

**PREMIER COOK — LEADERSHIP**

*Matter of Public Interest*

**THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts)** informed the Assembly that she was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [2.59 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns Premier Cook’s consistent pattern of vanishing when Western Australians need leadership most, underscoring that Western Australia cannot, and should not, endure another term under Labor.

It has been quite evident in the last number of months that my constituents and the people I meet right across Western Australia cannot countenance another term of this government. The damage that is being done across the state and the lack of accountability and responsibility being taken by the leadership of the government is telling. We know that there are pressing regional issues, especially the stripping away of regional representation and the aftermath of it, that are making people in regional Western Australia feel undervalued and increasingly apprehensive, particularly about what their representation level will be in the future. We saw the farcical rollout of the Aboriginal cultural heritage laws and the complete absence of any responsibility being taken by the Premier for so long. The Premier remained absent from the discussion until such time as it became obvious that the situation was having ramifications nationwide. In fact, there were stories on the nightly news in the eastern states, as well as in Western Australia. There is no doubt in my mind that pressure was put on this government to pull back and to change course.

Time and again, when decisive action is needed, this Premier tends to vanish into the ether, which is undermining the ability of his government to perform. We are seeing some terrible examples of the results of that, such as the empty housing project, as was outlined in question time. When the government took over, the minister of the day claimed that this was an area of extreme social distress and that it would be better to pull the buildings down. What have we seen in response? We have not seen the buildings being built. We have seen the buildings being pulled down. The minister tells us that it is a highly constrained site, but the minister and the Premier are not taking responsibility for the fact that so much housing has been lost and the state is still in a terrible housing situation. I will talk about that a little later, because the Treasurer is here and I was pleased to be at a breakfast today at which she discussed her announcements.

We know that this week is Anti-Poverty Week. A lot of people probably do not know that because all the news of the day leading up to this week has been subsumed by the referendum on the weekend and its result. Anti-poverty is something that we should be speaking about because we know that Western Australian families are doing it very tough indeed. We know from Foodbank and other organisations that are leading the charge in providing for the Western Australian community that there is real distress in the community. I understand that the majority of people those organisations now service actually have jobs, such is the level of distress in our community, but do we hear the Premier talking about that? No; we hear him talking about happy events happening at Optus and all the good news things. When it is time to show leadership and take responsibility to ensure that fundamental things such as the cost-of-living pressures that are bearing down on householders right across Western Australia are spoken about, we see no action. We hear nothing from the Premier. Indeed, very little is coming from the government at all.

Some of the newspaper headlines in the past few months are very telling. Some of the terrible situations that we have seen unfold have been highlighted in this house. One of the headlines is “Horror inside ward 5A”. Members will remember the health crisis that occurred there and the revelations about the events in ward 5A and the fact that there have not been the necessary improvements since then to ensure safety. We know that the Premier was nowhere to be seen. The Premier was not there to be accountable. The Premier was not there to front up and assure the people of Western Australia that these matters would be taken seriously and that they were important to him.

We have the situation with the housing crisis. Some of these headlines are too distressing to read out. They refer to the housing crisis and the effect on families and babies. Another series of headlines, including “Living hell”, “We let her down” and “Let out to kill”, was about the domestic violence situation that we saw explode in Western Australia, and again the Premier was not able to take responsibility and front up to address those pressing concerns.

We know that leading up to the referendum, the Premier was nowhere to be seen in Western Australia. Apparently, he was in South Australia. He attended a meeting, but I understand he spent time over there campaigning for the Voice to the South Australian public. It seems strange that the Premier of Western Australia would perform that role in South Australia. I know that the Premier would love to explain why he did that and why he was not here showing leadership to the people of Western Australia.

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Members will remember when 30 000 community members signed a petition calling for the Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation to be delayed. The Premier took no notice. In fact, he then embarked upon one of the greatest overreaches in recent history, which eventually, as I said earlier, led to a backflip. Did the Premier front the farmers when they were at the front of this building? No; it was the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, who was not the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs when that bill was passed. He was responsible for the implementation of the legislation, but the head of the show is the Premier and he was not there to take responsibility. The Aboriginal affairs minister had to go out there and front those farmers and talk to them.

Today, once again the member for Roe asked a question about live export. We have heard from the member for Roe on numerous occasions. He is a prominent member of the farming community and is very interested in and knowledgeable about exactly what is happening in the sheep industry. The Premier's response was so dismissive of the member for Roe that he did not even talk about live export initially. It was not until the member for Roe pinned him down that we got a response for the farming community and members of the public, as well as all the other people who are ancillary to and depend on that industry—the people who provide the transport, the feed, the shearing and a range of other services involved in the industry. We know that once one of the fundamental underpinnings of the industry is taken away, it saps confidence in the industry. The Premier seems to think that Western Australia and the eastern states are in isolation, but we know that animals move from one side of the country to the other. There has always been a discount for livestock in Western Australia, as opposed to the eastern states, but there is certainly a great deal of interaction between the two. They are not two separate matters. In terms of understanding the effect on the member for Roe's electorate in particular, the Premier would do well to listen to him; he is very knowledgeable about these things—much more than the Premier is obviously.

We know that the lack of leadership in the government has led to an increasingly difficult situation in providing housing. Today I was at an event and listened to the Treasurer outline her plan for a crack team of bureaucrats to tackle the problem. I wonder what the members of that crack team of bureaucrats have been doing over the last seven years or so—if they are there. I am sure that they would have been offering advice. Who has not been listening? Would it be the Minister for Housing? Would it be the Premier? Good on the Treasurer for coming up with the crack team, but I want to know why the Premier and the Minister for Housing have failed to listen to them. If they are able to cure the housing crisis, we should have been listening to those responses far earlier than we have been.

Another matter that I briefly want to turn to, because I know that other members want to talk on this motion, is one that is becoming increasingly problematic for Western Australia—that is, federal government intervention and decisions and Federal Court decisions that are affecting the approvals for major projects, especially in our gas sector, but it will increasingly affect our mining sector if it continues. We know that the Premier is the Minister for Federal–State Relations, and it is part of his role to get over to Canberra to outline how important these projects are going forward. What do we see? We see a situation in which the Japanese are now concerned about a sovereign risk aspect of investment and supply in Western Australia. It is not something that we have seen in the past; we have not seen those sorts of challenges. This is fundamentally important to the biggest industries in this state—the ones raking in those massive surpluses that this government has been enjoying based on the investment, hard work and knowledge of people working in those industries. I refer to industries working against the anchor that is increasingly becoming the federal government's approval system married to the state's approval system, which continues to be problematic despite the so-called development of Streamline WA that has seen very little or no improvement; in fact, we are seeing roadblocks to improvement going forward.

The situation got so bad that *The West Australian* cartoon of the day recently was a *Where's Wally?*-type exposé of "Where's Roger?" A little figure popped up from under a drain in a *Where's Wally?* outfit. If it has reached the stage that the newspaper has started to print *Where's Wally?* cartoons of the Premier, I think it has become quite evident to the public that there is a problem with his accountability.

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [3.11 pm]: I also rise to support the matter of public interest —

That this house condemns Premier Cook's consistent pattern of vanishing when Western Australians need leadership most, underscoring that Western Australia cannot, and should not, endure another term under Labor.

When it comes to the failure of leadership, it is clear that this Premier and his default position of vanishing when the heat is on is becoming all too common. After all, this is a minister who would do anything to avoid standing up and taking responsibility for issues that happened under his watch—so much so that at one stage he was referred to as the "Teflon minister". The public will tolerate only so much. That will eventually see the mud stick, which is what the Leader of the Opposition referred to.

We saw that the then Premier had no choice but to demote the former Minister for Health in December 2021 after a string of failures in his four and a half years overseeing the health system. He was moved on to special events and concerts. We know that is his specialty—photo ops and having no responsibility. The timing of his demotion

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from health was no coincidence. By the time he was removed from this portfolio, we saw health in absolute freefall. There were record levels ambulance ramping, blowouts in elective surgery waitlists, unlimited code yellows and a decimated workforce that felt extraordinary levels of low morale. His handling of key crises proved that his position was untenable.

Who could forget his mismanagement and the appalling leadership vacuum that we saw following the tragic death of Aishwarya Aswath in 2021? She was a seven-year-old who died on 3 April waiting for two hours in the emergency department of Perth Children's Hospital. The minister was nowhere to be seen. He waited three full days before receiving a briefing on the tragedy. Her parents, Prasitha and Aswath, were so desperate for answers about their daughter's death that they were forced to stage a hunger strike outside the hospital. The image of the grieving couple standing outside the hospital begging for answers will be a legacy of this Premier. Her death should not have happened, certainly not in such a circumstance given multiple warnings were given that it would take place. Senior clinicians six months prior rang alarm bells with health executives about patient safety, particularly for children in the waiting room. In December 2020, the Australian Medical Association and the Australian Nursing Federation —

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** I do not want to be a pedant, but I noticed that the motion is about Premier Cook's consistent pattern. You are talking about a time when the Premier was Minister for Health. In other words, you are not speaking to the motion.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Okay. I accept what you have stated, Acting Speaker.

Under the now Premier's leadership, we have seen much more of the same that we saw when he was the Minister for Health. It is extraordinary that when asked a question on this matter in the house today, given the tragic circumstances of what happened over two years ago, we saw more deflection and excuses and a suggestion that I should point the questions to someone else. Given the tragedy and enormity of what we saw in 2021, one would think that the key recommendation of the coronial inquest of a dedicated resuscitation team would be the priority of any government or Premier, particularly given his former role as health minister. Clearly not. We saw last week through the Child and Adolescent Health Service's annual report that this team is still not in place. More defences were given as well.

It was no surprise when it was revealed that a 13-year-old was allegedly raped at Perth Children's Hospital while in the mental health ward that the Premier was back to his old form of being in hiding. He left it to the health minister to front the media on her own about questions about this. This incident happened just a month after she took the reins. The incident was an absolutely despicable, devastating and preventable act, as the Minister for Health stated. It is no understatement to say that it was also absolutely shocking and the community was left with many unanswered questions. The parents are also understandably frustrated and concerned. It is extraordinary to hear them speak out in public seeking answers. There was a real need for leadership and reassurance from the Premier. That should have come from the top, but we saw something else instead.

The Premier was not officially on leave. I know that journalists had to get that clarified because he certainly was not fronting the media for eight days. He laid low dodging accountability and transparency. He was happy to wipe his hands of this crisis in health. The Premier had no appetite to front and support the minister. He was quick to look to his media statements. The list of media statements will tell members what the Premier's priorities are: the minister for special events and concerts was all smiles when it came to wrestling, a party for the America's Cup anniversary, the Royal Show and good news stories with a Formula 1 star. It was crickets on health, which is in crisis. There are many unanswered questions. The recommendations regarding ward 5A where a Western Australian patient was allegedly raped saw the Premier lay low for eight days and not front the media. We know that he eventually showed up in another state, out for a light jog with a Labor colleague while the state was still grappling with the shock and despair of a truly horrific and inexplicable sexual assault at our state's flagship hospital. That well and truly sums up where our Premier's priorities lie. It is absolutely unbelievable and tone deaf, and represents a leadership vacuum.

Western Australians have also been left wanting when it comes to leadership on the women's and babies' hospital. It was a captain's call to shift the proposed women's and babies' hospital from the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre site in Nedlands to the Murdoch site—a decision made without consultation that has raised real concerns.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Member, you are straying again. I remind you that you are straying from the wording of the motion.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Despite the Premier's knowledge of the clinical need for such a facility to be at the QEII site, we have seen the Premier, a former health minister, take a contradictory approach to his commentary as minister, and that is not putting WA patients first.

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [3.20 pm]:** I rise to support the Leader of the Opposition's excellent motion. I know that it is tough to be the Premier; it is not always a good gig. In a state like this, the Premier has many portfolios and areas that he needs to cover and many things he has to do. One thing a Premier has to do in this case is hold his ministers to account.

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It will not be the substance of my contribution—brief as it will be—to this debate, but it was fascinating to hear in the chamber today the Minister for Housing boast about 1 600 social homes. I think that is a net increase of 300 social homes in seven years. Imagine that—a minister boasting about a net increase of 300 social homes in seven years.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member, you did indicate that you were not going to stray from the motion. The core of the motion is a consistent pattern of vanishing.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am not straying from the motion. Acting Speaker, I am talking directly —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** You are talking about housing, member.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am talking directly about this Premier’s failure to rein in his minister, and I am explaining why.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** All right; good. I look forward to hearing about it.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** We have the extraordinary answer from the Minister for Housing on the Bentley 360 project. We are not talking about something that has just started; it has been four years since the site was demolished and the former minister announced it, and this minister has done nothing. One thing the Premier needs to do—lest I be accused of lecturing—is hold ministers to account for their lack of performance. Clearly, the Minister for Housing is not performing and needs to be held to account.

I want to cover a couple of key areas. The Leader of the Liberal Party covered the many failures in health, for which the Premier has ultimate accountability, and I will not go over those. I want to dwell for some period on the Premier’s role as the Minister for State and Industry Development, Jobs and Trade. We do things day to day in this chamber and we may do political things, but I would say that state development is not a sexy portfolio most of the time; it may be sometimes.

**Mr R.H. Cook:** Please!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Maybe the incumbent minister is, but I am discussing the portfolio.

State development is a key role for the state. It really is key. I encourage all members, whatever their political ilk, to read Sir Charles Court’s biography and read about his achievements in that role.

**Ms S.F. McGurk:** Life’s too short.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I would encourage the minister. It is a really good read, and I think that she would be enlightened by how much he achieved in that role in just three years. Essentially, he established all the current industries that sustain the great wealth of our economy. It is actually true, and that is why I encourage members to read it. It would give members a good reflection of what members should be doing when in government.

This Premier is the Minister for State and Industry Development, Jobs and Trade. It is not that the Premier is out there every day opening something, but the role is about developing the future economy of our state. In particular, the Premier is responsible for one key area in the state development role, which is ensuring that important projects for this state are not held up. The Scarborough gas project is utterly crucial for the future of this state. First and foremost, it is utterly crucial for the supply of gas into our state gas network. Some members may be aware of the Australian Energy Market Operator’s *Gas statement of opportunities*. It says that we face a substantial shortfall that will be mitigated only by Scarborough coming online. We saw a court case against not Woodside but the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority, the regulatory agency responsible for approving the various aspects of gas projects. Green activists found a person to lodge a claim that Woodside’s seismic activity, which has to be done and is utterly crucial for Woodside to develop that project, could not go ahead because it would interfere with whale songlines some 190 kilometres off the coast. That was the claim and the base of the case, and it succeeded.

We can sit and argue whether we think that is reasonable, but that is not the purpose of my contribution today. I asked the Premier a question about it because I am extremely concerned that a person with a very peripheral interest in a major project could stop the project. Federal legislation clearly has a loophole that enables that. We see what happens when green activists misuse groups. We saw what happened at James Price Point.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member, can I bring you back to the motion, please?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It is my motion.

*Point of Order*

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Acting Speaker, my understanding is that, in debate, a member can build a case and refer to history. That is exactly what the member is doing and exactly what the member for Vasse did, as well.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Ordinarily, member, I would say that if it was about the Premier’s time in Parliament, we could refer to historical matters, but the motion specifically talks about Premier Cook’s consistent pattern et cetera. That would seem to relate to the time since he has become the Premier and to the pattern.

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Although it is an interesting public policy issue, we have heard nothing from the member for Cottesloe about how this is evidence of a pattern that is the core of the motion. There is no point of order.

*Debate Resumed*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Acting Speaker, I wish to continue my contribution to the debate.

In that case, my fear here with the Scarborough delays is that we saw an Aboriginal group denied \$1.2 billion in royalty payments because of that action. Clearly, a weakness in the federal legislation has allowed this to occur to the Scarborough project. I asked the Premier a question in this house about whether he was going to do anything. I asked, first, whether he was aware of it and had spoken to his federal colleagues and, second, what he was going to do. I asked him a question and a supplementary question about that matter. If I look at the Premier's response to that, he talked about how he had spoken to the relevant federal —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Just for ease of reading later, you might refer to the date of that response. Thank you.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I will. Thank you very much. This was on Thursday, 12 October, in response to my question.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Excellent. Thank you.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The minister came back and said about the federal minister —

She was awaiting advice on what response the federal government should take, if any is required. Obviously ... We would expect some response.

When I asked whether they were doing something to assist that, the Premier made a number of comments on the same date, and he said at the end, "but I reckon she has this one". I will tell members what. If I were the minister for state development, I would believe that this project is utterly crucial to the future of our state, to our power reliability and for our overseas customers. The state and federal governments have made promises to our overseas customers that they will guarantee it. If that project is delayed, the gas supply requirements of South Korea and Japan cannot be met as promised. There should be an entire unit working on this issue. Apparently, we now have a state government embassy in Canberra that is working on issues. That group of people and the state development department should be working full-time on solutions, not waiting for the federal minister to come back. That is the job of the Minister for State and Industry Development, Jobs and Trade, and we are not seeing that. The Premier cannot sit back and relax on this one. We have seen the same thing with the federal industrial relations laws. I asked a question about the federal IR laws and I got a similar response from the Premier. We heard the Minister for Mines and Petroleum say by way of an interjection that this does not affect all the big miners, only BHP. It affects almost every contractor involved in our mining industry, which, again, is crucial to our state, yet the Premier said he that will not take sides. No! It is the job of the Premier to advocate for this state. I think the Premier is being poorly advised. It is no substitute to attend glitzy openings and all those distraction-type events that might be appropriate at times. Major issues affecting the state have been raised by my colleague, and no more so than those issues around state development that I have outlined during my contribution. We cannot have the response that the Premier is waiting for other people to do things. As Premier of the state, he should seize the bull by the horns; that is his job.

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Premier)** [3.31 pm]: Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this motion, which must be the worst matter of public interest ever. I have never come across a more garbled, open-ended and confused set of words, except, of course, if I were to read the *Hansard* of the contributions they made in the chamber to support this motion.

This motion, which I completely reject, seems to go to the question of leadership. I waited with bated breath for the evidence to be put in front of me of what members opposite described as my consistent vanishing and, therefore, a lack of leadership, but I heard none. Nothing they said provided any support for the motion itself. Leadership takes a range of different forms. There is leadership in decisions. Members opposite described me as not wanting to engage in difficult issues, yet I am the Premier who took hold of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act and made sure that, after listening to the community about their concerns, we have made appropriate changes that are simple and effective. We have made the difficult decisions that had to be made. I am also the Premier who was front and centre on the family and domestic violence issues that were recently raised. We have put in place measures that we see as responding to those concerns, particularly around the implementation of the taskforce. I am looking forward to engaging with the deliberations of the taskforce. They are important and confronting matters, not the glamour and the glitz that the member for Vasse would like to characterise as my contribution. They are important issues of great social importance. Today, I announced an historic overhaul of our firearm laws, which will, again, create an important set of rules in this state to make sure that we make our community safer. These are the decisions that we make and we make them because of our position of leadership; they are important decisions to make.

Another form of leadership is advocacy. It is an important part of my role as Premier to make sure that we are in a position to advocate on behalf of the state. The member for Cottesloe tried to place before us evidence in the absence of that when he talked about the Federal Court's decision about the National Offshore Petroleum Safety

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and Environmental Management Authority's powers under federal legislation. The member for Cottesloe said that when he asked me a question about this, I responded that I had already spoken to the federal minister involved, that she was going to consult with her department and then make a decision on the basis of the conversation that I had with her. I am not quite sure what the member for Cottesloe believes he was trying to achieve in supporting his argument that somehow my leadership was diminished or "consistently vanishing", according to the words of the motion.

Another aspect of advocacy is making sure that I am there when the decisions are made. I was criticised by the Leader of the Opposition for attending a Council for the Australian Federation meeting held in Adelaide on 6 October. What an extraordinary accusation! On the one hand, we have the member for Vasse —

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** On the one hand, we have the member for Vasse —

An opposition member interjected.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Madam Acting Speaker!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Yes. Order, members!

**Mr R.H. COOK:** On the one hand, the member for Vasse criticised me about health policy and, on the other hand, the Leader of the Opposition—we know you guys do not get along that well—said that I should not have been at a meeting in Adelaide to advocate on behalf of the Western Australian health system. What an extraordinary situation of a bizarre dichotomy between their arguments. One was saying that I should advocate and the other was saying that I am advocating too much because I, along with the other Premiers of Australia, assembled in Adelaide, regardless of the political party we come from and having stated a position on the Voice referendum, took the opportunity to restate our position on the Voice referendum. That is quite frankly extraordinary. We took the opportunity to reaffirm all state Premiers' support for the Voice. That included the previous and current Premier of New South Wales and the current Premier of Tasmania who, for the purpose of this debate, I point out, is from a different political party than my own. We were united in that particular cause. All the Premiers thought that it was appropriate, since we had assembled, to restate that and, of course, it was.

The other concept of leadership is leadership around being present and making sure that I can be there to present, in front of the people of Western Australia, issues of importance. I believe this debate comes from the events of 3 October; namely, a media piece of Tuesday, 3 October, by the ABC about incidents in ward 5B that happened 18 months earlier. Obviously, those issues are of great concern and are confronting and horrible, which is the reason why we responded as we did at the time and the reason why the Minister for Health has these issues in hand. On Wednesday, 4 October, the Minister for Health presented to answer questions from the media. On Thursday, 5 October, my office did not receive one request for information about this matter. Actually, no, that is not true; we received one request from a journalism student from Edith Cowan University. The critique seems to be that on that day, I was not doing media. I had done media earlier in the week; I had done media every day of the week the week before and I did media on Friday, 6 October. The idea that I was consistently vanishing is absurd. The day in question that opposition members would like to describe as my day of consistently vanishing was the one day on which I was not able to do media, so it came up with this ridiculous argument. Since then something else has happened. There has been a full week of parliamentary debate, and do members think these urgent issues that the opposition sought to bring to the attention of the chamber got a mention last week? Not a single question. That is just how ridiculous and concocted this whole motion is, but it is what we have come to expect from those opposite. We have an opposition with a complete lack of policies, a complete lack of ideas, and a complete lack of substance. That is why members opposite come up with these completely vacuous motions and why they are not fit to even consider themselves for government, if we assume they are saying that they should be in government instead of us.

We have been in government for a number of years and one would have thought that, by now, members opposite could bring to this place matters of policy and matters of substance. One would think that they would be prosecuting ideas about what an alternative Western Australia might look like, but they are not. The member for Vasse completely misrepresents the truth; I am not quite sure where she found her eight days, but she needs to look at her calendar. They come in here slinging personal insults and drawing on their same old tired lines. They are not even addressing the substance of the motion, which is why the Acting Speaker has had to be so active today. What those opposite have demonstrated today is not a lack of leadership on the part of my government, but a lack of substance, capability and gumption on the part of those opposite. They are not fit for government in Western Australia.

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport)** [3.41 pm]: I remember bringing matters of public interest when I was in opposition. We would spend hours doing research and developing arguments because the opposition has only one hour during a sitting week to present an argument in respect of the government's

performance. That was what we concentrated on and we did a lot of work. We did a lot of research and fact-finding so that we could come in and present a coherent argument.

Today we saw yet another demonstration of an opposition that does not do any work. This is an opposition that is so lazy that a third of them disappear from the chamber, even during an MPI. There are six of them! This is the opposition's motion against the government and the Premier, but a third of them cannot even hang around. That shows us how this is just another lazy afternoon stroll through the Parliament for this opposition.

Let us look at the opposition's motion. The motion is —

That this house condemns Premier Cook for his consistent pattern of vanishing when Western Australians need leadership most, underscoring that Western Australia cannot, and should not, endure another term under Labor.

I am going to address that motion. Do members opposite really think that they are fit to govern? We still do not know who the real Leader of the Opposition is. Is it the Leader of the Nationals WA? Is it the Leader of the Liberal Party? Is it someone else out there? Is there a Campbell Newman out there? I do not know, but who will be the Leader of the Opposition? We still do not know that.

Members opposite come in here and claim that everything we do is wrong. Apparently, everything we do could be done better by the opposition, but the previous Liberal–National government clearly did not. As I said: we do not know who the Leader of the Opposition is and we do not know exactly what the opposition's policies are. As has been outlined today by the Minister for Housing, the Minister for Health and the Premier, the opposition has presented no policies. Members opposite have been in opposition for six and a half years now, but they have not presented any policies in this place. They continue to base their arguments on: “You guys are cocky; we want to knock you down a peg.” That is their whole philosophy. They have not presented any policies.

It is important to recall what the last Liberal–National government did to this state when it was in power, because according to this motion, that is what the opposition thinks Western Australians should suffer through again. The opposition wants total financial mismanagement. That is what the Liberal–National government did last time—remember? There were two cabinet processes. It wrecked the finances. It borrowed for everyday spending, ran operating deficits and had out-of-control debt. Our debt now is \$16 billion less than what the last Liberal–National government forecast, saving \$4.3 billion in interest payments. These were two parties in government that did not care about the future. The previous government spent from day to day, made reckless forecasts and did not care about the next generation, and that is what members opposite will do again.

Of course, when a government wrecks the state's finances, what does it do? It has to increase taxes and charges, and that is what the previous government did. Over eight and a half years of Liberal–National government we saw the biggest hikes in electricity prices that we have ever seen. Household fees and charges rose by almost \$2 100 during the eight years of the previous government. Electricity prices increased again and again. We saw an extraordinary attack on young people trying to get a trade in WA; I know the Minister for Training will have more to say on that. The previous government basically made it unaffordable for Western Australians to undertake TAFE courses. It was complete neglect; it turned its back on Western Australians who wanted to get into trades in key areas across the state. It attacked public transport users; it failed to deliver on key public transport policies. It let regional airfares climb and climb and did nothing to support the residents of the regions. Just to illustrate how the previous government did not discriminate in its attack on Western Australians, it also attacked landowners by increasing land tax again and again. Those were the consequences of a government managing finances poorly: it increased taxes and charges, it attacked WA families and it attacked WA businesses.

Let us look at what members opposite would do in government. They would embark on the privatisation agenda that they so dearly love every time they are in government. We just have to look at their past record to see what they would do. They would reverse the decision to bring road maintenance back to Main Roads, because the previous government privatised road maintenance and privatised our hospitals. It privatised Westrail Freight, and it closed rail lines in regional WA. It had plans for Fremantle port; it had a data room set up and had called the consultants in. It was going through the books, getting ready to sell it. It was also going to sell Utah Point, which again, returns ongoing dividends to the state. Of course, it was also going to sell Western Power. That would be what members opposite would do in government.

Another opposition member has left now! It is an hour! Honestly, if members opposite are going to come in here to deliver an MPI, they should at least stick around for an hour. That is the least they can do. I am sitting here for the full hour; if there are only six members opposite, they should be able to stick it out for an hour, given that they have only one MPI a week.

Under this government and the leadership of our new Premier, we are focusing on the key things that matter to Western Australians. Regarding federal–state relations, Premier Cook has already had to negotiate new housing agreements and TAFE agreements, key things that help Western Australians across the state, ensuring that WA

gets its share in things such as funding for housing and support for free TAFE places. Regarding decarbonisation, a multibillion-dollar deal was struck with the federal government for infrastructure in our north west to help decarbonise and reduce emissions—that is, not only in the south west interconnected grid, but also in support of a new grid in the north—and, again, moving into renewables. As the Premier outlined, across a number of areas, including family and domestic violence and gun reform, he is taking the lead. For the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act, he made a tough but strong decision to ensure that we could safely go forward and bring the community with us.

The member for Vasse is not in here, but she stood up and said eight days, never actually clarifying what eight days she was talking about. This shows that this member of Parliament will say and do anything in this place. She gets reported on, but there is absolutely nothing that that member would not say or do for a cheap headline. I have never seen anything like it. To say that the Premier was missing for eight days around the reporting of that awful, tragic incident and not even be able to verify it in any shape or form—that was a key element of her argument—shows an inability to do some basic research. She cannot even count eight days. We do not agree with this motion.

*Amendment to Motion*

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I move —

To delete all words after “house” and insert —

commends the Cook Labor government’s leadership on issues facing Western Australians.

**MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Training)** [3.51 pm]: I am pleased to contribute to this debate, because, like many members of the government and anyone who is even a casual observer of the political process in Western Australia, I am appalled by the notion the opposition put forward that the current Premier has been, as it puts it, missing in action and not prepared to make hard decisions or deliver for our state. In fact, his whole record since he has been in public life—with many years in Parliament both as Deputy Leader of the Opposition and shadow Minister for Health, then holding a range of senior portfolios and now as Premier—has been one of not only delivering for our state but also being prepared to be out there and talk to ordinary Western Australians to understand their day-to-day issues, and to respond to them either when in opposition or since we have been in government. I am very happy to speak in favour of the amendment and against what the opposition is saying in criticism of our government. I wholeheartedly endorse the work of the member for Kwinana in his role as Premier of this state.

I will focus my comments on an area of my portfolio responsibility: vocational training. In many ways, our record as a government in vocational training typifies what Labor is all about, and that is investing in Western Australians, jobs and diversifying our economy, and making sure that we are building both the human capital as well as delivering the workforce to ensure that industry is able to operate in Western Australia now and in the future. That is what vocational training is all about. We have a proud history over the last six and a half years of vocational training in such stark contrast to what the opposition failed to deliver when it was in office. As I said, working in vocational training with my job as the Minister for Training is such a good news story because our commitment to TAFEs and to the vocational training system in general has been so demonstrable since we came to office in 2017. We have delivered not only dollars but also a consistent and most of all considered approach to this portfolio area to make sure that we are building the foundation stones, then the physical infrastructure and the human infrastructure needed for our state for the jobs here now in 2023, and the jobs that will be there in the future. That is why I am very proud to be part of a Cook Labor government.

Recently, during private members’ business, I spoke about how when we came to office in 2017 we immediately froze TAFE fees to provide students and industry with cost certainty. Despite being in a period of budget repair, we slashed fees by up to 72 per cent for 210 courses in key industries, because we wanted to send a message to the public and industry that we wanted people training and wanted to get them out there ready for jobs that we know are out there. Importantly, this also included 17 construction-related apprenticeships and traineeships, and 13 pre-apprenticeships in key industries, with construction being one of them. This year with our Free in ’23 initiative, in partnership with the federal government, we were able to deliver and secure funding just for 2023 for 130 courses, either full qualifications or short courses, that would be free in essential industries such as the care sector, IT, cybersecurity, agriculture, construction, hospitality and tourism. They are all really crucial. We secured \$112 million from the federal government initially for 18 000 fee-free places, but of course we were able to deliver many more than that by the time we were finished and we are on track to do that. Of course, we have supported employers to take on apprentices and trainees through a range of incentive programs. We are working with the Construction Training Fund that provides grants to deliver to the important construction industry. We are delivering nearly a quarter of a billion dollars to rebuild our TAFEs, both in physical infrastructure and equipment, throughout the state. The majority of those upgrades are in regional WA. It is such a pleasure to go out to those colleges and see the investment that we are putting in place.



Mr Shane Love; Ms Libby Mettam; Dr David Honey; Mr Roger Cook; Ms Rita Saffioti; Ms Simone McGurk

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As a result of this investment we now have the record highest ever training enrolments of 10 000 apprentices and trainee contracts registered in just three months this year. It is a remarkable number. Completions have also increased by 26 per cent, which is a huge number. That is skilled people finishing their qualifications, ready to go into the workforce. It is fantastic. What did we see from the opposition? We saw a massive increase in fees, in some cases five-fold, and a massive decrease in the number of people enrolling. Enrolments fell by up to 25 000. If we look at the metrics, we will see that the number of apprenticeship and traineeship commencements, the number of apprentices and trainees in training, and the number of completions, on any one of those three measures, we are doing better. The other side never had an increase in any of those metrics in the eight and a half years it was in government. It is an absolute illustration of its failure to deliver.

When thinking about the contribution I wanted to make in this debate, I wanted to back up what both the Premier and Deputy Premier said—that it is one thing to sit in the cheap seats and criticise, but it is another thing to come up with policies. On any of the areas that we have covered today, whether it has been health, housing, vocational training, budget initiatives and planning policies—any of those items—not one policy has been put forward by the opposition. In fact, it is so lazy and ill-informed on some of these policies, its entire strategy has been that all it does is read *The West Australian* and take its guidance. I will take a bit of poetic licence here; I looked up the price of the paper edition of *The West Australian*. I do both; I also read the digital version, like many members. The opposition spends \$2 for a paper edition of *The West Australian*. That is how much the opposition invests in its strategy before it comes into this place—\$2 to look at *The West Australian* and say, “Right, what’s our theme today? What’re we going to do?”

**Ms R. Saffioti** interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am seeking your advice, Acting Speaker. Earlier on, you instructed members of the opposition that they must refrain from straying from the matter at hand. I understand that the motion is being amended and that we are talking about the amendment to insert the words “commends the Cook Labor government’s leadership on issues facing Western Australia”. I do not really see how this contribution is any closer to that discussion than when we were called back to the substance of the motion.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. I will ignore the fact that you are probably canvassing my previous ruling. You will note that the last few words in your motion are —

... and should not, endure another term under Labor.

All the speakers on the government side have given evidence of why Western Australians could endure another term under Labor. There is no point of order.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further to the point of order, are we not debating the amendment that the Treasurer put forward?

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I understand what the Leader of the Opposition is saying, but it goes to the issue of leadership, which I think all those members have covered.

*Debate Resumed*

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** I will continue on my theme, because I think it is an important one. If the opposition wants to critique our government under Premier Cook, it also has to endure a bit of a spotlight, focus and attention on its own record. Of course, the record of members opposite, both when they were in government for eight and a half years and now in opposition, has been absolutely woeful. I think the public know that. We know it in here. Our job is to highlight it. The opposition invests \$2 in *The West Australian* to give it a strategy to bring into this place. That is pathetic. The opposition needs to do some work and come up with some policies. Perhaps it might then be taken seriously by the Western Australian public.

Until members opposite do that, I think we are right to be critical of them in government. We are in office and we have so much to be proud of, particularly under this Premier. I have not even talked about the national agreements on housing or skills that we announced this year, or the infrastructure billions that have been secured under the Labor government, and particularly under the Cook premiership.

*Division*

Amendment (deletion of words) put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms A.E. Kent) casting her vote with the ayes, with the following result —

**Extract from Hansard**  
[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 17 October 2023]  
p5547c-5556a

Mr Shane Love; Ms Libby Mettam; Dr David Honey; Mr Roger Cook; Ms Rita Saffioti; Ms Simone McGurk

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Ayes (47)

Mr S.N. Aubrey	Ms K.E. Giddens	Mrs M.R. Marshall	Ms R. Saffioti
Mr G. Baker	Ms M.J. Hammat	Ms S.F. McGurk	Mr D.A.E. Scaife
Ms L.L. Baker	Ms J.L. Hanns	Mr D.R. Michael	Ms J.J. Shaw
Ms H.M. Beazley	Mr T.J. Healy	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr M. Hughes	Mr S.A. Millman	Dr K. Stratton
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Mr H.T. Jones	Ms L.A. Munday	Mr D.A. Templeman
Ms C.M. Collins	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Ms C.M. Tonkin
Mr R.H. Cook	Ms E.J. Kelsbie	Mr P. Papalia	Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms L. Dalton	Ms A.E. Kent	Mr D.T. Punch	Ms S.E. Winton
Ms D.G. D'Anna	Dr J. Krishnan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr S.J. Price ( <i>Teller</i> )
Mr M.J. Folkard	Mr P. Lilburne	Ms M.M. Quirk	

Noes (6)

Ms M.J. Davies	Mr R.S. Love	Mr P.J. Rundle
Dr D.J. Honey	Ms L. Mettam	Ms M. Beard ( <i>Teller</i> )

Amendment thus passed.

Amendment (insertion of words) put and passed.

*Motion, as Amended*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent):** The question now is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

*Division*

Question put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms A.E. Kent) casting her vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (47)

Mr S.N. Aubrey	Ms K.E. Giddens	Mrs M.R. Marshall	Ms R. Saffioti
Mr G. Baker	Ms M.J. Hammat	Ms S.F. McGurk	Mr D.A.E. Scaife
Ms L.L. Baker	Ms J.L. Hanns	Mr D.R. Michael	Ms J.J. Shaw
Ms H.M. Beazley	Mr T.J. Healy	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
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Ms D.G. D'Anna	Dr J. Krishnan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr S.J. Price ( <i>Teller</i> )
Mr M.J. Folkard	Mr P. Lilburne	Ms M.M. Quirk	

Noes (6)

Ms M.J. Davies	Mr R.S. Love	Mr P.J. Rundle
Dr D.J. Honey	Ms L. Mettam	Ms M. Beard ( <i>Teller</i> )

Question thus passed.