couple of members and he sought to rectify that. That was the only time I saw him lose it, so to speak.

It was also very evident that he was held in high regard and respected by members of Parliament and Clerks from across New Zealand and Australia. I always observed that whenever I went to a Presiding Officers conference or other meetings. We were very fortunate to have an individual of his mark.

Managing the Legislative Council and the Parliament is not an easy task. Managing staff and members, and oversighting the management of the buildings and its precinct have their challenges. Of course, that was exacerbated during the very difficult early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when he was trying to rejig how we sat in this place and how staff would operate and during the introduction of working from home, which was a significant change. I must say I think that he managed it quite well.

One thing that I think he is probably disappointed about and that he put a lot of effort into, along with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and Rob Hunter, is providing assistance in drafting a parliamentary precincts bill, which unfortunately had not been introduced to the house by the time that had he left. Hopefully in the future, that will be brought in, but that would have been very significant legislation and would have afforded the Parliament oversight of its own precinct, particularly in terms of security issues.

Nigel left this place a lot earlier than he would have anticipated, partially due to health issues. I certainly wish him a good recovery. It has been a very difficult period over the last couple of years for him on a range of levels.

Members, I had the very good fortune to work with him as a new member of the Legislative Council when I came in in 2001 on committees, as a deputy chair, as a member in opposition, and as President. I am very grateful to have had his sage advice, his very good humour, his support, his guidance and his friendship.

I wish Nigel and Penny and the family well in their next chapter. I thank him for his service and his significant contribution to the Legislative Council over a period of more than 20 years.

TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (IDENTITY MATCHING SERVICES) BILL 2021

Returned

Bill returned from the Assembly without amendment.

LEGAL PROFESSION UNIFORM LAW APPLICATION BILL 2021

Assembly's Message

Message from the Assembly received and read notifying that it had agreed to the amendments made by the Council.

House adjourned at 10.25 pm
