

Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Colin Barnett; Ms Rita Saffioti; Acting Speaker; Ms Margaret Quirk; Ms Janine Freeman

APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) RECURRENT 2011–12 BILL 2011
APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) CAPITAL 2011–12 BILL 2011

Estimates Committees A and B Reports and Minutes — Presentation

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Leader of the House) [4.09 pm]: Madam Acting Speaker (Ms A.R. Mitchell), I seek your indulgence for a moment, because we are trying to locate the Deputy Speaker who will be delivering the budget estimates reports.

Mr M. McGowan: Do you want me to take a point of order?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, not yet anyway—perhaps in about half an hour!

Mr M. McGowan: He's not hard to see. You'll be able to see him from space at the moment!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Fortunately, Madam Acting Speaker, he has now arrived and I am sure he will be moving a motion as we get on to order of the day 1.

MR M.W. SUTHERLAND (Mount Lawley — Deputy Speaker) [4.10 pm]: I present to the Legislative Assembly the reports and minutes of Estimates Committees A and B.

[See papers 3478 and 3479.]

Estimates Committee A Report — Adoption

Mr M.W. SUTHERLAND: I move —

That the report of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

I thank the Speaker, the Acting Speakers, the Clerk and the chamber staff for the excellent assistance they gave to Estimates Committee A over the three days of 31 May, 1 June and 2 June. As members know, the sitting times were long and everybody excelled in the jobs that they had to do over that three-day period. Fortunately, the estimates hearings went off without hitch, although I think there are ways in which we could streamline them. Hopefully, we will be looking into that in the near future. I would say that all in all, the estimates went off very well this year.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham) [4.11 pm]: I will say a few words about the estimates committee process. I thank the Deputy Speaker for his comprehensive analysis of the estimates process. Indeed, he is making himself easy to find around the building at the moment. That is a good thing because sometimes the Leader of the House has difficulty finding him! However, I see that, like a child in a shopping centre, if we dress them in a certain way, we can always find them if they get lost—and the Deputy Speaker is in that category! I assume the Liberal Party must have got together with the Deputy Speaker to assist him with his wardrobe so that he could be found at all times. That is a good thing because it is an important role for the speaker who commences this debate!

I want to talk about the estimates committee process. It is a tough week for members, for ministers and for senior public servants. It is demanding and there is a lot of expectation, particularly on ministers and on their relevant shadows. It is also an important week for the Parliament, as it is a time for members to elicit a great deal of information that they otherwise would not be able to acquire. That intensive period of questioning is, therefore, a good thing for government, for accountability and for transparency, as we are able to elicit all sorts of information from ministers, to ask questions of public servants and to get senior public servants to assist ministers and so forth. It is a very good period for getting maximum information out there into the community, some of which is handy, some of which is useful and some of which is completely banal. In any event, it is a good period for getting that information out and is a worthwhile part of the parliamentary year.

I have a few concerns about the estimates committee process and I will start with one. First of all, it goes for only three days in one week. I have a recollection of earlier occasions when it went for four days and there was a greater opportunity for getting information from people. Some people might say the process already goes for too long. I would say to members that perhaps an additional day would allow for greater scrutiny of ministers and for the acquisition of a greater amount of information than was acquired during the recent estimates period, and I will explain why.

I was given the estimates committee roster for Estimates Committees A and B. Committee A sits in this chamber. Committee B sits in the other place in the interesting seats there that members can roll around the room in—expensive seats, I might add. I was rostered to Estimates Committee B on the first day, 31 May, and I noted a couple of things. First of all, I noted that the Premier's timetable in this chamber overlapped with that of the Minister for Regional Development in the other place. I would have liked to ask questions of the Premier, who is also the Minister for State Development, but I am also shadow Minister for Regional Development. As everyone

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knows, a member cannot be in two places at once. The timetable clash meant that there was insufficient opportunity for members to question the most important person in the state, the Premier, and did not allow members, particularly his shadow in one or two portfolios, to be here to question him because they were required in the other place.

The second point I will note—this is a very significant point—is that the Premier’s estimates hearing was scheduled to commence at two o’clock in the afternoon. I would have thought that the Premier’s estimates hearing was the most important of all the ministers’ estimates hearings. It is the one that the public watches most carefully. It was scheduled to commence at two o’clock in the afternoon and to go to 6.00 pm. The hearing in that period comprised the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Public Sector Commission, the Governor’s Establishment, the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal, the Western Australian Electoral Commission and the Department of State Development; that is, a hearing from six major agencies all contained within a four-hour period. The estimates hearing of another minister—for instance the Minister for Health combined with Tourism—commenced on Wednesday at 9.00 am and went through until 5.00 pm. The hearing of the Minister for Transport combined with Housing started at 9.00 am and went through until 3.30 pm, and the hearing of the Attorney General combined with the Treasurer started at 9.00 am and went through until 6.00 pm.

Mr C.C. Porter: It was a great day!

Mr M. McGOWAN: In any event, it shows that the Treasurer has a bit more stamina than the Premier, because the Treasurer was prepared to be there all day and answer all the questions. However, the Premier was prepared to be there for only four hours starting at 2.00 pm and finishing at 6.00 pm. The first point is that the Premier should allow more time for questioning. The Premier is an important person. All the agencies for which he has responsibility deserve a greater amount of time for questioning. They certainly deserve as much time for questioning as the agencies for which the Treasurer and Attorney General is responsible; certainly as much time as the agencies for which the Minister for Health combined with Tourism is responsible; and certainly as much time as the agencies for which the Minister for Transport combined with Housing is responsible. Those three ministers—Ministers Buswell, Porter and Hames—allowed sufficient time for extensive questioning; whereas the Premier allowed only that four-hour period. I thought the Premier would have allowed greater time than that. I might be wrong, but I have a recollection that Geoff Gallop, as Premier, allowed a greater time for questioning than that period. I recall him sitting in this place for hour after hour answering questions. He loved it, I might add, and I do not think he saw it as an imposition. He loved being in this place answering those questions and was always available for that. Also, the Premier’s estimates hearing started at two o’clock in the afternoon. I would have thought the Premier’s estimates hearing should start at nine or 10 in the morning, as opposed to some time between two and six in the afternoon, because that is when he would get the greatest attention and coverage for what he has to say. I raise this matter now in the hope that it will be taken into account in the future. It would be a good thing if the Premier’s estimates hearing did not overlap that of another extremely senior minister, such as the Minister for Regional Development; secondly, that the hearing commences in the morning; and, thirdly, that a greater time than the four hours he provided be available for the Premier to answer questions. I therefore believe those three points should be taken account of in the future.

Also, I believe an additional day should be allocated for the estimates hearings. If we want to get everything in that should be gotten in, there should be additional time. We had time in the estimates process for a number of off-budget agencies—public, non-financial corporations. We had time for the Rottneest Island Authority, the Western Australian Land Authority, the Water Corporation, some ports, the Public Transport Authority and the energy utilities. It might have been an opportune time to ask questions of a range of others, such as Racing and Wagering Western Australia, some of the redevelopment authorities, the Insurance Commission of Western Australia, RiskCover, and the agency that runs Keystart home loans. We did not have the opportunity to question any of those, and it might have been an opportune time, had there been sufficient time—perhaps another day—to enable members to question each of those agencies. As it was, I think some of the public non-financial corporations, such as some of the port authorities, unfortunately truncated some of the consideration of other portfolios. In the case of the Minister for Transport combined with the Minister for Housing, the Transport portfolio, Main Roads Western Australia and the Housing Authority received less time than the four port authorities namely, Bunbury, Port Hedland, Geraldton and Esperance. It might have been better to have provided additional time—as I said, an additional day—which would have allowed for greater scrutiny of the major parts of the portfolios rather than the minor parts. As a shadow minister I was a little frustrated because I had lots of questions and insufficient opportunity to ask them.

Another issue that comes to mind is the conduct, sometimes, of some government backbenchers. As I recall, back in 2001—it probably happened in 1993 as well—government backbenchers in their zealously —

Mr J.E. McGrath: Zeal.

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Mr M. McGOWAN: Their zeal. I have been corrected on English by the member for South Perth! Oh my God! Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Things are going downhill! The next thing I know, the member for Mount Lawley will be advising me on fashion!

Mr J.E. McGrath: You invented a word; you can't invent words!

Mr P.B. Watson: I used to read your articles in the paper, member for South Perth; and, remember, it's on disc!

Mr M. McGOWAN: I remember back in 2001—perhaps it also happened in 1983 and 1993—government backbenchers, in their zeal, with the assistance of ministerial staffers, had their sets of questions ready to ask ministers, to help out and make sure the minister could handle it.

Mr J.E. McGrath: And you blokes didn't do that? Bob Kucera was a champion at it! He used to speak for half an hour on dorothea dixers; we were very frustrated.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The member for South Perth is always frustrated!

Mr J.E. McGrath: I remember the member for Hillarys walked out of the chamber one day in disgust because we could not ask a question. You had them all lined up!

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will raise that again, if members like! I was Minister for Tourism, and I remember him storming out and winking at me as he went. He said, "This is an outrage", as he ran out and did some radio!

Mr R.F. Johnson: Disgraceful! Absolutely disgraceful conduct!

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was; it was disgraceful conduct on the member's behalf!

The point I was going to make is that I think it is time, after a couple of years in government, for that unnecessary zeal on the part of backbenchers to dissipate. As I recall, under the former government it dissipated over time and ministers were basically left on their own and government backbenchers sat there, not as interested as they were in the early years, which gave the opposition an opportunity to ask questions. Of course, as time goes by ministers become more familiar with their portfolios and it becomes an easier process for them as well. I would have thought that it might have been time for that zeal on the part of some backbenchers to dissipate. I notice that the member for South Perth did not have a great deal of zeal; he was not part of the problem!

Mr C.C. Porter: He was zeal-less!

Mr M. McGOWAN: Yes, he was zeal-less during the proceedings, and at times I wondered who was snoring to my left—the member for Kalgoorlie or the member for South Perth! But the member for North West was always there with his set of questions, ready to ask them, and I thought perhaps he might have given it a rest, to be honest, and given the opposition, particularly shadow ministers, a greater opportunity to ask questions.

In effect, I think the estimates hearings is a process by which the opposition asks government ministers or the Premier significant questions to elicit information, often for political purposes—that is the nature of politics—sometimes for an electorate purpose or sometimes just because they are interested in a particular issue. I think that process is sometimes a little frustrated by some of those behaviours.

Mr C.C. Porter: Sorry; are you suggesting four days of estimates?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Yes.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: That's what we had for years.

Mr C.C. Porter: I am not being picky, but did you ever have four days?

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was four days.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Absolutely.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was four days. Cabinet sat on a Monday, and it went through till Friday.

Mr R.F. Johnson: No, you actually had four and a half days. You had Friday mornings—not Friday afternoons—but the evenings were shorter.

Mr M. McGOWAN: In any event, I will not repeat my argument of 13 minutes—I know it can become tedious!

Mr R.F. Johnson: I made a similar speech to the one you are making today on various occasions when I was occupying your seat.

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Mr M. McGOWAN: But not as well!

Mr R.F. Johnson: Obviously, not as well!

Mr J.E. McGrath: Can I interject, please? I think you must have made this speech last year, because I recall getting to my feet—I will not do it this time—and making the point, in fairness to the Premier, that when we were elected and when the first budget estimates hearings were being held, the Premier said that budget estimates are for the opposition. He said we could ask some questions, but to remember that it is opposition time. Maybe the backbenchers did become a little overzealous, but the Premier has always said that because he believes in the parliamentary process.

Mr P.B. Watson: You obviously don't take any notice of your friends!

Mr J.E. McGrath: Some members of our party room believe that maybe it should just be for the opposition, and we could have the week off and leave the ministers in this place to face the music!

Mr C.C. Porter: Imagine our backbenchers thinking that!

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is an excellent idea! I would hate the press to think that we have a week off; of course, we are out working hard in our electorates.

Mr C.C. Porter: Yes, we are; my apologies, yes.

Mr J.E. McGrath: You're right, actually.

Mr M. McGOWAN: We are out working hard in our electorates, member for South Perth. The member for South Perth might need a bit more re-education by the Premier!

I do not think it would be possible for the estimates hearings to be for the opposition only, simply because this is a democratic chamber and people can come in and say what they want, but I think there needs to be a bit of an understanding that they are predominantly for the opposition. Sometimes a government backbencher might have a significant issue in their electorate that they want to raise because they cannot get an answer any other way, and estimates is the one time that they can get the minister on the record and they can ask the question. Of course, ministers hate that, because they generally know the question and the answer and they do not want to answer it, but it gives government backbenchers, particularly those who may have been around a while and are not particularly happy—grumpy—and have an issue in their electorate, the chance to ask the question. I am not referring to anyone in particular, member for South Perth, but it gives them the opportunity to come in and do that. I do not know if I said the same thing last year.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Similar!

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is unusual for speeches to not be original in this place, I know, but it strikes me that an extra day would allow more time for the significant agencies and less time for the smaller agencies. Also, the Premier should do a proper day of estimates; he should start in the morning and not overlap other significant ministers, so that shadow ministers to his portfolios can ask questions. That would be an appropriate way to go about it.

I would like to thank the Chairmen—by and large I think they did a good job. I particularly acknowledge the member for Albany who, when he was in the chair, dealt appallingly harshly with the member for Mandurah. He asked him to leave the chamber, and when I asked whether the member for Mandurah had been named, the member for Albany said he had not; the member for Albany had just asked him to leave and the member for Mandurah complied.

Mr R.F. Johnson: We haven't seen him since!

Mr P.B. Watson: His wife is having a baby.

Mr M. McGOWAN: His wife is in confinement—is that the correct term, member for South Perth?

Mr J.E. McGrath: Yes.

Mr M. McGOWAN: His wife is in confinement, or some such thing, at the moment, or in coming days, so he has a pair for a few hours, and then no doubt he will be back. The chairs have a bit of a difficult job, but I appreciate that as time passes they might understand that the estimates hearings are predominantly for the opposition. Ministers who are on top of their game should find it pretty easy, to be honest. Ministers who know their stuff should find estimates fairly easy to handle.

One thing I found disturbing and a bit disappointing was that sometimes members asked for supplementary information and it was denied. The Minister for Transport; Housing was particularly ruthless in denying that sort

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of information. In my experience, the Minister for Regional Development also did the same. Supplementary information is a good way to get information we would otherwise get via a question on notice because it is quicker and more efficient. Therefore, I did not appreciate being denied the opportunity to get answers via supplementary information. I will raise one example in particular. I was not in the committee, but the Leader of the Opposition asked the Premier about the salary package for Arthur—I mean, Dixie Marshall. I was thinking about people who filibustered in estimates and Arthur Marshall came to mind! He must have some sort of world record on filibustering in estimates. However, the Leader of the Opposition asked what the salary package is for Dixie Marshall in the Premier's office. Naturally, there is some public interest in that because of the issue of government profligacy and the expenditure on some of the staff in the Premier's office. Naturally, people want to know what Dixie is being paid to work for the Premier. The Premier refused to answer the question and said, "I'm not answering it; ask me once she's in the role." Obviously, she has received some indication of what she will be paid; otherwise, if the Premier offered her a job and said, "The job is yours, we will negotiate your pay later", he would provide her with a blank cheque for what she might be paid. That is not how it would have been done. All I say to the government and the Premier is that ministers should answer those sorts of questions. The Premier will eventually have to answer that particular question. Estimates is a time for getting information out there and it would have been a good time to answer that question. I ask that the ministers, including the Premier, who declined to provide supplementary information and refused to answer questions, to in future bear in mind that estimates runs a lot more smoothly if those financial questions about the operations of government are answered.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [4.31 pm]: Unsurprisingly, I concur with the member for Rockingham's remarks. The fact of the matter is that the estimates hearings used to take place over a longer period, not only when we were in government, but also, I think, prior to that. Estimates hearings were held over a longer time and ministers made themselves available for more hours than this government's ministers made themselves available. In fact, I think it is probably fair to say that this was the least number of hours of estimates hearings that any government had.

Mr R.F. Johnson: That's not true.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Can the Leader of the House name a government that has had fewer hours of estimates hearings in the Assembly than the Barnett government?

Mr R.F. Johnson: I think you'll find that the last year that you were in government, it was the same.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: No, I do not think that the Leader of the House will find that.

Mr R.F. Johnson: The programs were the same; I'll confirm that.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Perhaps we can check that out. I think it is a turn for the worse. I well remember that about 10 or 12 years ago we used to sit on Thursday night and come in Friday morning. Although that has not occurred for some years, I think that was a good tradition and we had a more thorough approach to ministers answering questions. I think it is also true to say that the responses from various ministers in their various portfolio areas differed in their usefulness to committee members. Some ministers were prepared to answer quite detailed questions and to subject themselves and their portfolio areas to considerable scrutiny. However, I noted that other ministers, not just at the estimates committee hearings that I attended but some of the estimates committee hearings that I watched via the internet and TV, were not willing to answer questions, were not willing to let their staff answer questions and were not willing for the answers to those questions to be provided by way of supplementary information. In fact, a number of ministers repeatedly said, "Put your question on notice." The estimates process is about getting those answers for not only our political purposes but also the purpose of informing our electorates and the general Western Australian community about the details. Although in recent years we have been told that the budget papers are more informative and clearer, my impression is that the budget papers in fact cover even less each year, so there is a greater requirement to ask questions to find out the details because, necessarily, the budget papers are a broad brush approach and the actual details for programs within portfolio areas are not specified in the budget papers themselves. Therefore, estimates should be a process by which members of Parliament can ask on behalf of the community for those detailed areas of expenditure.

I do not intend to go through a lot of examples today, but I will give one example from Estimates Committee A during which I asked some questions about the Public Transport Authority. The Public Transport Authority's division had the line item "Accommodation". I just put on the record that I am referring to supplementary information that I requested and I certainly commend the minister for providing me the answer by way of supplementary information. I also put on the record that the Minister for Transport was willing to provide supplementary information and did not fob me off with the answer, "Put it on notice." For the record, when ministers fob members off with "Put it on notice", that means that we must wait a week until it gets put on the

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notice paper and then wait at least two weeks for an answer. Therefore, it is generally the best part of a month before we receive an answer. A competent minister with a competent office should be able to provide supplementary information. The example I give uses the transport portfolio and highlights how unclear the budget papers are. I asked about the issue of the Public Transport Authority's accommodation expenses. Supplementary information A43 states —

Question: Mrs M H Roberts asked the Minister why PTA accommodation expenses went up between 2009–10 and 2010–11?

I asked that question because the 2009–10 actual amount for accommodation expenses for the Public Transport Authority was \$18.544 million, yet the 2010–11 estimated actual is \$27.4 million. Off the top of my head, that is a more than 50 per cent increase in accommodation expenses. Had the Public Transport Authority moved offices or got new offices? What has happened? Why would its accommodation costs go up so dramatically? The answer I got is quite extraordinary. It states —

The Budget Papers indicate a \$8,856,000 increase in “Accommodation” expenses between the 2009–10 Actual and the 2010–11 Budget. To put this into perspective the following additional information is provided.

...

The first point to note is that the Budget amount has not materially increased from the 2009–10 Budget.

In other words, there was a bigger budgeted amount in 2009–10, but the PTA spent only \$18 million. The answer continues —

Secondly it is important to understand that the “Accommodation” expense grouping in the 2011/12 Budget papers incorporates all power (electricity) costs incurred by Public Transport Authority (PTA). The outcome of this is that the power costs associated with running the urban passenger rail network (about \$17.3 million of the 2009–10 budget of \$24.381 million) are included in the grouping.

In other words, the whole power cost of running the urban passenger rail network is included in the accommodation expenses of the Public Transport Authority. I do not believe the average person would think that that would be the case. For every other agency and department, the accommodation expenses are generally that—the costs of accommodating the agency or department. They are primarily made up of rent or lease payments and other costs that would normally be associated with the word “accommodation”. It appears that the Public Transport Authority has included in its “accommodation expenses” the cost of power for the urban passenger rail network. I think that is pretty interesting, particularly given the massive increases in electricity under this government. If someone were a little suspicious, they might think that the government was trying to hide this cost; otherwise, why would it be buried within the accommodation expenses or in that grouping? The answer from the minister goes on to say —

In 2009–10, anticipated increases in power costs did not eventuate and as a result the “Accommodation” expense grouping showed an Actual of \$18,544,000, some \$8,856,000 under Budget.

There has been no material increase in office accommodation utilised by PTA.

I will repeat that —

There has been no material increase in office accommodation utilised by PTA.

I asked a question thinking, somewhat naively, as it turns out, that the accommodation expenses for the PTA related just to its accommodation expenses, but now I have found that other things are buried within that figure. What I would say to Parliament is that that is part of what the estimates process is about. It is about looking behind the figures that are given in the head line items within the budget papers. The Minister for Transport concludes his response in the supplementary information by saying —

The inclusion of electricity costs consumed on the urban passenger rail network in the “Accommodation” expense grouping does distort this grouping and I have asked PTA to raise this issue with the Department of Treasury and Finance.

The Minister for Transport, the former Treasurer, says that including electricity costs for the Perth urban passenger rail network under the accommodation expenses for the Public Transport Authority does distort the grouping. In other words, it does not belong there, it should not be there and it does not indicate any transparency or clarity in the budget process and what lies behind it. I disagree most strongly with people who say that estimates hearings are a waste of time or that there should be less time rather than more time for delving behind the line items. The estimates committee process is one of the most important accountability processes in

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Parliament. I have highlighted just one example this afternoon, but I know that many of my colleagues have gone through the areas of the budget papers that they have an interest in and have come up with other examples of things in line items that were not anticipated. I also note that many of my colleagues took the opportunity to ask about some very necessary services for their constituents and about the funding of those services, particularly for people in hardship and when there were cuts to the budget. It is the opposition's job to highlight those cuts to the budget. It is the opposition's job to highlight when decisions of government that are made as part of the budget process impact adversely on any members of the community in Western Australia.

MR P.B. WATSON (Albany) [4.44 pm]: I agree with the member for Rockingham that there is not enough time for estimates hearings. Before I saw the schedule for the estimates hearings, I had a lot of questions about Racing and Wagering Western Australia that concerned my electorate. Now I will have to put my questions on notice, and its representatives will not be in the same room to answer them. I also had questions about the Albany Port Authority, which was one of the few port authorities that were not on the schedule. I think it is imperative that local members have access to all these agencies. As has been said by the member for Rockingham, estimates used to go for three and a half or four days. I remember when the government was in opposition and the then Minister for Planning and Infrastructure was allocated six hours and the opposition ran out of questions after two and a half hours. It is a little different now; opposition members are a little more determined to get to the bottom of questions.

Mr J.E. McGrath: You're much better in opposition than we were!

Mr P.B. WATSON: The member for South Perth has made quite a few interjections, so I am sure that he will get up and speak.

Mr J.E. McGrath: I'll talk forever.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes, but the difference is that members on this side talk commonsense.

I would like to thank the chairmen of the committees.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr P.B. WATSON: It was an interesting story about the member for Mandurah. He was in a report on the front page of his local paper because he was ejected from the chamber by me. I would like to put the true spin on it. When I was the chairman, he was sulking in the corner because no-one would give him a question. He asked me whether he was on the list. The previous chairman had put him at the bottom of the page, but he was not on the list. I said that I would try to fit him in. So when I did fit him in, a few people got upset and then he went berserk. The member for Mandurah got his point across. I do not necessarily think that an estimates hearing is the right place to do that. It puts the chairman in a difficult position. I was in the same position when the Leader of the House had his dummy spit in estimates B a few years ago. I can remember him storming out after three calls to order and saying that it was a disgrace. Now he sits on the other side of the house and applauds the same process.

Mr M. McGowan: People behaving badly in Parliament would be terrible!

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes, it would be, member for Rockingham.

I think the estimates hearings went very well. I would like to thank all the staff. When members are in the chair, they rely a lot on their offiders. I thought the staff did a tremendous job. They were here until late at night, as were the chairmen. I agree with the member for Rockingham; we should extend the time. Members of Parliament should have a chance to question all agencies and departments on issues that affect their electorates.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Leader of the House) [4.48 pm]: I promised to provide a bit more detail. I think the member for Rockingham and the member for Midland have misled the house with the number of hours and days that the budget estimates hearings sat for this year and with the number of hours that the Premier has sat in estimates hearings. All Premiers have sat in estimates hearings for four hours. That includes Geoff Gallop, Alan Carpenter and the current Premier.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: But no-one liked it as much as Geoff Gallop did. He really did enjoy it.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: We do not give a stuff whether he enjoyed it. We are trying to get the truth, and that is the truth.

Mr M. McGowan: Was he also Minister for State Development?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That was up to you guys! The Premier sat for four hours during every budget estimates hearing. We hear the opposition bleating about needing an extra day; we did have an extra day.

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Mrs M.H. Roberts: That's what you used to say!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No; I never said that. I am sure I never said that! I will provide members with figures for the number of budget estimates sitting hours over the past few years. This year it was 64.5 hours; last year, 64 hours; 2009, 64 hours; 2008, 65 hours—we sat an extra half an hour that day; 2007, 64 hours; 2006, 63 hours, and in that year we sat on the Monday afternoon; 2005, 64 hours—we also sat on a Friday morning that year; 2004, 65 hours, and that year also included a Friday morning sitting. The number of hours has basically been the same year after year. If my memory serves me right, we sat one year on a Monday afternoon and a Friday morning at the request of the then government because the Labor Party had had a booze-up one night! I do not think we sat on the Tuesday or Wednesday night on those occasions.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: That doesn't sound like the Labor Party! Next thing you'll be saying we went for a Chinese meal!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Well, I think you did! I think you may well have done! It took precedence over budget estimates!

I am saying that there was usually a reason for the Labor Party, when in government, wanting to sit on a Friday morning or a Monday afternoon. It was not our prerogative in opposition, it was the Labor Party's prerogative in government, and that is what it chose. But the total number of sitting hours was no different from the number of sitting hours this year, last year or the year before.

Mr J.E. McGrath: The member for Rockingham's maths are not that good!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I think his maths are pretty good, member for South Perth; I think he just likes to mislead the house sometimes during his daily attacks on the government. However, I believe that the truth is necessary in this place, and the only reason I stand today is to correct the record of the members for Rockingham and Midland.

I suspect that we will have the same argument next year —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Only if you're here!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will be here; do not worry! We will have the same argument next year, but it is the same every year. Those opposite say such things when in opposition, and governments say the sorts of things I am saying today. The truth of it is that we have sat the same number of hours, give or take half an hour or so, every year for the past 10 years. We do not sit on Fridays because it is inconvenient for a lot of members—particularly country members, who like to get back to their electorates. Occasionally, we have sat on a Friday and, very rarely, on a Monday afternoon; in fact, I can remember only one year in which we sat on a Monday afternoon, and that was in 2006. Obviously the Labor government of the day had its own reasons for doing that.

The truth is now out there, and the *Hansard* record has corrected what was said by the manager of opposition business and the member for Midland. The member for Albany has chaired many budget estimates hearings, both during our government and when the opposition was in government. I seem to recall that he very rarely looked in my direction!

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston) [4.53 pm]: I would like to contribute to this debate, and I agree with many earlier speakers that the time factor is a major issue. An idea that should be considered for estimates hearings is that there be no dorothy dixers. When a budget is being examined and pulled apart, I do not see the purpose of dorothy dixers. This occurs on both sides —

Mr R.F. Johnson: You asked them when you first came into this place!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That is what I am saying; the process is flawed. If ministers need protection, that is not the way to do it. That is what I am seeing; as soon as a minister gets a really tough question, the next question is a —

Mr R.F. Johnson: I don't think on either side it's about protection; I think it's to try and ensure that the minister gets some good news out, because governments don't expect oppositions to ask questions that can be responded to in a good news way.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It certainly could be seen that way, but I also have seen questions being used to protect ministers who are not quite across their portfolios. I think that is the wrong way to go. A large amount of time is wasted going over what has already been covered in Parliament, in many cases, such as announcements that have already been made by the minister concerned. Government backbenchers then like to give their local press releases. I have no problems with members trying to do that, but when we talk about the processes of Parliament, and how long, slow and tedious they are, this is an area that could be tidied up. We could cut to the chase far more quickly and ensure that we get the answers we want.

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I do not think there has been a more embarrassing moment for me in Parliament than my first estimates hearings. We all lined up with our little folders, all the same colour, and we all looked like Wombles as we came through the door. The then opposition had a field day, which embarrassed me and all my colleagues immensely! It is something that I certainly remember very, very well. There are not many of us left around here from that time in 2001!

We need extra time for the estimates hearings. One might start to drill down on a budget item, but other members will want to take their turn to ask questions and will not be concerned about what someone is trying to find out about in-depth. Sure, we can put questions on notice for supplementary information, but if one does not have enough time to get to the question in the first place, it can be very difficult. One has to go back, as the member for Albany said, for questions on notice, which are also limited to some degree. If we are talking about reform in this house, that is one change that could be made. Let ministers answer questions about the budget in a straightforward and meaningful way, so that we can drill down on issues without being interrupted by dorothea dixers.

I would like to raise a couple of other little issues. I have previously written to the Auditor General about agencies such as the Forest Products Commission having only one page in the budget papers. When one asks a question, one is told that it is not in the budget papers, and is referred back to the annual report. I believe it is incumbent on all parts of government to provide a proper report that can be seen in the budget papers. It will then be available in one place. The way that is handled now is time consuming, and that all adds up. The Auditor General agreed and said that that change should be made, but that there is no compulsion on the government for the total budget to appear in the budget papers. That belittles Parliament to some degree, and allows some of the finer detail to be hidden away in agency annual reports. One has to put out a statement of intent, and I do not believe that that is good enough for this house. It is very poor form. Even though I have chipped the same group every year, I think they get a thrill out of watching my face go red in frustration at having only one page each year. I was hopeful that this year, after talking to the Auditor General, something would be done, but nothing has been done.

Another area I am very concerned about is the drift in the time factor. The first couple of groupings get most of the time, then all of a sudden we run out of time. I have seen large numbers of advisers from the development commissions sitting up the back of the chamber, all primed up, and then having only 15 minutes to go through the development commissions. We could not get any real sense of those agencies because the questions and answers were run through too quickly. That wastes the time of staff and executive officers. It is extraordinary to think that many of them had travelled down from as far as Carnarvon and Port Hedland, at great cost to the community and to the government, and did not answer any questions. I think that needs to be looked at. The development commissions were not allocated enough time for members to ask questions to determine how they could be made better and to examine what is going on with them. That is an area of the estimates committee process that must be looked at. I estimate that the development commissions brought with them about 15 or 20 staff, of whom only three spoke. We talk about cost savings. Some of those people probably spent several days, if not weeks, getting across all the detail of the commissions. They probably thought it was a long way to go to get a cup of coffee in the strangers' bar. The Premier should look at tidying up the system to enable those people to be cross-examined in the interest of open and accountable government. We did not see that occur in this case.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Development commissions might not be the best example to use, but I have said on previous occasions that I believe there is a case for having statutory organisations involved in a rolling program of accountability throughout the year. It does all get compressed during the estimates week.

Mr E.S. Ripper: The Public Accounts Committee could do that.

Mr C.J. Barnett: You could have something like that. That is possible.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I thank the Premier. I am making the observation that we are engaging in a process that is not only costly, but also fruitless. It is pleasing to hear that some thought has been given to how the estimates committee hearings are conducted and how they could be done differently. During the hearing into the South West Development Commission I got to ask only two questions. Although I would have liked to have asked others, I was stifled. The same was the case for the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor. The member for Albany, who has left the chamber, said the same thing. Questions were asked of Racing and Wagering Western Australia and other statutory bodies, but we were unable to ask the minister more questions about what was happening because of the lack of time. Many members waited for a question but missed the call because time ran out after another member jumped up and asked a supplementary question to the supplementary question. The estimates committee process can be improved in many ways and be made far more clear, precise and cost-effective than the way it is run now. I hope that the Leader of the House and the Treasurer are listening so that

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next year, if the Treasurer is still in the same portfolio, he and the Leader of the House can ensure that the process is tidied up.

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont — Leader of the Opposition) [5.02 pm]: I want to raise a small issue. I asked the Premier a perfectly reasonable question in the estimates committee but he refused to provide the information. I hope he will provide that information publicly as soon as possible. My question was about the salary package of the government's new chief spin doctor, Dixie Marshall.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Don't be disrespectful. The poor woman has not started yet.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: It is a high-profile appointment. Like a lot of people in Perth, I like Dixie Marshall, but I think the public is entitled to know what package she is being employed under. It is taxpayers' money after all. It was very disappointing that the Premier did not and would not provide that information in the estimates committee. I would like to seek an undertaking from the Premier about when he will provide that information. I hope we will not have to use question time to get it. When will the Premier provide that information?

Mr C.J. Barnett: This government introduced a system of regular reporting on ministerial staff on a six-monthly basis. No government has done that before, but we are doing it every six months. I am not sensitive about the contract.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: When will Ms Marshall's contract be finalised?

Mr C.J. Barnett: It has been finalised but she has not been appointed yet; she has not started her duties.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Has the government decided how much she will be paid?

Mr C.J. Barnett: She has signed the contract by now.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: In which case the Premier is in a position to reveal it.

Mr C.J. Barnett: No, because she is not employed yet. I will not reveal information about people until they become employed.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: When does she start?

Mr C.J. Barnett: She starts next week; it's not long to wait. You'll notice!

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I think the Premier might have realised that when he was away visiting the Queen, his team did not perform very well. Am I to conclude from the Premier's remarks that if we were to ask a question during question time next week, he would be able to answer my question about Dixie Marshall's contract because at that stage she would have started her employment?

Mr C.J. Barnett: If you want to ask a question, ask it. Take your chances. I will not coach you on which questions to ask.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: How accountable and sensitive the Premier is to the needs of, not the Leader of the Opposition and the opposition, but the people of Western Australia and how their money is being spent!

Mr C.J. Barnett: Not one member of the public has contacted either me or my office asking what we are paying Dixie Marshall. Not a single person. No-one out there gives a toss.

Mr P. Papalia: Why are you so touchy? What do you know?

Mr C.J. Barnett: I am not touchy. I actually respect the private affairs of individuals. That's something you might want to think about.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: We know that Dixie Marshall has been employed and that her contract has been signed. We know also that a decision has been made about what her salary package is and that she starts next week.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: And we know that the Premier knows how much she will be paid.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: That is right. The only thing we do not know is the figure of the package. What we do know is that the Premier has said that when she is appointed, he might tell us. He told us to ask him a question and see how we go. What sort of an attitude is that to accountability? That is basic information that should be revealed. Let us hope it is not \$349 000, which is the salary package for Mr Pontifex. Let us hope it is not the daily payment Mr Wedgwood is getting through his company. Let us hope the salary package figure will stand up to public scrutiny. I wanted to raise that issue because it was the most egregious example of the Premier not answering questions during the estimates hearings.

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I will raise another issue. The Premier has been remarkably secretive about the Oakajee port project. He has not responded to opposition questions about the cost of that project, despite the fact that there has been incessant press speculation about the cost blow-outs of the project. If the project was entirely a private sector project, the only issue that the public would have is whether any cost blow-out would jeopardise the possibility of the port actually being built. However, the project is not entirely a private project; there is a state government commitment to building the common-user infrastructure. If the cost of the common-user infrastructure is blowing out, there will be pressure on the state government's commitment. The Premier said that the government would not spend a single cent beyond the \$339 million that it has committed. That does not actually deal with the issue, because if the common-user infrastructure costs more than two times \$339 million, taking into account the state and federal contributions, someone will have to pay and an offsetting arrangement will have to be made to service the payment made, if not by the government, then by the third party. If the government will not stump up the full cost of the common-user infrastructure, what is the validity of the government's argument that it has to spend money on the common-user infrastructure so that it is a government owned and controlled port and is not controlled by a Chinese or Japanese company? If that is the government's argument, it needs to say why full payment for the common-user infrastructure is not required. Part payment of the common-user infrastructure does not satisfy the government's rationale for the commitment to provide government funds for this project.

Another thing I will say about the Oakajee port project is that, in my view, the Premier should be careful about the extent of his public comments on the issue. We have heard him comment publicly on commercial matters. Those comments have had commercial implications for the various commercial parties involved, or potentially involved, with the project. It is not wise for a government to make statements that can potentially alarm investors, or potential investors, in a private sector project. The government has a responsibility to exercise some discretion and refrain from creating unnecessary uncertainty for the project that the government itself describes as a project of national economic significance.

We will be pursuing Oakajee-related issues. It is our responsibility to pursue those issues. We will pursue, for example, how certain the state is of getting the \$339 million federal contribution. My understanding is that contribution is conditional on a business case being submitted that is acceptable to the commonwealth. I am not actually certain whether that business case has been submitted or whether the business case is acceptable to the commonwealth.

Mr C.J. Barnett: It is due 30 June.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: It is due 30 June. We have not yet seen the business case go to the commonwealth. We have not yet seen the commonwealth response. Maybe the \$339 million from the commonwealth is still not certain. The Premier asked me whether I support public funding going into that project. No, I do not. I am on the public record as not supporting the federal contribution or the state contribution. I seek an extension, if one is available?

Mr R.F. Johnson: You cannot; this is an hour-long debate.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I am on the public record as not supporting either the state or federal contribution. It should be built by the private sector as proposed by Labor.

Point of Order

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I thought the Leader of the Opposition sought an extension.

Mr R.F. Johnson: There is an hour in total on this one; you would remember that.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.P. O'Gorman): This debate has a time limit of one hour in total. That is for both sides. That time has now expired.

Adoption Motion Resumed

Question put and passed.

Estimates Committee B Report — Adoption

MR M.W. SUTHERLAND (Mount Lawley — Deputy Speaker) [5.11 pm]: I move —

That the report of Estimates Committee B be adopted.

Firstly, I thank the member for Rockingham for his kind comments about my dress. Maybe he should also seek out a new outfitter!

I have listened to comments made by members about the estimates committee hearings, particularly those made by the member for Collie-Preston about people who sit here waiting to be asked questions. That matter was

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raised with the Procedure and Privileges Committee. Unfortunately, the prevailing view seems to be that these people should be at the disposal of Parliament for the time estimates are on and should be here to answer whatever questions. I agree that it is very wasteful to have people sitting outside waiting for many hours and perhaps then not even asked a question. I have discussed the matter with the Clerk and requested that certain matters be collated from other Parliaments so we know what other Parliaments do regarding estimates. There is room for improvement. Hopefully there will be a report brought to the committee shortly that sets out what happens in other jurisdictions and maybe we can streamline the process. This is an ongoing process. In this place, it seems that if things are done in a certain way for a number of years, there is great reluctance to change. That is always a problem. If a member comes up with suggestions, often the reason for not changing things is that it was always done like that in the past. We are looking at that issue, and hopefully some improvements will be made.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [5.13 pm]: I largely agree with the comments the member for Mount Lawley has made. The management of the various directors general and other chief executive officers who come here and are potentially not asked questions, or not given much time, and sit around and wait for hours is really a matter of management to be considered by each minister. Some ministers do it better than others. Some ministers seek advice from the opposition as to whether it has any questions for various agencies. It is true to say that we would have questions for all agencies as an opposition if time constraints did not apply. With a two or three-hour window to deal with a number of departments or agencies, decisions must be made about which agencies we want to investigate in detail. Choices are made between asking detailed questions about one department or agency and perhaps not asking questions about another, or whether just cursory questions are asked of some agencies.

With respect to Estimates Committee B, one area of concern to my electorate is the allocation of crosswalk attendants. There is currently a proposal to remove two crosswalk attendants in South Guildford. Children walking home from Guildford Primary School have no option but to cross the Helena River bridge. They cannot get to homes on the other side of Great Eastern Highway without crossing the road. Surveys have been done of the area. Local people told me that particular crossing has been staffed by a crosswalk attendant for at least 30 years. It is now proposed that that crossing be downgraded. Although investigations continue on the numbers of children crossing the road there, it is a very dangerous place even for an adult to cross. There are no alternatives for children living in one part of South Guildford who attend Guildford Primary School. The area has a lot of transport companies; therefore, a lot of trucks use that section of Great Eastern Highway. There is very little by way of traffic calming at that point, which means crosswalk attendants are needed.

I signal that is an area I will focus on more in the next couple of months to ensure that we do not lose crossing guards who have been in place for a long time. It would be a very mean-spirited government that removed the paltry funding for two crosswalk attendants on Great Eastern Highway if it put little children's lives at risk, which I am confident it would do if crosswalk attendants were not there. A crosswalk attendant was hit by a car in the area within the past couple of years. There have been other instances that indicate it is a very dangerous place to cross the road. However, a few children crossing the road at Guildford Primary School to get to their homes in South Guildford is not really the issue; the issue is that children need to cross the road there, and their lives will be in danger if the crossing is not staffed by a crosswalk attendant. My colleagues raised many issues during estimates committee hearings. I did not have the opportunity to participate in WA Police estimates, but I wanted to highlight that issue in the time available today.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham) [5.18 pm]: I will not keep the house long. We had a fairly full debate in Estimates Committee A. I want to respond to a couple of grievous attacks made upon me particularly by the Leader of the House, and also the opening remarks of the member for Mount Lawley who moved the motion and promptly left the house. I would like to respond to him, but he has thrown his grenade and departed the field of battle! He referred to my commentary upon his dress. I think he is a dapper gentleman, but he is wearing a camel-coloured jacket! I acknowledge the lovely purple shirt of the Acting Speaker (Mr A.P. O'Gorman). Standing order 39 states —

The Speaker may determine what dress is appropriate for members.

I ask the Speaker, in light of this serious debate, to look at whether camel-coloured coats are appropriate in Parliament, particularly in light of the Premier's remarks upon coming to office. One of the big issues when the Premier came to office was that dress standards of members of Parliament must be a key issue in Western Australia in this day and age!

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Whilst the member for Mount Lawley has thrown his grenade into the field of battle, I think the Speaker, in determining what dress is appropriate, should take into account what the Premier had to say. He cracked down on bad dress!

Mr C.J. Barnett: It was directed at people wearing jumpers in the chamber.

Mr M. McGOWAN: He made sure that bad dress standards were front and centre in public policy in this state, and we applaud the Premier for that! We applaud the Premier for taking that up.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I took the stand on the standard of dress, not the quality of the choice!

Mr M. McGOWAN: Ha, ha! I am sure the Premier took up this issue in those private conversations with the Queen that he cannot reveal! He said to the Queen, “Don’t worry, Your Majesty; I’ve been dealing with those important issues of dress standards in Western Australia. I would not like you, when you come out to our state, to be confronted by ugly clothes of members of Parliament.” Then we have the member for Mount Lawley deliberately defying the Premier immediately on the Premier’s return from England to see the Queen! He is deliberately defying the Premier with that camelhair coat!

Mr C.J. Barnett: I spoke of standards, not taste!

Mr M. McGOWAN: I do not want to see the Queen arrive here in September and be confronted by that camelhair coat!

Mr C.C. Porter: What happens if she’s wearing a camelhair coat? Then you’ll be in strife! They’d be a perfect match!

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am confident that the Queen will not be wearing a camelhair coat, and I suggest to the Treasurer that the members of his branch would be very upset by him alleging that the Queen would be dressed in that manner! All I say to the member for Mount Lawley is: take a look in the mirror!

Ms M.M. Quirk: That’s what he’s doing now!

Mr M. McGOWAN: The member for Mount Lawley might be impressed by what he sees, but no-one else is!

I refer to the attack upon me by the Leader of the House.

Mr R.F. Johnson: It wasn’t an attack.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was.

Mr R.F. Johnson: No, I was just correcting the misinformation that you gave.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was a personal attack. The Premier said that the Leader of the House does not conduct those personal attacks, and here he goes conducting a personal attack.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I had to correct the misinformation that you were giving.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: He attacked me too.

Mr M. McGOWAN: He attacked me; he attacked the member for Midland.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I would never attack you or the member for Midland—God forbid!

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Leader of the House did, and he produced a bunch of dodgy statistics, no doubt cobbled together by Nick Hagley in the dark and smoke-filled rooms of the back office of the Premier.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Exactly like he used to do for you!

Mr M. McGOWAN: When he did it for us, they were accurate! These days I think time has dulled his capacity to pull those statistics together. The statistics he pulled together were fatally flawed because the Premier has responsibility for the Department of State Development, for which the former Premier did not have responsibility. The former Premier had responsibility —

Mr R.F. Johnson: If it’s your fault the Premier didn’t work as hard as our Premier, that’s tough!

Mr M. McGOWAN: Former Premier Geoff Gallop had responsibility for multicultural affairs.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Yes, and what else?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Public sector management.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Yes, and what else?

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Mr M. McGOWAN: Federal affairs.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Yes, and what else?

Mr M. McGOWAN: And science. The Premier is looking at me with a very expectant look on his face. What is he trying to say?

Mr R.F. Johnson: I think he also had citizenship and multicultural affairs.

Mr M. McGOWAN: All I am suggesting to the Leader of the House in relation to his —

Ms R. Saffioti: Multicultural interests he had.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I think he also had citizenship and multicultural interests, and he never went anywhere.

Ms R. Saffioti: You're a liar!

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Even you, Mr Acting Speaker, could not have misheard that—a clear comment of “liar” across the chamber. I would request that you ask the member, who is showing no attention at all, to stand erect and apologise fully.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Further to the point of order, I do not object to the fact that the member for West Swan should withdraw what she said, but I do object to the Premier getting to his feet and saying that even you, Mr Acting Speaker, would have to have observed that. In effect, he was implying that you were biased, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr R.F. Johnson: No, he wasn't.

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is exactly what he was doing.

Mr P.B. Watson: It's on *Hansard*.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I would ask that the Premier withdraw that allegation as well.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I withdraw, Mr Acting Speaker, but anyone who claims that Geoff Gallop did not go to multicultural events —

Mr C.J. Barnett: Withdraw!

Mr R.F. Johnson: Sit down! Disgraceful!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.P. O’Gorman): Member for Rockingham.

Mr P.B. Watson: Are you going to withdraw, Premier?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Acting Speaker, the Premier implied bias on your behalf. I would have thought that that would be something that he should have to withdraw.

Mr R.F. Johnson: He did not.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Premier did. He said, “Even you”. So, if I stood up when a Liberal Party member was in the chair and said, “Even you would have to agree”, or something of that nature —

Mr P.B. Watson: Yes; double-standards!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Rockingham, the role of the position up here in occupying this chair is to make this house run as efficiently as possible with the least number of interruptions and interjections. Yes, there was a comment from my left, which I actually did not quite hear because I was listening to what the member for Rockingham was saying. There was then a comment from my right. A point of order should be taken strictly on the issue that is before the house and should cast no reflection on the Chair or anybody else in this house, but just the person against whom the point of order was being taken. The member for Rockingham has the floor.

Debate Resumed

Mr P.B. Watson: Disgraceful!

Mr M. McGOWAN: Yes, disgraceful; the member for Albany is correct. It was an excellent ruling, Mr Acting Speaker, and a very poor point of order on the part of the Premier. Standards are dropping in this state. We have camelhair coats; we have the Premier undermining the integrity of the Speaker; and we have the Leader of the

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House coming up with absolute rubbish about Geoff Gallop. I doubt that there has been another person in public life in this state who has attended more multicultural events than Geoff Gallop.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Leader of the House and the member for West Swan! There is supposed to be only one person speaking, the member for Rockingham.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was a shocking attack on Geoff Gallop based upon untruths. Furthermore, the dodgy figures the Leader of the House brought out before did not refer to the fact that this Premier has the Department of State Development under his control, and obviously Geoff Gallop did not. Alan Carpenter did but Geoff Gallop did not. Therefore, when the Leader of the House produces figures from 2002–03 alleging something of that nature, I think it is very much the case that the Premier's estimates hearing should be in the morning and should go for longer. Considering that the Premier has that portfolio, the hearing should go for more than four hours. It came to my attention—the Premier might be interested in this because I am sure he does not know it—that the estimates hearing of the Premier's deputy, Minister Hames, went for seven or so hours; the Treasurer's went for seven or so hours; and the estimates hearing of the Minister for Transport and for Housing went for six and half or so hours.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I don't have a problem with doing more.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It just strikes me that the Premier of the state, a very significant portfolio, should perform for longer.

Mr C.J. Barnett: It doesn't worry me.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I know that the Treasurer is younger and fitter —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: But he's not as handsome!

Mr M. McGOWAN: He dresses better most probably! I just think that in light of the fact that some of the Premier's underlings are able to do it, he should be able to perform for longer and arrive in the house at an earlier hour.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Did you request more time for my portfolio? You didn't request more time.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Hold on! That is not our role.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I don't have difficulty doing another couple of hours.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am requesting it now for next year, but the Premier produced a diary and an itinerary. The Premier missed my earlier address when I talked about the days and hours and so forth.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: It was good.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was a good speech and I can repeat it, if the Premier likes.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: If I keep getting interjections, I might well repeat it, and I would probably rely on the member for South Perth to assist me along the way.

Mr J.E. McGrath: I will correct your grammar!

Mr M. McGOWAN: He can correct my grammar.

In any event, the points I wanted to make were that perhaps the estimates hearings could run more effectively and smoothly if the Premier provided a greater level of time for scrutiny, and also if he actually answered questions. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, there was a significant issue of some moment and the Premier refused to answer it. The Premier is refusing to answer it today—even though he knows the answer—through some sort of petty petulance that is going on. He will not answer that question until next week, because he is sort of teasing us. I think it is a simple question and he should just answer it.

MS M.M. QUIRK (Girrawheen) [5.28 pm]: There are two minor matters that I want to raise about Estimates Committee B and the police and emergency services and road safety divisions. The CEO of the Fire and

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Emergency Services Authority did not attend the estimates hearings and we were given no explanation as to why that was the case.

Mr R.F. Johnson: That is untrue.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: We were given no explanation.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I explained that there was a personal family situation that she had to attend to. You weren't listening, obviously.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Not in my presence, minister.

Mr R.F. Johnson: You should have come at the right time then.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I think that is unacceptable.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Check the *Hansard*.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I did not hear it, Premier.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Check the *Hansard*. I explained that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Frankly, for a three-hour session—I do not know what the family situation was—I regard that as unacceptable, unless it is a grave family situation.

Mr R.F. Johnson: She had to go to Melbourne.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: When was the minister given notice of that? It is not sufficient.

Mr R.F. Johnson: The day before.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: We attended estimates with questions ready to ask the chief executive officer—many of them related to her. There have been a number of inquiries in the past 12 months concerning the conduct of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, and there have been three major inquiries into serious bushfires. There have been a record number of property losses in this state due to bushfires in the past 12 months or so, but the CEO of FESA was not here to answer questions, and there is an insufficient explanation.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I gave the explanation.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: This is not the first time it has happened; the year before last, I think the Director General of the Department of Environment and Conservation did not attend when we were keen to ask questions about what happened in the Boorabbin fire. It is just not satisfactory. I think that that should be, in all circumstances, avoided, so any occasions —

Mr R.F. Johnson: What; even a family situation?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Obviously not, if it is a serious family matter, minister, but if she had time to buy a ticket and fly to Melbourne, it seems to me that the minister's office had the means of communicating that information effectively to the opposition.

The other thing I want to raise, having been in a number of estimates hearings, is that a trend has crept in of the ministers being surrounded by a phalanx of ministerial staff. That is something that in my time in this place—10 years or so—I have not previously seen to any great extent, but now ministerial staff are sitting there along with the bureaucrats. I am not quite sure what function they serve. I have no major objection to it happening, but it is a very strange state of affairs. I do not know the explanation for it, but, again, I do not know why it needs to be encouraged or entertained.

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont — Leader of the Opposition) [5.31 pm]: I just want to raise one issue that came out of my participation in Estimates Committee B, and something I asked during the hearing with Horizon Power. Successive governments have worked on extending regularised power supplies to Aboriginal communities, and I asked which Aboriginal communities will be provided with regularised power by Horizon under the currently funded Aboriginal remote communities power supply program. The answer was Beagle Bay, Warmun, Ardyaloon, Bidyadanga, Djarindjin, and Lombadina; and the work is currently in progress in Kalumburu and Yungngora. There is a list of so-called hub communities that will not be provided with power at the end of the currently funded program. That list is Balgo, Mindibungu, Yandeyarra, Burringurrah, Jigalong, Warburton and Blackstone. Five other communities that have more than 200 people living there are not even on the list to be provided with power, being Bayulu, Mowanjum, Looma, Wangkatjunka and Warakurna.

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Some of those names will not be familiar to many people in our community, but the fact that they are not familiar is an interesting issue in itself. Here are towns with more than 200 people living in them that are not provided with regular power supplies in the same way as other towns in our state. I think there is only one non-Indigenous town of a similar status that is not provided with regularised power—namely, Eucla. So we have all these Indigenous towns with ad hoc and unsatisfactory community power station arrangements, but we have only, insofar as I am aware, one non-Indigenous town of the same size that does not have regularised power. This is the outcome of years of boutique arrangements for Indigenous communities and differences between federal and state governments in responsibilities for Indigenous communities compared with responsibilities for non-Indigenous communities. Nevertheless, surely it is unsatisfactory that it is not even planned that 12 Indigenous towns, each with a population of more than 200, will receive regularised power provision through Horizon Power. I understand it is not cheap; it is expensive to provide power supplies into remote communities. Nevertheless, it can hardly be said to be a good reflection on the state of Western Australia as an institution that we have this disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous towns.

In comparative terms, we are a rich state, and we have a big program called royalties for regions to spend money in regional areas. A basic service that people need and should be able to expect in the modern world is a modern, reliable, quality electricity system. I urge the government to look at this afresh and to look at it aside from the usual arguments about who is responsible for Indigenous issues and who has paid what historically, and to just start with the basic assumption that every town above a certain size in Western Australia should expect roughly the equivalent level of state services. I think it is a matter of some shame that we have these 12 Indigenous towns that do not have a regular power supply. I venture to suggest that if they were non-Indigenous towns, the history of Western Australia would have seen them treated much more fairly.

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Nollamara) [5.36 pm]: I rise to talk about Estimates Committee B, and I raise the very important issue of what the Department for Child Protection will be doing about women's refuges. I think it is very important to note that although there will be the much-trumpeted 15 per cent increase in funding for the community sector, women's refuges will be disadvantaged.

There will be no funding for extra beds at women's shelters. I think that is a very serious matter, considering that the state has been part of the national plan to reduce violence against women and has taken funding for programs such as Safe at Home, which is an excellent program. I commend the federal government on that program. It enables women to stay in their homes, but sometimes that is just not possible. The demand for beds and accommodation in shelters is ever increasing, as is demand for accommodation throughout our community. The need is great and serious for these women because one in three women over 15 years of age has experienced physical violence, and almost one in five has experienced sexual violence. If those statistics related to what was happening on our roads or in other parts of our community, there would be outrage, and there should be outrage that we are not providing for these women properly.

Most of my concern relates to the allocation of the 15 per cent funding increase. During the estimates hearing, Mr Murphy, the director general, stated that although a 15 per cent funding increase was to be provided, because of the 50–50 funding agreement between the state and the commonwealth, the timing of that 15 per cent would be subject to the determination of the federal pay equity case and the negotiations with the commonwealth. That makes absolutely no sense when we consider that many other organisations that are in receipt of federal funding will receive the 15 per cent increase on 1 July, an example of which is Rocky Bay, which falls into the disability sector.

Those organisations will be covered by the federal pay equity decision. They also receive funding for services from the federal government for programs that they run. However, for some reason, organisations in this area of women's shelters somehow need to be in some ways stalled from 1 July and must wait for the decision. Mr Murphy said that they will get the 15 per cent but it will be only after the decision, and he seemed to imply that there would be some aspect of back pay. However, that still makes no sense to me; the decision is due to come down in August, so there is no reason for organisations that are eligible for the 15 per cent increase in funding, which, as I understand, will apply to only the 50 per cent that is state government-funded, to not receive that funding on 1 July. Further, it concerns me somewhat that the Department for Child Protection made clear that its intent is to increasingly contract out some of the services that it delivers. That shows us that this is a government of privatisation that hits many vulnerable areas in underhanded ways. Therefore, I am greatly concerned for those workers who do good work in our government agencies and who are belittled by this government, which thinks that their work is not valuable enough to be delivered from within the service. That is not to say that services delivered outside the government sector are not delivered well; they are simply delivered for a lot less money. We know this because the national pay equity case goes to that point exactly; namely, someone working in a level 5 position in government does not have the same sorts of wages and conditions that they would have in

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non-government organisations. Non-government organisations find that particularly galling and have fought very well and hard for increased wages. However, the government cannot take an important area such as child protection and undermine its effectiveness by privatising parts of its service.

Question put and passed.