

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [5.10 pm]: Just to recap on where I left off before the debate was interrupted for question time, I had been comparing the education system that our government inherited with the education system that the current government inherited. I was talking in particular about the massive teacher shortage that existed from 2006 to 2008 and the appalling strategies that were used by the then government to try to counter that teacher shortage. Members may remember that the former government tried an advertising campaign on the east coast. It tried to bring in retired teachers. It tried to employ teachers who had not yet graduated. What the government should have done is pay teachers what they rightly deserved to be paid so that their pay rate was the equivalent of teachers in the rest of the nation. At that time, teachers in Western Australia were the lowest paid in the nation. It is no wonder the then Minister for Education and now Premier wondered why he was not able to put a teacher in front of every classroom in this state. That is a fundamental responsibility of every government.

The then Minister for Education decided to conduct a review—the then government was good at reviews—to work out what the problem was. Frankly, any idiot could have worked out what the problem was. The problem was that teachers had to be given decent pay and conditions. This is from the Labor Party, which purportedly is the party of the workers. The then Minister for Education asked Professor Lance Twomey to do a review and write a report. The Twomey report was terrific. I have a great deal of respect for Professor Twomey. He travelled across the state and spoke to everyone. He spoke to me as shadow Minister for Education and we went through a few things. I had regular meetings with the unions, the Western Australian Secondary Principals' Association, the Western Australian Primary Principals' Association, and the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, which is the peak parent body. The unambiguous and consistent message was that we needed to pay teachers more and treat them with respect. Everyone knew what the Twomey report would bring out. However, the then Minister for Education flatly refused to release that report. I asked endless questions in Parliament about the release of that report. The media put relentless pressure on the then Minister for Education to release that report. I FOI-ed the report. *The West Australian* FOI-ed the report. The then Minister for Education and now Premier refused to release that report. I do not know why. Everyone knew what that report would say. The then Minister for Education tried to get teachers from Ireland and New Zealand. He tried to bring retired teachers back into the system. That did not work. All he needed to do was ensure that teachers were paid adequately. He was finally dragged kicking and screaming into releasing the Twomey report. Of course that report showed us what we already knew.

I want to refer to a very succinct appraisal that appeared in *The West Australian* of 19 June 2008. The article is headed “State uses cold showers to take heat off report”. It states —

Once again, the State Government has shown its penchant for spin and its disdain towards accountability and Freedom of Information laws.

For seven months, Education Minister Mark McGowan has refused to release the Twomey report, which cost taxpayers nearly \$480,000 and investigated how to overcome the critical shortage of teachers in WA.

There are few reports which could be more important to fast track through the red tape. We are talking about the education of our children.

But the Government has fought against its release. When faced with an FOI request for the document in February, it used its standard excuse of Cabinet confidentiality to prevent disclosure.

Today, it's clear why the spin doctors urged secrecy. The report paints a bleak picture of how the Government has handled the teaching crisis.

It found there had been a lack of long-term workforce planning, teacher and TAFE lecturer salary levels were below the national average and the pay structure required a major overhaul. It warned that the situation would worsen unless drastic action was taken.

So what has changed that has finally prompted the release of the report? Mr McGowan said yesterday it was an act of good faith after the WA Industrial Relations Commission this week banned strike action by teachers in their very bitter pay dispute.

But this has happened before. A February WAIRC order against striking failed to produce any “act of good faith” from the Government. The difference now is a gas crisis dominating the news and a Government spin machine in full flight, operating on the presumption that the prospect of cold showers and no heating will keep the Twomey report off the front page.

That was spot-on. It was a disaster. The state ran out of gas and electricity. We had no teachers. However, the government had a great set of books that it could go into the election with. That was an absolute disgrace.

We can compare that with our track record in government. We put a teacher in front of every classroom every year we were in office. I suggest to members opposite that that might have had something to do with the fact that we went into that election with a \$120 million commitment to increase teacher pay rates. Teacher pay rates went up by 18 per cent over that enterprise bargaining period. Teachers got the pay rate to which they were entitled and which they rightly deserved. During our first term in government, our teachers went from being the lowest paid in the nation to the highest paid in the nation, and our teacher graduates went from being the lowest paid in the nation to the highest paid in the nation. Surprise, surprise, we put a teacher in front of every classroom. Did we spend too much money? Is that the reason for the rhetoric from members opposite that we were spending like drunken sailors? Did our government spend too much on education? Is it terrible that we put a teacher in front of every classroom? Of course it is not. We need to get some perspective from members opposite. That is the reality of the situation. Members opposite messed up education in every respect.

Another issue at that time was the Western Australian College of Teaching. That was an unmitigated disaster. It had been totally mismanaged by the former Labor government. The Labor government had determined that every teacher in Western Australia had to be registered by WACOT. It was an administrative nightmare. The standards were appallingly mismanaged. It caused massive dissent within the teaching fraternity. There are dozens of articles about WACOT and I could go on forever about it, but I will read just one article. The article is dated 28 September 2007 and is headed “Teachers face mass sackings over fees”. The article states —

The Education Department has warned it will sack hundreds of teachers for failing to pay compulsory registration fees in a bitter standoff that threatens to exacerbate WA’s already substantial teacher shortage.

In a letter to State school principals this week, the department urged them to draw up contingency plans to cope with the staff shortages that may result from its decision to oust those who refuse to pay the annual \$70 fee by October 26.

The impasse prompted the head of the secondary principals association, Alison Woodman, to warn that schools may have to close because of a lack of teachers while teachers’ union chief Mike Keely said some programs may have to be cut.

The fee was originally due by April 30 but several thousand teachers refused to pay until the registration body, known as the WA College of Teaching, fulfilled its obligation to hold elections to allow teachers to appoint representatives to the board.

The elections were meant to have been held last November but the process was abandoned midstream with the college citing legal complications. Since then, it has continued to demand teachers pay the fee or face the sack but thousands of teachers have refused to hand over their money until the election date is set.

WACOT said yesterday its board would meet on October 26 to draw up a list of teachers to be deregistered for failing to pay, making it illegal for them to teach in a State or a private school.

Nearly 3000 teachers from State and private schools have not paid.

In its letter to principals, a copy of which was obtained by *The West Australian*, the department warned it had no choice but to sack teachers who failed to pay by October 26.

“If teachers fail to comply with this requirement, the department will have no alternative but to comply with the legislation and terminate the contracts of employment of unregistered teachers on the basis that they have repudiated their employment contract,” the letter said. It is important for schools and districts to consider contingency plans where a teacher may be deregistered.

Principals were instructed to tell the department how many unregistered teachers they had and how they planned to deal with the expected shortages.

Acting director-general of Schools Keith Newton refused to say how schools could deal with an exacerbated teacher shortage.

What an absolute public relations nightmare! Hundreds schools were already without teachers, then the government was threatening to sack 3 000, all because of an administrative nightmare it created. We replaced that with the Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia—a highly professional and competent group that gained, retains and maintains the respect of the teaching fraternity throughout Western Australia. Again, a classic example of them versus us.

Let us look at some other areas. Regarding crowding, over the past four years, we have been told relentlessly that our schools were overcrowded, that we had far too many kids in our classrooms and that it was a disservice to their

education or pedagogy in an overall sense. Let me read from an article in *The West Australian* of 19 May 2008 titled “Crowding in classes ignored: teachers”. The article states —

The Department of Education and Training had failed to honour a commitment made nearly two months ago to tell all schools to reduce overcrowded classes, the teachers’ union claimed yesterday.

Figures revealed in negotiations over pay and conditions and leaked to *The West Australian* show that more than 1000 classes across 320 State schools had more students last year than the maximum allowed under the department’s guidelines.

State School Teachers Union president Anne Gisborne said she believed department officials were shocked at the extent of the overcrowding when the evidence first emerged in confidential pay talks seven weeks ago.

The department had indicated to the union that it would be putting out an instruction on the matter.

Ms Gisborne said she understood the directive to all schools would advise them to focus on reducing class sizes. “And we’re still waiting for the instruction,” she said.

Education Minister Mark McGowan and the department refused to comment yesterday on whether they had backed away from the commitment.

When we talk about overcrowded classrooms, let us once again remember that during the time we were in government we always—always—met the enterprise bargaining agreement requirements. That was an agreement with the union. We are talking here about a minimum of 1 000 classrooms, according to the union, in which the schools were not agreeing to the EBA requirements. Again, them versus us, but they had a wonderful set of books.

This pearler is about school repairs. Over the last eight years, we constantly heard that our schools were falling down, despite us spending far more than any of our predecessors on the building and maintenance of schools. We constantly heard members opposite saying that we were not doing a good job on infrastructure. There was to be another opportunity with the partial sale of Western Power to do an even better job. There are 70 schools, particularly the terrible 1970s things with the flat roofs and the tiny design and technology rooms and substandard gymnasiums—I do not know what happened there; the architects lost the plot in the 1970s—that are in desperate need of repair. We were going to do them en masse with \$560 million allocated for 70 schools to be upgraded. All the physical education departments and gymnasiums were to be upgraded, the performing arts centres were to be developed, all the design and technology rooms were to be upgraded, as well as the science laboratories upgraded—an opportunity lost.

Let us again look at the past for a dose of reality. This article appeared on 16 September 2007 in *The Sunday Times*, “Schools beg for repairs”. The article reads —

CASH-STRAPPED WA schools have had to plead with the Federal Government to pay for “basics” such as toilet blocks.

Documents obtained by *The Sunday Times* reveal one community turned to the Commonwealth after years of desperately waiting for fences to be built high enough to stop intruders using their school as a drug shooting gallery, toilet and campsite.

Since 2005, 758 of WA’s 771 public schools had received \$84 million between them from the Federal Investing in Our Schools program. Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop said her department has to step in with the money because state governments were neglecting schools. Boulder Primary School Parents and Citizens Association secretary Kate Blond said the school fence was finally erected three months ago with federal funds, after more than seven years of waiting. The school’s submission said that for many years the grounds had been used by fringe-dwellers as a camp site, to take drugs and as a toilet.

Ms Blond said finding used syringes, alcohol bottles, condoms and broken glass in sandpits was previously a regular occurrence. Intruders also lit fires. “We tried on numerous occasions to apply to local government and (the) State Government, and also the Federal Government,” she said. “But we were always told we weren’t a priority.”

A successful submission by East Fremantle’s Richmond Primary School said toilets for students and staff were “worn . . . doors, walls, tiles are chipped, flaking and cracked.”

Richmond Primary School Parents and Citizens Association president Richard Hicks said: “We approached the (WA) Education Department last year and they said they could help us, but whether that was next year or eight years’ time, who knows?”

“It’s disappointing that you’ve got to go through hoops to get something as basic as toilet facilities.”

Morley's Hampton Park Primary School also asked for federal funds, complaining that about half the student furniture in classrooms was aged and "close to being unsafe", dating from the mid-'70s.

A successful submission by Latham Primary School—310km northeast of Perth—said there had been no student resource centre-library and "all books and resources are currently stored between a tin shed, three storage rooms and the classrooms".

Ms Bishop said the program originally intended to provide additional items such as computers, library resources and sports equipment.

But it became apparent that state schools needed funds for basic maintenance and repairs and infrastructure that "hadn't been adequately maintained for decades in some cases".

Perspective is a magnificent thing. It is very easy to sit up there and flippantly pass the comments and criticisms we heard, particularly for the last four years, on how bad our schools were, but the reality is that the comments and criticisms were wrong.

We spent \$3.1 billion on public school infrastructure between 2008–09 and 2015–16. There were 46 new schools and 15 replacement schools between 2009 and 2017. In addition, over the period when we apparently took \$200 million out of our schools, we put in an additional \$13 million for a classroom refreshment program. That was to assist with external painting, classroom refreshment, food studio upgrades, toilet upgrades, resurfacing playgrounds, and dust extraction in design and technology rooms. In 2015, we put an additional \$85 million into maintenance and technology funding. There was \$33.8 million for school maintenance on new roofs, paint, carpets and courts; \$32.7 million for investment in technology in schools; and \$20 million for a primary school computer device program. In January 2016, we added another \$15.7 million in the high-priority maintenance program, when we invested in remediation and replacement of classroom ceilings, repairs to paving, the resealing of bitumen play areas and replacement of cable pits and millboard containing asbestos.

We poured hundreds upon hundreds upon millions of dollars into our schools. One member opposite who agreed with that was Hon Sally Talbot. This is her comment from 25 June 2014 —

I want to add to the many, many stories that members on this side of the house have told about the cuts to education by relaying a personal story that was told to me just a couple of weeks ago in the Bunbury area. It is a story about a very experienced primary school teacher who has been teaching for the last couple of years in a demountable classroom. We have recently had some discussion in this place about the use of demountables. Although it is reassuring to hear that some of them are air-conditioned and some have quite good facilities, I think the consensus among everyone in this Parliament is that demountables are not an ideal teaching environment for children of any age in the state system.

I hope the education minister is listening to this, because they will absolutely always be a part of our education system. It continues —

She told me something the other day that quite shocked me. The physical state of this demountable building was so poor that she and her husband actually bought paint and paintbrushes and went in and painted the demountable classroom one weekend recently. If we heard stories about charity work being done by affluent Western Australians taking their brushes and paints, going to Third World countries and painting substandard classrooms, we would be very proud of those people. It is happening right here in Western Australia! It is happening in a community where a large proportion of workers are doing fly in, fly out work on the mines in Western Australia and generating the wealth that is filling the coffers of this government that is constantly crying poor. The classrooms that their children are being educated in are being painted by their teachers and their teachers' husbands, using their own money in their own time! For this government to claim that it is using the revenue raised in measures such as these taxes to put towards health and education services is just a disgrace.

I remind members, and I have mentioned this on a number of occasions, that in 2008 there were 1 800 demountable classrooms in our schools. Schools always need demountables because of the fluctuation in student populations. In 2016, the last full calendar year that we had in government, there were 1 833. Yes, there was an increase of 33 demountables, but there were an additional 13 000 students. Can I tell members that there were actually fewer demountables than there were when we were in government. That was nonsense! It came with that mantra. They obviously had their talking points in opposition as they do in government. I have a pearler here. I want members to listen up for this one. Hon Sally Talbot got it wrong.

Hon Simon O'Brien: No?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Members will not believe this one. She said this on Wednesday, 13 September 2017 about cash-strapped schools —

So much royalties for regions money was going into schools that I saw principals with their heads in their hands saying, “We’re not sure how we’re going to spend all this money. We didn’t know that we were going to get all this.” I have seen it. I am not going to name the school. I promise honourable members that that is literally what I have seen.

It was wrong! In fact, principals did not have to go out and paint their own classrooms; they had too much money. You have got to be joking! That would have to go down as the greatest clanger of all time! I am sorry that Hon Sally Talbot is on urgent parliamentary business, because I have got to say that that is a definite own goal. Imagine a principal saying, “Look, our funding for next year has come in—too much money! What are we going to do with it? Don’t worry. I’ll write out a cheque and give it back to the department.” That is exactly what she said.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: They are word for word, mate! It is in *Hansard*. Check *Hansard*. That is exactly what she said. You have got to be joking!

To conclude on that aspect, schools were cash-strapped, apparently. This is a good one as well, because the education minister who refused to give teachers a salary increase, who had massive teacher shortages and who had the curriculum in a mess, found \$600 000. Does anyone know why he needed \$600 000—because “everyone has to do their bit”, do they not? That was one of their speaking points: everyone has got to do their bit. This is before, of course, and we have to assume that they had speaking points then. Mark McGowan did it to renovate his office. “Minister counts refit cost” was the headline on 29 June 2008. I got a lot of the mileage out of this one. It states —

WHILE teachers battle the Carpenter Government for better pay, Education Minister Mark McGowan has spent \$666,000 of taxpayers’ cash refitting his luxurious St Georges Tce offices.

Opposition education spokesman Peter Collier said Mr McGowan should feel ashamed to have spent so much money on himself then deprive teachers of well-deserved pay rises during a teacher shortage.

The WA State School Teachers Union president Anne Gisborne said Mr McGowan’s priority should be to fix the “distressed system” in his portfolio with appropriate conditions and pay for teachers, not his offices.

Are we all doing our bit for teachers?

Hon Simon O’Brien interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I think we should do that. He could not afford to pay teachers, but could afford to redo his office to the tune of \$660 000.

I will leave a couple of others there. I think I have more than covered the western suburbs. I will have plenty more to say about that at another stage. But at that time we had a situation in which, as I said, if we compare and contrast—I will briefly do it one more time—in 2008 we had mass teacher shortages, a teacher registration system that was a mess, the curriculum was an unmitigated disaster, and there was complete disillusionment within the education system. Look at what we delivered—a Rolls Royce education system, a teacher in front of every classroom, the highest funded schools in the nation, the highest paid teachers in the nation, a curriculum that is the envy of the nation with the new standards that were put in and our NAPLAN results the most improved of any other jurisdiction. What is the big difference of course? Apparently, they had to have a good set of books. Yes, the former Labor government had a good set of books, apparently, in 2008, but the education system was a mess.

Hon Darren West: Very much so.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Is Hon Darren West quite willing to sacrifice the education system for a good set of books.

Hon DARREN WEST: Not at all.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Is that all wrong then? We did not have hundreds of teachers.

Hon Darren West: I wasn’t in Parliament in 2008.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Right. I will finish on that. Is it any wonder, of course, that the number of public school students declined in our public education system over that period? Another accolade we have is that Western Australia is the only state six years in a row with an increase in public school students. They love the independent public school system and they love the fact that they have been empowered in our public education system. We handed over a magnificent education system.

Just to conclude on education from that perspective, part of an editorial from 4 February 2007 entitled “State to blame for teacher crisis” reads —

The Carpenter government should be ashamed. It likes to boast about—and take credit for—WA’s “V8 economy”, the lowest unemployment in history and budget surpluses.

But there’s no point in all this economic sunshine if schoolchildren are without teachers.

Frankly, the Government can keep its boom economy if it means starving hospitals of funds to hire more nurses and stops the police service from putting more officers on the beat.

WA taxpayers are entitled to expect some benefits when the economy is so strong and the Government is awash with revenue.

The State Government's prime areas of responsibility are health care, education and law and order.

But it is not delivering.

Worst of all, the Government—elected on a promise to put education front and centre of its agenda—has failed miserably to staff schools with teachers.

Education Minister Mark McGowan accepted responsibility for the embarrassment this week, but has been unable to explain what went wrong.

The teachers union warned—in writing—the previous minister, Ljiljana Ravlich, of the looming crisis in November last year.

The letter was ignored and two days before school returned this week the Department of Education revealed that 270 teaching positions had not been filled. What a disgrace.

The Government, rather than admit to a blatant case of failing to plan properly, tried to blame its predicament on the booming economy, claiming high-paid jobs in the mining industry made it difficult to keep teachers. Are we really to believe that the teachers are leaving the education system in droves to work in the mines?

One country high school was reportedly short of 18 teachers. After week one of the school term 160 teacher positions had still not been filled.

The crisis could also be worse than what the Government is telling the public.

The teachers union and TAFE College lecturers claim that apprenticeship courses are being cancelled because there are not enough teachers.

That would be unacceptable at a time when industry is crying out for skilled workers.

Mr McGowan says he has a plan to fix the problem. Unfortunately, it's all a bit late. The Government has not got off to a good start in 2007.

It did not get any better. It just got worse. Let us not forget, going into that election in 2008, they still had not settled the enterprise bargaining agreement. The party of the workers could not look after the people whom they purportedly represent. We have taken heed of all the schools that apparently had these cuts and we will be following it with great interest when schools get their budgets next year.

With that in mind, I would like to move on for a little while to my area of housing. Everyone knows that we need a vibrant, dynamic housing sector. We have had the debate on the ways in which this government tried to stimulate first home buyers through the first home buyer grant initiative. We are still having that debate of course. We moved an amendment to retain the \$5 000 dollars top-up, but the amendment was rejected. I will not reflect on the will of the chamber; I will wear that. Suffice it to say that the Liberal Party will still make every attempt to stimulate the housing market, particularly for first home buyers.

An area that needs some consideration is social housing. I wonder whether the government has given due consideration to social housing, because it is constantly an area of need in our community. We have the highest rate of home ownership of any capital city in the nation. When we talk about housing affordability—both sides of the political spectrum work towards housing affordability—we like to think that everyone can own their own home at some stage. That is good and in a utopian society it possibly could happen; however, it cannot and it does not. It will always be the case that around 20 to 30 per cent of the population will need to rent or will need assistance through social housing.

With that in mind, I quote from a paragraph on page 238 of budget paper No 2, which states —

Affordable housing is still out of reach for many Western Australians on low incomes even though the Western Australian property market has been in a cyclical downswing over the past few years. As at March 2017, the median house price in Perth was \$506,500, with a lower quartile price of \$405,000, and median rents at \$360 per week with lower quartile rents at \$320 per week. The gap between what people can afford and what it costs means that there is an ongoing demand and need for assistance across the housing continuum. This includes sustained demand and need for social housing (including from people who also have health, disability or complex personal circumstances in addition to low incomes), with an overall waiting list of 16,516 and a priority waitlist of 1,590 households as at 30 June 2017.

The government budget papers refer to 335 new public houses, but we do not know what the net increase is, and I am going to flesh that out during the budget estimates hearings. Suffice it to say that that has, to a degree, been acknowledged by the housing minister, Hon Peter Tinley, in an opinion piece printed in *The West Australian* of 29 August 2017. The article states, in part —

Despite the recent decline in housing prices, the number of West Australians who own their home outright has decreased since 2011, while an increasing number of residents have difficulty meeting rental costs.

...

The McGowan Government's centrepiece Metronet policy, spearheaded by Transport Minister Rita Saffioti, seeks to address the conundrum by investing about \$2.5 billion into much-needed upgrades to Perth's urban rail network.

WA needs a range of housing to meet diverse needs. Different products such as apartments, villas and townhouses will give West Australians more choice and improve affordability.

The Government's former housing authority, now a part of the Department of Communities, will have a strong role in activating transport-oriented urban infill developments around new and existing train stations.

In partnership with the private sector, it will use profits generated from private sales to cross-subsidise social and affordable housing.

That is on the record, but there is nothing in the budget papers to identify it. The notion of inclusionary zoning is something the government needs to look at in respect of this issue. I acknowledge that the government was elected with a mandate that includes Metronet, but inclusionary zoning would help to overcome that problem. Of course, there is plenty of enthusiasm for affordable housing, but members on both sides will acknowledge that there will always be people in the community who simply will never own their own home, and we must look after those members of our community. A lot of them, of course, are some of the most marginalised people in our community, including Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, or people who really struggle with substance abuse and dependency, and they deserve a leg-up. There are no details on social housing within the budget papers. As I said, mention is made of the 335 new public homes, but we do not know what that net increase will be.

I have had a number of discussions with the Community Housing Industry Association and it is a very, very good group; Barry Doyle, the chief executive officer, is a very good man. The association has put out a strategy for the Western Australian community housing sector, and it is a very good read. I would suggest that everyone who is interested in this sector, particularly with regard to assisting those who are least able to help themselves and who really need assistance in getting a roof over their head—something we take for granted—read this strategy. Perhaps we can assist them a little further. I seek leave to table that housing sector plan from the Community Housing Industry Association and encourage members, if they are interested in this area, to have a good read.

Leave granted.

[The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

Hon PETER COLLIER: Members will be pleased to know that now that I have started my introductory comments, I will make a few comments on where we are going as a house. I am sure that this will stir the troops a little, but it is inevitable and this is politics.

As I have said before, when it comes down to it, we lost the battle—the war will never stop, but we lost that particular battle—but we will continue. We picked up after a month and got on with the job of being a relentless opposition. With that in mind, what has concerned members on this side of the chamber is the attitude from members opposite that the Labor Party's emphatic win gives them carte blanche for governing without any scrutiny—that it in fact gives them a legitimate right not to worry or be concerned about scrutiny in this place, the Legislative Council. We have seen that in a number of areas and I know it will continue through the debate we are going to have tonight.

Let us have some perspective here; I have mentioned this before. Earlier this year we were trying to establish the President of this house and I had an exchange with the Leader of the House. The *Hansard* on 13 June 2017 states —

Why were members opposite so keen to get someone from this side of the chamber to be President?

Hon Sue Ellery: Why do you think?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I am going to tell the member. The answer is numbers, and 18 always beats 17.

Hon Sue Ellery: That is correct.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Absolutely! Hon Sue Ellery actually admits it. The government was willing to compromise the Presidency for the numbers; is that right?

Hon Sue Ellery: How was it compromised?

Hon PETER COLLIER: The government was willing to forgo the Presidency for the numbers.

This is compelling —

Hon Sue Ellery: Wouldn't it be in everyone's interests, with such a massive majority elected in the Legislative Assembly, to ensure that we could deliver on our election commitments and the policies that we took to the election and ensure that we could pursue our agenda?

So because the Labor Party has, in the Leader of the House's words, a thumping majority, it means that this place becomes a rubberstamp for decisions made in the other place.

Not to be outdone, I draw on a comment made by Hon Darren West, which tended to reinforce that. I know he will enjoy this. The *Hansard* of 5 September 2017 states —

I want to remind members of the former government that the best thing they can do in opposition is get out of the road and let Ben Wyatt, that very skilled economics fellow and barrister, do what he needs to do to repair the budget.

Hon Peter Collier: So, we don't have an opposition?

Hon DARREN WEST: It should get out of the road. If the measures that we introduce are so poor, the public will have a say on them.

So there we go; it is in black and white. We need not bother coming in. Let us get out of the road and go for a holiday. I can go to the Australian Open and let these guys decide what is best for Western Australia. If we had let these guys do what was best for Western Australia, Perth Mod would have been napalmed. If we do what this mob over here potentially wants to do, depending on the outcome tonight, we are really going to impact on the jobs of thousands of Western Australian miners. This is called democracy. Just because the government has a significant majority in the other place, it does not give it the fundamental right to just assume it is going to be able to bulldoze its legislation. That was always on the assumption that the Greens would just roll over and do what the government wanted. As I have stated before, that will not happen. I have no doubt that the Greens will not allow that.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is what Hon Sue Ellery said.

Hon Sue Ellery: Did you watch the estimates in the other place? We need a strong opposition, and we just don't have one. Did you see the estimates in the other place? Did you see it?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Come in, spinner—give me a break! These sorts of comments are not helpful to the Leader of the House.

Hon Sue Ellery: Did you watch them?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes, I did; not entirely though, because I was out in my electorate. As a humble member of the opposition, I meet with members of the disability sector and the housing sector and my constituents. Regardless of anything that the Leader of the House puts on it, her comments indicate that arrogance has already set in. She is assuming that because the government has a majority down there, it should be able to bulldoze legislation through in this place. As I said, you guys have got a few more seats than we had last time.

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes, you do. We had 38 and the government has 41, so a few more seats—that is three. In anyone's language that is a significant —

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes, but the government has got that.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Oh mate! Let me just say, Hon Darren West —

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I said Hon Darren West. I corrected myself straightaway, unlike some members opposite.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon PETER COLLIER: I told members opposite I would stir them up. Hon Darren West should wait; I have not finished yet.

I remind members over there yet again that if they think for one second that the Western Australian public is rusted onto Labor, their arrogance has no bounds—none at all. I remind members opposite that there have been 12 elections in Western Australia since 2001; five state and seven federal. On seven occasions, the Liberal Party has got above 40 per cent of the vote. On two occasions, in 2005 and 2017, the Labor Party got above 40 per cent of the vote. Yes, you guys had a very handsome win—I have congratulated them on that before—but their attitude in this place, some of the comments that they have made, their responses to questions without notice and their attitude to non-government business and the photos et cetera of members on government cheques, wrecks of arrogance. I also remind them that a 5.1 per cent swing in 2021, which is quite modest in the current climate, will see the Labor Party lose 10 seats. I know that members over there are scoffing and rolling their eyes, but those are the facts. Mate, you have got it down pat!

The issue of real concern to me is standards in this place. We have had a couple of instances. This transcends whole areas of the budget and the standards of members opposite. Again, the hypocrisy of members opposite has no bounds whatsoever. I draw members' attention to the exchange between the Leader of the House and Hon Colin Tincknell. He said something to which the Leader of the House objected. She stated in a members' statement on Wednesday, 13 September —

So the suggestion that the Premier has refused to meet you is just not true—just not true!—and when you say something in this house that is just not true, you need to correct that.

I will repeat that because it was said by the Leader of the House, who knows about standards in this chamber. She said —

...when you say something in this house that is just not true, you need to correct that.

That is true. That is a convention of this place; members must do that. When a member does something like that or says something unparliamentary, they have to correct the record. They have to stand up, apologise and move on. We all do that. On Thursday, 24 August 2017, a week or two before, we had a debate about parliamentary standards during non-government business. Hon Michael Mischin said something that offended the Leader of the House. She was offended, which is fine. I did not hear what was said, but I understood that she was offended. Hon Michael Mischin and I had a chat and we collectively agreed that it would be a good move that he apologise to the house. He gave this apology on the same day at 11.29 am, and it reads in part —

I sincerely apologise if any offence has been caused to the Leader of the House or any other member by that comment. I trust that the grotesque nature of the response could not be misunderstood as anything serious. It was nothing more than a rhetorical response to a rather rhetorical, I thought, introduction to the debate by the Leader of the House. I unreservedly apologise for any offence that may have been caused or any misunderstanding that has arisen in that regard. I will be more careful with my comments in future. I had not the slightest thought that it could be taken as anything other than the usual robust debate that takes place in this house.

How could we possibly ask for a more appropriate apology from anyone? Hon Michael Mischin covered all bases; it was an unreserved apology. Not only that, he went behind the Chair and gave the Leader of the House a personal apology, which she accepted. That should have been the end of the matter but it was not and that is what concerns me. At 3.06 pm that day, the Leader of the House went on 6PR to complain about Hon Michael Mischin's actions. Her quotes on the program included, "I found it disconcerting", "I'm not used to men speaking to me like that", "I found that language to be kind of violent". Also, she said that Hon Michael Mischin was ineffectual as shadow Attorney General and that he had been an ineffectual Attorney General. She also said, "I did invite him to apologise", and, "He offered me an unreserved apology."

Hon Sue Ellery: That is exactly what happened.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is. The point I make to the Leader of the House quite sincerely is that if someone apologises to her, surely that should be the end of the matter. Does she not think so?

Hon Sue Ellery: It would depend entirely on the circumstances.

Hon PETER COLLIER: The Leader of the House read the apology. Hon Michael Mischin apologised—what else did you want from him?

Hon Sue Ellery: In those circumstances, I thought what I said publicly was perfectly reasonable.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Why on earth would the Leader of the House find that necessary given the conventions of this place are to apologise —

Hon Sue Ellery: I guess that is a judgement call and my judgement is that what I said was entirely reasonable.

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is quite true. It is a judgement call. I emphatically disagree with the Leader of the House and if she listens to the call-back on that interview, the overwhelming majority of Western Australia, judged by that call-back, agrees with me—that it should have been the end of the matter. What I am saying once again is that we obviously have interesting standards as a result of the change of government. A member can apologise in the house but it means nothing because, “I’m still going to take a piece out of you anyway.” It means absolutely nothing. Apologies do not matter to members opposite but they mean something to us. The standards of this place mean something to us. If a member apologises, it should be the end of the matter.

That brings me to the constant issue that I have had with Hon Alannah MacTiernan. She made a comment in this place—I have raised this on a number occasions—that was factually wrong and inaccurate. I will read her comments, which she made on Wednesday, 16 June 2017 in response to a question I asked about the Aboriginal regional services reform unit. She said —

This is a very important unit that was set up, as members might remember, after the disastrous attempts by the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs to close scores of Aboriginal communities without consultation with those communities. He was offered a bit of money by Mr Abbott, and, given the parlous state of the budget, he wanted to take that money up-front, no strings attached, and he subsequently announced that various communities would be closed down. However, fortunately, the National Party came in on its white horse with the Regional Services Reform Unit, which was operating out of the Department of Regional Development.

That was wrong. I asked the honourable member to retract what she said and I asked for an apology, but she refused. I will take members back to what Hon Sue Ellery stated on Wednesday, 13 September 2017 in response to a comment made by Hon Colin Tincknell —

So the suggestion that the Premier has refused to meet you is just not true—just not true!—and when you say something in this house that is just not true, you need to correct that.

I repeat yet again that Hon Alannah MacTiernan is 100 per cent wrong. I will keep on about this guys; I am sorry but I am going to keep on about this because she is wrong. I do not want an apology. I do not care what she thinks; I really do not. There is complete mutual disrespect between us. That is fine. But I care about and respect this chamber and the Leader of the House is right; if a member says something that is wrong, it is incumbent on them to correct it. As I said, there are three scenarios for this issue. Hon Alannah MacTiernan inadvertently made a wrong comment.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm

Hon PETER COLLIER: I felt an overall sigh around the chamber on this occasion. I will continue my comments.

Hon Darren West: Not at all!

Hon PETER COLLIER: Does the member like it? Good to hear, mate. The truth hurts, does it not?

I will just recap the point I was making prior to the dinner break. We appear to have hypocrisy from members opposite about the standards of this chamber in much the same way as we have seen their hypocrisy regarding this entire budget. Members can come in here and make a comment that is wrong and inaccurate, as the Leader of the House has said, and are chastised for it. Members can come in here and either make an offensive or unparliamentary comment and apologise for it and the apology will mean absolutely nothing so there is no point in apologising, or, a member can just get away with it, which is what we have here. From my perspective, Hon Alannah MacTiernan made comments specifically about me that were 100 per cent wrong. As I said, I am not precious about this because I do not care what she thinks, but I care about the conventions of this place, particularly on this issue. The Leader of the House evidently feels the same way, because she stated it in this house as a direct result of comments made by Hon Colin Tincknell. We cannot have it both ways. As I said, when I raised this issue about Hon Alannah MacTiernan’s comments on a number of occasions, I do not want her apology anymore; that would mean nothing to me. All I want her to do, for the record, is to come in and say that what she said was inaccurate. She must know it is inaccurate. Earlier I referred to three scenarios. The first scenario is that she just made a mistake, which she did in this instance. She could come in, withdraw the comment and it would be all over red rover. The second scenario is that she is completely incompetent. That is an option. The third scenario is that she knew what she was doing. As I have said before, if she knew what she was doing—she has repeated comments of a similar vein in this place—it is a matter of privilege because she would knowingly have made a comment in this chamber that is wrong. Either way, it is absolutely extraordinary that we have a Leader of the House who knows the standards in this regard but is not prepared to do anything about it. She can shake her head all she likes but

what I am saying is entirely accurate. The Leader of the House cannot come in here and chastise another member of this place for saying something that is wrong and expect to get away with it while allowing one on her own team to do it at her beck and call. Having previously been the Leader of the House for over four years, I find the standards of this chamber offensive, quite frankly.

With that in mind, the standard of answers to questions leave a lot to be desired. As I mentioned before, most of the questions answered in here have the standard talking points that are handed to us on a regular basis, so we know what we are going to get. We received an extraordinary answer from the Premier today. I cannot believe the Premier of Western Australia would put that in an answer. Regardless, the government is doing it at the expense of the accuracy of questions without notice. One of the issues I raised that took me the better part of four months to get to the bottom of was about double dipping with government cars. It is not going to bring down the government and it certainly is not going to fill a black hole in the budget, but it is a big issue because obviously member's opposite have the attitude that they do not sweat the small stuff in this instance. To remind members, previously, ministers were given a car but that was replaced by being given an allowance. Ministers of the Crown and Presiding Officers get a ministerial car. The State Administrative Tribunal made a determination in December that it would bring in this allowance. After the election, a number of ministers got both the allowance and the ministerial car. I just asked innocuous questions, to be perfectly honest. I wanted to find out who received both and whether they repaid it, on the assumption that they would repay it. It was like drawing teeth. My first question was asked on Tuesday, 16 May 2017. I asked another one on Wednesday, 17 May 2017, another one on Thursday, 18 May 2017, and then I wrote to the Presiding Officers, based upon a recommendation from the Premier and was shunted from pillar to post. They simply did not want to answer this. The fact of the matter is that it took four months to get an answer to something that could have been answered in 24 hours. Finally, I got a response from the Presiding Officers. I could not get it from the government; I had to get it from the Presiding Officers. The long and short of it is that some ministers double dipped when we have all been asked to do our bit. Do members remember that? That was one of the speaking points. We all have to do our bit.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Unless you're a minister.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Unless they are a minister—that is right. The following ministers have not done their bit: Hon Fran Logan, Hon John Quigley, Hon Bill Johnston, Hon Rita Saffioti, Hon Roger Cook, Hon Peter Tinley, Hon Simone McGurk, Hon Dave Kelly and Hon Sue Ellery. All those members double dipped. They got in excess of \$5 300 each.

Hon Martin Aldridge: Have any of them given it back?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No, they have not repaid that \$5 300. No-one has repaid it. That mob over there is carrying on about how we all have to do our bit and they say to public servants, "You guys are going to get \$1 000 a year for the next four years." It will take public servants four years to get their \$4 000. It took these guys three months to get \$5 300. Are they serious? The government expects the public of Western Australia to take it seriously when it is telling public servants out there—the teachers, nurses and police officers—in voter-land that they are worth \$1 000 a year and these ministers get \$5 331.04 in three months. Everyone has to do their bit, apparently. That is in the speaking points, remember. The total cost is \$48 036.56. My point, yet again, is that the hypocrisy of this mob has no bounds. This will not bring the government down; it will get a bit of ink in a couple of newspapers. Do members know the thing that really bugs me? We had to hear sanctimonious judgemental comments from members opposite about our white limousines and keys that got us to the tenth floor of Dumas House and all this rubbish, as if we abused the privilege. I have said this on numerous occasions and I will say it again: I was dying for someone to FOI my credit card because I never used it. I felt very uncomfortable in a great big Caprice, to be perfectly honest. If I ever get into that situation again of being on \$270 000, with my phone and paper paid et cetera, and I got \$5 000—which I should not have got, quite frankly—I would write out a cheque the next day. I promise members that. I would pay that money back the very next day.

Hon Darren West: You still use cheques, do you?

Hon PETER COLLIER: You can laugh about it, mate, but it is not funny.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members! That is enough interjection. Leader of the Opposition, please continue your remarks.

Hon PETER COLLIER: This is my point: whenever I bring these issues up, we get this patronising rolling of the eyes and these flippant comments. Guys, these are big issues—they really are—just like it was a huge issue when the Premier, when he was the Minister for Education and Training, spent \$600 000 upgrading his office when he could not pay teachers. It was a huge issue because it got out into the community. I say to each of those ministers, for goodness sake, if they do not want to do it because I am giving them a hard time about it, do it for

the people out in voter land that the government keeps carrying on about, saying that we all have to do our little bit. They should write out a cheque or direct deposit the \$5 300. It is an absolute disgrace.

Hon Tjorn Sibma: They will not have to use the Local Projects, Local Jobs slush fund either!

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is right.

Just to finish this off, I asked another question about this. I asked whether any ministers who are using their own vehicles had used the government fleet cars. Do members understand what I mean? They are not going to use their little —

Hon Simon O'Brien: Fiat.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes, their little Fiat, or whatever it might be—they might use a government fleet car. I only asked this a couple of weeks ago. I thought: who cares? I will just give it a go. I got an answer! Do members know what that means? The government can actually answer! It took four months to get answers to all these questions I had asked and speeches I had made. I asked this question, and four hours later I got a response. At this stage, the only one is Rita Saffioti. She used a fleet car on 8 September. I will keep on asking this question. I will tell you what, you guys, if you are getting an allowance, you better not use fleet cars because I am going to keep on asking this question. The point is that I knew the government could answer the question. Everyone knew that the government could answer the question, but it kept putting me off. It kept sending me from pillar to post and I kept saying that it was not going to get rid of me. Over there, they are scoffing and saying, “Who cares? It’s no big deal.” It was a big deal, guys, and it is testament to that ingrained arrogance that is already there.

I will bring my comments to a conclusion, members will be pleased to hear, with two final points about the commission of inquiry—on this side we call it the witch-hunt—and the service priority review. The witch-hunt is the one in which the government is looking at some of our projects on which the money was purportedly lost. I asked a question about how much it was costing and how many, dare I say it, public servants are part of this witch-hunt. The total expenditure on consultants—we have had a very lengthy explanation about why this response was wrong—was \$127 609, but the response today shows that the total correct answer was \$64 240 thus far on the witch-hunt. I want members to listen to this because it shows just how sneaky this government is. That amount of money has been spent, but I also asked what the staffing profile was for the commission of inquiry. How many do members reckon there are? It is a matter of interest. Members have to put up their hands. It is 17.4 —

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Do not hint!

Hon PETER COLLIER: Sorry, Mr Acting President. Deep down, I will always be a chalkie.

There are 17.4 full-time equivalent employees—all of whom are public servants. In addition to that \$64 000, I asked for the levels of these public servants and where they came from. The total wage of these officers for 12 months, given their levels—we went right through the levels—is \$2 180 533. At this stage they have been used for 4.5 months—it has not finished—and the total is \$817 700. The cost of this witch-hunt is not \$64 000; it is \$817 700. Do members know where the public servants came from? Five came from the Department of Finance; three came from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet; one came from the Department of Training and Workforce Development; 0.4 was from the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries; two came from the Department of Health; and one came from the Corruption and Crime Commission. They are public servants that could be doing work for the state. Instead, they are on this witch-hunt, which has cost us close to \$1 million thus far, so that the government can keep digging that knife in to say, “We don’t care about governing; we’re just going to keep on throwing stones at the previous government.”

It was likewise with the service priority review. The government said that the consultants have cost \$200 050.10. Only 15 public servants are working on the service priority review—not 17.4. That is 15 public servants who could be doing their work but they are not. They have been seconded to do this service priority review. Five are from the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety; one is from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; two are from Department of Water and Environmental Regulation; two are from the Department of Treasury; two are from Department of Communities; one is from the Public Sector Commission; one is from the Department of Finance; and one is from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. They are very high level public servants with an annual combined salary of \$1 938 243. The five months that it has been going have cost \$807 601. Let us not be cute about this, guys. We are not talking about \$64 000 here and a couple of hundred thousand dollars there; we are talking close to \$1 million each for these reviews of the mob opposite. I bet your bottom dollar that the reports will not be like the Toomey report. We will not have to put in FOIs and have parliamentary debates and no-confidence motions in this chamber to get these reports. When they hit the desk of the minister, they will table them the next day. That is exactly what this is about. This is a witch-hunt. That is all it is.

Hon Sue Ellery: Did you do anything wrong?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No, I did not.

Hon Sue Ellery: What are you worried about?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Why is the government doing it? Why is the government spending \$1 million on it? The Leader of the House should know that. Surely, the demountables in one of her schools needs painting. She should ask Hon Dr Sally Talbot.

Hon Sue Ellery: If you have done nothing wrong, what are you worried about?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I am not worried!

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Okay, members!

Hon PETER COLLIER: Members opposite just do not get it. They honestly do not get it. It is exactly the same as everything else. It is like those cheques the government sent out with the local member—it is a government cheque! If we had done that, all hell would have broken loose.

Hon Darren West: It's not a real cheque.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I beg your pardon?

Hon Darren West: You cannot take it down the bank and cash it; it is not a real cheque.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: All right, members. Order!

Hon PETER COLLIER: The members opposite just do not get it. The point is the image that the government has. If we had done that, imagine the vitriol that would have come across from this side of the chamber. The hypocrisy has absolutely no bounds. I have nothing to worry about with these reviews—nothing whatsoever. That is not my point in raising this. My point is that the answers I got from ministers and the Premier showed \$64 000 and \$200 000, yet in reality we are looking at closer to \$2 million. That is what I care about. Members opposite can try to scoff at this and carry on with their patronising arrogance all they like, but it does not work with me. It just does not work. I will tell them right now that this is evidence, yet again, that it is a government in decay before it has even started.

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: There we go! Do members see my point?

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is just extraordinary.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Leader of the Opposition, if you refrain from antagonising the government benches, we might get to the end of your contribution.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Thank you, Mr Acting President, but I am enjoying myself so much and really have got a very good story to tell. If this government does not hear it from me, it obviously does not hear it from anyone else, because it just keeps on doing it. I just cannot believe it.

Anyway, as I have said, I have been through the budget in terms of the hypocrisy of what was said before the election and after the election, what was said before the budget and after the budget, and the hypocrisy of saying that there would be unequivocally no new taxes when now there will be new taxes. There is also the difference in standards in education between the government and us, the previous government. To come into government after four years in opposition and be delivered a magnificent education system shows the Labor Party's hypocrisy over the last four years.

There is also the issue of the standards of this Parliament. They are the things that concern me more than anything. As I said, at this stage it is quite evident that pairs mean nothing; they can be stopped at the drop of a hat. The role of the President means nothing. We can sacrifice that; it means nothing. Questions are an opportunity for the government just to have a cheap go at the opposition rather than give accurate responses. Adhering to the conventions of the house in relation to correcting the record and not using unparliamentary language is only relevant to the Leader of the House—no-one else matters. Those standards do not matter for anyone else. As long as Leader of the House gets her way, that is all that matters.

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is true.

Having said that, I will conclude with once again a comment from the Leader of the Opposition in the other place. He said —

The biggest political issue in Western Australia is a Premier who has no regard for his promises—the promises he made prior to the election upon which he was elected. Every day we see all the deception and untruthfulness; the callous disregard for all that was said before the election. When I have the temerity to stand in this place and raise it he says, “Why are you worrying about that? That was five months ago. That was back then.” He says, “Look forward and worry about the future; stop dwelling in the past.” That is his advice to me on promises he made a mere five months ago. I have news for the Premier; we are going to keep reminding Western Australians about what the Premier promised in the lead-up to the election because they have a right to be reminded. They have a right not to be lied to and misled. Western Australians do not like being treated like fools. They hate the idea of the Premier thinking he can break all his promises and still skate through without being held to account. Western Australians will remember this betrayal and dishonesty, and it does not matter how much the Premier tells us to stop raising these issues in the Parliament, we will keep doing it because truthfulness and honesty count and the Premier’s truthfulness and honesty are seriously in question.

Again, that is not the current Leader of the Opposition; that is the now Premier. He made those comments as Leader of the Opposition on 14 August 2013. Hear, hear! I suggest to the now Premier that he go back and take heed of the advice he gave to the previous government. We intend to ruthlessly scrutinise this government. We will not be remotely put off by the patronising arrogance of the members opposite whenever we raise these issues, which is almost a cliché. We will not be intimidated or diminished by the constant clichés and jibes from the members opposite or from those clichés and jibes in the responses that we get to valid questions, even if it is the small stuff, as members opposite think it is. It is not; it is a part of being in government. This is the government’s budget. It has three more to come and if the government is going to be re-elected, those three budgets are going to have to be much better than the rubbish dished up this time.

HON TIM CLIFFORD (East Metropolitan) [7.54 pm]: I will be brief and I will not offend any drunken sailors, because I think they have been bashed over the head enough tonight! I acknowledge that the budget is what it is. It has been left in that situation as a legacy of the previous government and we are in a difficult position. The earlier announcement on the gold royalty just makes it a bit harder to fathom how we are going to get out of the situation when some of the players in this state do not pull their weight. I am a bit disappointed about the fact that people in this place oppose the gold levy, because I think it is an important pathway forward in addressing some of the budgetary issues. I wish we also had a bank levy, but I do not think there is an appetite to address that.

I would like to touch on a few things in this budget and one of them close to my heart is housing. I was heartened to hear when the budget came out that the government would go a bit of a way to addressing some of the issues associated with housing, especially the 16 516 people currently on the waiting list for social housing, which represents a population the size of Gosnells, and the 1 590 on the priority list who urgently need assistance. That is pretty shameful in our state.

Going back to the gold levy, if these people who can afford to pay \$20 an ounce out of a pretty large profit margin —

Hon Darren West: It is \$14 after tax.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: It is \$14 after tax.

Unfortunately, some of those people will still be on the waiting list because the revenue stream that was supposed to come from that levy will not be there to address the problem. Money will have to come from somewhere and it usually comes off the back of the most vulnerable people in our society. In the housing portfolio 80 per cent of social and public housing is owned and managed by the Housing Authority, with only 20 per cent provided by community housing providers. I looked at the job that those community housing providers have been doing and I was a bit disappointed that we have not encouraged that percentage to go up for some of them. They have been doing such a great job and some elements of the Housing Authority have been run down over the previous few years, having spoken to some of the people closely associated with it and with people who have been sleeping in cars in Rockingham while they have been waiting for a house. They are not just adults; they are kids as well. If we are looking to address some of those issues, we need to get the lives of people who have experienced homelessness and approximately 145 weeks on this waiting list back on track. We still need to do more to support homeless people. Although funding for housing support services will go from \$78 million to \$85.5 million in this financial year, the figure decreases over the forward estimates to about \$53.4 million by 2021. Given that homelessness is such a critical issue in our state, I do not think those funds should be decreased. The indirect costs of homelessness can be about \$4 000 per person. An indirect cost can be due to the fact that someone sleeping on the street needs an ambulance to attend to them because they might have suffered from hypothermia or something; we do not always think of them. We need to be more creative and flexible about how we address community housing, provide for people and give them a roof over their heads. We should not shy away to committing to a longer term vision to make sure that people have the services and support they need to get them off streets. That also goes to the people living in social housing. The terms “energy poverty” and “services poverty” have been spruiked quite a bit

recently in the context of energy prices going up. The cost reflectivity that Hon Peter Collier spoke of earlier is an issue. It has been on the horizon for quite a few years now. I checked to see whether it had been addressed over the last eight years or if an attempt had been made to address it. We are facing not only an energy crisis in this state—not so much that we are heading towards a full cost-reflective price and people will have to face the brunt of that—but also a technology crisis. I have heard people talk about selling the grid so that we can pay down debt and provide money for schools. That would be great, but we are facing a transition to technology that will not provide an adequate amount of foresight to address the issue of, say, battery storage on the grid. I do not think we should be selling the grid when people are starting to become their own independent power source and are looking to unplug it. We have seen what has happened with the national electricity market on the east coast; it has been privatised and is a patchwork situation. No government over there has been able to manage it in the right way because it has been out of its hands. Then, all of a sudden, when there are blackouts, as we have seen in South Australia, the federal government is quick to blame renewables, which were not to blame. We just did not have the forward planning, which we can do now because we have the grid in our hands. I do not agree with the short-sighted view that we should sell the grid and that will solve a lot of problems.

A couple of weeks ago I was in Perenjori, as was Hon Jim Chown, and we got to listen to some experts speak about the crisis that they are facing on the edge of the grid. There have been 42 blackouts in 12 months on the edge of the grid. Powerlines are slowly coming to the end of their life and it will cost millions of dollars to replace them. Some people might say that it is just an excuse to sell the ageing infrastructure and get the money we can get now and pay down debt, but it has provided us with an opportunity, because Horizon Power is currently trialling micro grids in the north west. It is looking at providing renewable energy for smaller networks of communities, which will be able to redistribute their energy between households and reduce energy costs. The energy provided within these grids is not nuclear, which is something I have heard in this chamber in the past couple of months. It will not be large-scale thermal, although it might play a role in large city centres like Perth or Sydney or Melbourne. We have already seen it in California. Small-scale renewable energy will be plugged into these systems to provide energy for people and it will lower their energy costs. Smart meters will show people their energy usage in real time, which is already being trialled in remote communities. It has been very effective. If people know what they are using in real time, they can adjust their behaviours. That is something that we have been looking at quite closely. The initial indication from the government is that it is something that it will look at.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: Yes, and battery storage.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: Yes, the big battery is acting as a shock absorber for the blackouts, which is quite amazing. There is also the battery storage from the likes of people such as Elon Musk at Tesla. These batteries will come online as fast as solar photovoltaic energy and if people are not ready for it, it will cost them more than they can afford to pay. Unfortunately, the people with more money will be able to afford to pay for solar PV and battery storage before the poorer people will. If people are going to start disconnecting from the grid, the poorer end of society, or the most vulnerable in our community, will be paying higher energy costs; they will not have these buffers to prevent the hikes in prices because they do not have solar panels and access to battery storage.

Hon Rick Mazza interjected.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: There is the wave generation trial in Albany, which is quite amazing. Energy is also being provided at Garden Island, which is great. That is very promising. We have got wind, and that is another reason we should support renewable energy and not go down the nuclear path. It takes six months to get a wind farm online and it takes 12 to 18 months to get a decent-sized solar farm online. The state would provide the insurance policy for it, so we would not be spending money on a massive nuclear power station, which is a security risk because it is centralised power—we are going to a decentralised power system—when there are other options that can come online a lot cheaper and are a lot more efficient than anything else.

Hon Robin Scott interjected.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: But we will have battery storage. When battery storage is available within the next five years, that will provide the baseload that the member is talking about within the system.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: And wave energy is 24/7 and solar thermal can be 24/7.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: That is really exciting. The idea of us having a centralised energy system as we have had at Muja, for example, or in Collie will not be a reality in the future because every household will have battery storage, which, when the sun is not shining, will back up during the day and will redistribute energy across the grid at night-time. That is already happening in the world behind the meter within apartment buildings. Members can see some of the trials. I think Synergy is starting that. I ask the crossbenchers to speak to people from Synergy because they would be able to show them exactly what Synergy is doing and how exciting it is.

Hon Robin Scott: You mentioned base power. They will never be able to supply the base power at a price we can afford at today's costs.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: How do you know that? Just look at how the price of solar has come down.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members, thank you.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: The comment I heard at the briefing from Synergy the other day was that they cringe when they have to sign a new contract because by the time the project is tabled, the price of energy has come down so much. It is not feasible to talk about these other alternatives like nuclear, coal and other fossil fuels, because these renewable energy sources will provide energy for the member's home.

Another thing I would like to touch on is the new industries fund, which is quite amazing. It is a bit of forward thinking. I have been a bit disappointed, because when people look at the budget, they ask, "What the hell are games in there for?" I have spoken to industry about that and I have spoken to people on the east coast. A lot of people do not know that the games industry is a hundred billion dollar industry. It is larger than the film industry in Hollywood. Sixty-eight per cent of people in this country engage with some form of games device, whether it is for education, health care or entertainment in their own home. That is coming from not only major players in the games industry, but also people who are developing at home and in cottage industries. The people I have spoken to used to live in WA but they moved away because there was no incentive to stay here. They went to Victoria, for example, where precincts have been set up so they can develop. Once they start developing games, they find a pathway into other industries in society, which is usually health care, education and other smart technologies. We need to start this thing off. It is a decent start. It is never enough money, but it is a small amount of money to invest to get a high return. Members will remember the global financial crisis in the United States. Tesla started only because of the incentives that were provided during the GFC. When the car industry collapsed, massive brand-new factories were basically mothballed overnight and so the government stepped in and said that it needed to get this thing started and it allowed people like Elon Musk to invest in the industry. That guy's name is now a household name. So many things have been spurred on and they have contributed to society and brought so much money back into the community.

There are the innovation technologies in the games industry and there is the smart technology that is being used in health care. The people who develop code are usually the people who bury themselves in their bedrooms and see joy in numbers. These people are driving this change. Half of the apps on the smart phone in our pocket were developed by people who had a bright idea. If these people were given the chance, they would be able to do these things. I think this innovation fund is a start to that.

Harking back to the gold levy, if we take something like that away—it would be \$400 million—where else will the government take it from? We are going to stifle industries before they begin if we do not look at supporting them. Whether we are Gina Rinehart or Mary in Joondalup, we have a role to play in this debate and a contribution to make to what we are doing here in WA.

Moving on, because I do not have much time, another matter is climate change. Members have heard us talk about it, but I refer specifically to the indirect costs in health care, which are quite substantial. I think back to when the carbon price was repealed in about 2013. A lot of the standards for regulating emissions were repealed and nothing was put back in their place. We are one of the highest emitting states, which is understandable considering that we have the mining industry. However, we have no real regulations around it and we have no drivers to minimise our emissions. The mining industry is taking on electric vehicles and dump trucks. My sister worked for Rio Tinto up north. She was a dump truck operator and she knew that that was coming so she got out of it before it happened. The industry that she was in five or six years ago has all been automated. We should be driving towards higher emission reduction standards around our mining industry and our vehicles and also be deploying smart technology to make sure that we drive ourselves into something that we can plug into in renewable energy so that people have an incentive to invest in different technologies within WA.

I refer to transport. We are looking at a heavy rail system, Metronet, which is great. But I still think we should have stage 2, which is light rail. That was axed by the federal government in 2013 when the Abbott government took over. Half a billion dollars had been fronted by the Feds, but, unfortunately, that was scrapped and rolled into Roe 8, which was highly disappointing considering that there was no business case and all those arguments that went around it. We had a light rail system ready to roll, pardon the pun, and we could have had that going and that would have had a return into our community. If we are looking at the heavy rail system, we really have to look at how we get people moving in this city, which in itself generates a lot more money for our society than people sitting in cars for an hour and a half going from South Perth to Baldivis because that is their only option. We could have a light rail system on Marmion Avenue, Alexander Drive and South Street to connect this city. We could also look at incentives for people to use public transport and better targeted campaigns to get people out of the habit of using their vehicles. That would contribute so much more to our community.

We have to do this and we need to do it together. Standing here and throwing insults at each other over who did what the best and who needs to put their name on something because they came up with the idea is not the way forward, necessarily, considering that we have huge waiting lists for social housing. That is unacceptable, considering we can always do more and the number of people living on our streets are relying on us to pass the legislation necessary to look after them. We have a whole bunch of gamers, developers and people who are leaders, because our economy is transitioning into something that we will not even recognise in 10 years. These people are leaving our state every day and going to other places. They are more excited about going to Melbourne than staying in their hometown, which is disappointing.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: There are people doing it. Power Ledger just raised \$34 million. That is a WA start-up. It's pretty incredible.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: It is amazing, but we need to encourage and keep pushing these things, because if we are going to have a brain drain when we face these times when we have a downturn and iron ore has come off the boil, what jobs are we going to give our kids? People would rather go interstate to study and to find a job, rather than stay in their home state. That is disappointing. We cannot keep our head in the last century. We need to make sure that if all these technologies are coming on board, we are ready for them.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Martin Pritchard**.