

MINISTER FOR MINES AND PETROLEUM — PERFORMANCE

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 Leader of 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) [2.45 pm]: I move —

That this house censures the Minister for Mines and Petroleum; Corrective Services; Energy; Industrial Relations for choosing to abscond from troubling allegations and revelations unfolding across his portfolios.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members!

Mr R.S. LOVE: Abscond—absconded. He absconded across the globe for the last two weeks. From 1 March through to earlier this week, he has been absent.

The SPEAKER: Member, just pause for a moment. It is very difficult for me to hear the Leader of the Opposition. It must be very difficult for Hansard, too. Please resist the temptation to continuously interject.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you. I am sure that people right across Western Australia are relieved to see him return to his duties here in Western Australia in a range of portfolios that we know are riddled with failure. One only has to look at all the portfolios I have outlined—corrective services, energy, industrial relations—and his oversight of Gold Corporation as well as the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety to understand that this minister has before him a raft of issues that he has failed to deal with over the time of his ministerial duties in this place. The failures continue to mount up day by day. Just today, for instance, there was a report on ABC news services of the withdrawal of Trovio's support for the Perth Mint Gold Token—that is, the PMGT. The minister, in response to questions I asked in question time, indicated that the Perth Mint decided to withdraw from the arrangements with Trovio last year. He said that the Mint did not provide information to the people who continued to trade on the platform because it needed to work through the issue with the counterparty involved. That is interesting because an announcement of 1 March was titled —

Trovio will no longer support the Perth Mint Gold Token (PMGT) and will begin an orderly unwind with token holders

The report was released on 1 March. I think that was the first day that the Minister for Transport had oversight of the Minister for Mines and Petroleum's duties. The report says —

Due to ongoing investigations into The Perth Mint in respect to alleged breaches with AUSTRAC and US State Regulation, a decision was made by Trovio (formerly InfiniGold) to no longer support the smart contract ultimately backed by Gold held at The Perth Mint.

The Perth Mint was established in 1899 and is the world's largest processor of newly mined gold and highest volume refiner in Australasia. The Perth Mint Gold Token was designed for the institutional market. Working with an entity owned by the Government of Western Australia and one of the largest London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) accredited refineries aligned with the product vision, as well as Trovio's core values at inception. However, considering recent allegations, we have decided to no longer support this product.

It goes on to say that Perth Mint gold token holders will be able to trade out of their position or redeem their tokens for Perth Mint GoldPass certificates. This is just typical of what we have seen going on with the Perth Mint. No information about this situation, which has caused such concern for many people across Australia since the revelations on *Four Corners* on 6 March, has been provided by the government and the minister and, until today, by the Perth Mint board. Since that time, no information has been provided by the minister, who has been journeying around the world. I have no doubt that when he left, he left with good intentions to promote the state. But there is no reason why he could not have made a statement or conducted an interview. There is absolutely no reason why he could not have asked the chair of Gold Corporation to make a statement and assure the public that these matters were being taken seriously. Instead, we have had to content ourselves with asking questions of an empty chair. The minister has not been here and he has not been able to be held to account.

Today in the press conference held at Dumas House, the minister's most used term in answer to questions was "confused"; everybody is confused apparently, except him. He is the only one who is not confused; he knows everything! He does not know how to do his job as a minister and how to be accountable for his portfolios. He

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does not know about the range of issues that happened under his government's watch that we brought to the attention of this place, prior to the *Four Corners* program, around the failure to register under the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, which commenced under the Carpenter government. It did not commence under the former Liberal–National government; rather, it commenced under the Labor Carpenter government and carried through until Gold Corporation rectified the situation during the caretaker period. The minister and the Premier never rectified the situation; Gold Corporation did that itself during the caretaker period.

We know that this government never got to the bottom of what was going on. We know that the Premier was the Premier at the time that GoldPass was launched in 2018. At that stage, the Perth Mint was not registered as a remitter under the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006. We know that there was a failure to register. We also know that despite that, the Perth Mint launched into cryptocurrency and ecommerce knowing that it had a deficient computer program to back that up, that it could not meet its know-your-customer requirements and that it could not keep proper track of all the financial transactions that were occurring. The Premier and the minister responsible seem to laugh that off as some sort of administrative failing: "They weren't involved in money laundering." No, not directly, but what they were allowing was the enabling of money laundering.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is what it means to fail to act according to the law. I cannot say this more strongly. If the government fails to properly safeguard the community from the possibility of people being able to move around illicit money —

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Transport, if you want to contribute, you will have an opportunity.

Mr R.S. LOVE: — it is enabling all sorts of illegal activity. This government likes to carry on about its war against the bikies, but in allowing Gold Corporation and the Perth Mint to launch into retail programs of gold trading using electronic platforms without appropriate controls in place, it has enabled groups like that to move money around. They do not have to have \$100 notes and they do not have to dig holes in the backyard; they can park it on their phone and it is backed up by the state government of Western Australia through its guarantee of the gold. It is backed up by the state of Western Australia.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The government must accept how serious this situation is.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, Minister for Transport!

Mr R.S. LOVE: The government must accept how serious these failures are. They are not administrative failings; they are contraventions—serious criminal matters. It is a criminal offence to trade as a remitter when not registered to do so. It is not some sort of operational or administrative matter; it is a criminal matter. This government presided over that platform, enabling it to blossom, with tens of thousands of people in 130 countries around the world taking the opportunity to get involved in the electronic trading of gold without the appropriate controls, therefore enabling the movement of both US and Australian dollars around the world. That is a serious matter that is of great concern, and that is why we have been calling for a royal commission into the situation. We know that people at Gold Corp cannot speak up because they are silenced by the act of Parliament that states that people cannot give away information about Gold Corp. We know that the same act prevents the Public Sector Commission from looking into Gold Corp because it is not defined as a public sector body. It is specifically excluded from those provisions, so we cannot have a special inquiry into the matter under that legislation.

The only way that we can get to the bottom of this, and the only way that we can put the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, the Premier, the board, the former board, a range of employees and a range of people who have been contracted to work in this field from time to time under the spotlight is through a royal commission. That is why we have been calling for that to happen and that is why it needs to happen. No other way would be able to unlock all the circumstances around the Perth Mint.

If members think that we know everything about what has gone on, I would say that they are very naive. The Trovio matter was not revealed publicly until today. Although Trovio put an announcement on its website, there was no pick-up in the press and no admission from the government that this had happened. Despite all the questioning around the Perth Mint controversy since the airing of the *Four Corners* program, no-one has volunteered the fact that Trovio had withdrawn its support of Perth Mint gold tokens. There have been interviews with the CEO; if it was an operational matter, why did he not say so? Why was the public not informed? The government only drip-feeds the public. When something comes out, the government comes out with a statement a week or two later.

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The minister has allowed this matter to drag on. He does not show up for press conferences. He heads off out of the country for weeks. He does anything he can to avoid scrutiny, and that has to stop. That is why we need a commission of inquiry that can get to the bottom of what has been going on. Most of the worst of what went on in Gold Corp and the Perth Mint happened under this government's watch. It did not happen under the former Liberal–National government's watch; it happened under this government's watch. The Minister for Mines and Petroleum has been derelict in his duties as a minister and he needs to be held to account.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [2.57 pm]: I rise to support the motion that this house censures the Minister for Mines and Petroleum; Energy; Corrective Services; Industrial Relations for choosing to abscond from troubling allegations and revelations unfolding in his portfolios. When we talk about the range of portfolios under the minister's watch, it is clear that there are too many responsibilities for a minister who is overseeing a range of significant issues. It is clear that the Premier cannot see this and that he does not care.

The ongoing chaos in the corrective services portfolio is another issue that the McGowan government wishes would just go away. There are significant staff shortages across the prison system. Most concerning is that corrective services officers are not working in safe environments. Last month, we saw the shocking scenes at Banksia Hill Detention Centre, which were illustrative of a government that does not have control of the corrective services portfolio. A youth custodial officer at Banksia Hill was left with a suspected fractured skull after youths threw around masonry. The complete chaos and outrageous scenes illustrate that this government is not keeping our WA public sector workers safe. This government does not have control of not only youth crime in our communities, but also youth violence in these detention centres. We have dedicated corrective services officers who face significant challenges. We know that the former President of the Children's Court, Denis Reynolds, has often talked about staff operating at 50 per cent capacity. The unions have also raised the issue of the very concerning and dangerous levels of staffing. Rikki Hendon made this obvious point about the scenes and the assault on the corrective services officers —

“This was unnecessary and avoidable,” ...

“No one should have to fear for their health and safety when they're at work. Everyone should go to work and return safe, home to their families.”

The McGowan government is failing to keep workers safe in these workplaces. Seven detainee offenders scaled roofs and fences at the Canning Vale centre, and pelted officers with chunks of masonry and metal. This shows that this government does not have control over this facility and is failing to keep these public servants safe. They were absolutely heinous scenes. The response from the Premier—the tough guy—was that the 18-year-old offenders would be shifted to the adult prison. Unfortunately, of those offenders involved, only one was aged 18. The opposition does not dispute the shifting of adult-age offenders to the adult prison, but this will not deal with the crux of the issue; that is, this government does not have control over this facility and it is failing to ensure the safety of those corrective services officers. Further, there is concern that the chaos in our jails and detention centres, including at Banksia Hill Detention Centre, poses a broader risk to the community. Under this government's watch, Banksia Hill Detention Centre has become a haven for the more hardened criminals or the more serious offenders. One in four offenders or detainees at Banksia Hill will go into mainstream prisons or jails later in life. Statistics have shown that hundreds of detainees attempt to take their life every year—353 last year. A so-called summit was held to look into these very real issues. Dr Fiona Stanley stated that the summit was not successful; the dialogue was not proper and it was a very disappointing summit. Although there were calls for transcripts of the meeting to be released, the public and everyone else was left wanting.

As I have said, a recent protest was held about Banksia Hill and its dangerous levels of understaffing. Earlier this month, the public servants working at Banksia Hill were forced to work with just 14 staff on board—one-fifth of the full complement of 65 staff. Again, that highlights how this minister has failed in the important corrective services portfolio and how he is failing those people who turn up to their workplace at the risk of being assaulted. This points to one of the many failures in delivery under this government's watch.

I turn to the industrial relations portfolio. The government continues to fight the unions, with escalating industrial action on a number of fronts, including those related to our important frontline officers. There are ongoing issues with the Western Australia Police Force and its police, who are leaving in droves. Last year, there was an exodus of officers from the force—about three times the average number of police officers who leave—because those officers did not believe that this government had their back. There are ongoing issues with the nurses' union and with the firefighters as well.

Obviously, there are a number of challenges in the portfolios overseen by the Minister for Mines and Petroleum; Energy; Corrective Services; Industrial Relations. Quite clearly, many people in the public service do not believe that this government has their back. We need only look at the corrective services portfolio, as I have highlighted, in which there are very real concerns about an unsafe work environment, and the ongoing issues across our public sector that also come under this minister's watch. I will leave my comments there.

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DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [3.06 pm]: I rise to speak on this excellent motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. It is interesting to note that if a minister has a problem with one portfolio, we say, “These things happen from time to time.” If a minister has a problem in two portfolios, we think, “Boy, he’s having a lot of problems.” If it involves three portfolios, we are certainly getting into the territory of a minister clearly not coping with the workload. But when we get onto the fourth portfolio and there are issues threatening the reputation of our state, we have a major problem. I said before that we know the Minister for Mines and Petroleum is a hardworking minister, but this minister is overwhelmed, he is spread too thin and he is overseeing major issues in all his portfolios.

I will focus in particular on the energy portfolio. What a record for the minister. This minister boasts about managing the energy transition and he loves to lecture members on this side of the house on many topics. I think he should have perhaps been a teacher rather than a parliamentarian because he certainly loves to lecture everyone, including journalists, about various matters. But this is the only energy minister I know of under whose watch our electricity system has experienced four years of materially worsening outages. That is what ordinary consumers in Western Australia, particularly those in regional areas, are experiencing. Today in question time we had a Dorothy Dixier to make the minister feel good about the question of energy prices. There is no doubt that Western Australia has had a good bipartisan approach to the management and regulatory framework around energy that has led to lower energy prices. The good bipartisan approach to ensure that we have adequate gas supplies to the state was created first in the state agreements and then by the Carpenter policy that provided a 15 per cent guaranteed gas reserve for the state. That is a good framework, but it does not help ordinary citizens who are experiencing materially worsening customer outages. I have been through this debate before, so I am not now going to go through it exhaustively in detail. In summary, the minister instigated the independent review of the Christmas 2021 power outages. One of the main conclusions in the final report of that review states —

This data shows over a four-year period a ‘materially’ worsening customer outage experience trend in CBD and rural areas, with flat performance in urban areas.

That covers the majority of the customers in the state. That is a failure to manage that portfolio correctly. In the history of this state, I doubt that we have seen such a regression in our performance. Members might say that if it occurs for one or two years, it is a problem, but when it continues for four years, we know that it is a major problem, and it is a problem that has not ceased.

The evidence is unequivocal. Nearly 1.5 million outages in a single year is an alarming figure, yet the minister just brushes it away and says that there is nothing to see here. There is a decline in investment in the grid. In that data, we have quite consistently seen a material ageing of the network in the zero to five-year figures. That is not our data or an assertion on our part; that is the data published by the agency itself. The government has not been investing. This is now a normal situation with this government. It is a bit like the situation with the hospitals. The government cuts medical expenses and then has a panic catch-up whereby it ends up having to spend twice as much to try to get back to where it should have been. That is what we are seeing with the network. The government is now starting to spend money on it, but the simple fact is that for the majority of this government’s term, customers in the state have not had the service or reliability in the network that they should have had.

The minister’s response is always to lecture us and tell us that we are stupid, we do not know or we do not understand, but the simple reality is that we need more investment in our grid. We particularly need investment in the management of the transition to renewables in the grid. This matter has been raised in this place in questions and otherwise. This minister states that he is in control, but credible figures in the industry say that we are facing a cataclysmic problem, which is that the 30 per cent of our power that is provided by coal cannot be replaced by the plan that the minister has put forward. Why is that? It is because this minister consistently shows a lack of transparency. Lack of transparency is a theme for this government overall. The minister makes assertions, but we do not have any transparency on the detail of that transition—none whatsoever. There is nothing to satisfy anyone who is a significant figure in the industry that we will have stable power going forward. On top of these current reliability problems, we will have problems going forward with that transition.

The minister claims that in response to the Christmas outages, the government has done everything to meet all those recommendations. One recommendation was for Western Power to assess the grid in areas with regular problems and compile plans. I have asked the minister a simple question: can the minister please release those plans so that we can see them and see what the government plans to do?

Mr W.J. Johnston: When did you ask that?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have asked that in this place on a number of occasions, minister. Does the government release those plans? No, it does not. We do not see those plans. It is again an assertion on the minister’s part—“I have plans; they are in place”—but we do not see those plans.

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The minister hired an independent expert to go and look at the issue of dealing with bushfires. Again, the government has not publicly stated that it is doing anything differently in that space of bushfire management. Again, we do not see the detail of that. We do not know whether that is going to materially improve. We do not know whether the approach has changed. This summer was not a test of the system, because it was one of the most moderate summers that we have seen, but, of course, when we see a little bit of weather, we see what we saw in the midwest in Geraldton. On Tuesday and Friday, up to 60 000 customers were affected by power outages because of unreliability in our network. Worse than that, there was repeat behaviour in those failures. Something went wrong in Geraldton. We had two lengthy outages, one of which lasted up to 12 hours. That outage had a massive impact on businesses in those communities because of not only the outage itself, but also criminals taking advantage of that outage to commit crimes because of the lack of security in businesses.

We have the Mungarra power station in Geraldton, which is supposed to provide backup power. What did we see when they were doing some line work in the region? There was a trip in the system. The Mungarra power station should have come up in a short period. What happened? It was six hours or so before that power plant came up and put power into the system.

Why is that, minister? I am happy for the minister to provide an answer in this place for the residents in that area.

Mr W.J. Johnston: It was on and then it went off. It's the other way round.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Why did that fail? Why did it trip?

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister can have plenty of time. Why did it take six hours to get that power back on? That is exactly what we saw in Kalgoorlie. The system is not reliable; the power station did not have the capacity to get it up. I am told that the problem in Geraldton is the same as the problem they had in Kalgoorlie that the minister has apparently rectified. When they need experts, they have to come from Perth. We have a centrally controlled system without experts out in the regional areas. The resources are based in Perth.

We talk about ridiculous situations. Again, we have had the ridiculous situation of Collie, which I do not have time to go through. The minister denied responsibility and said that it has nothing to do with him; then, all of a sudden, the minister has a realisation, "Hang on, we actually do have an enforceable contract." We have this ludicrous situation in which the minister is responsible for an enforceable contract with a third-party provider and yet can provide no information or input, and then suddenly he can provide input. This minister is struggling. The minister does not have to give us a lecture on dilution. That is reputational harm. The outcome of reputational harm ranges from a culture of indifference to risk in the Perth Mint. The minister has not told us how he is going to deal with that. We have problems in the prisons, in the energy system and in industrial relations. As I said, this minister has capacity but is not coping.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [3.16 pm]: I rise to respond to all that. I indicate that the government will not be supporting the motion moved by the opposition. I want to point out a few things about it. Firstly, it is a very silly motion. The Leader of the Opposition suggested that someone had absconded. Does the member know the definition of "abscond"? The dictionary defines "abscond" as "to leave hurriedly and secretly, typically to escape custody." The Leader of the Opposition actually put that in a motion before the Parliament—to leave hurriedly and secretly! The minister put out a press release stating that he was going on an overseas mission to sell Western Australia. He put out a press release about the matter before such time as he left the country to sell Western Australia overseas. The Leader of the Opposition came in here and moved a motion in the Parliament that the minister absconded—that is, left hurriedly and secretly—when the minister had put out a press release outlining what he was doing for Western Australia. That is point one.

Point two is that it is lowbrow to attack a Minister for Mines and Petroleum who is going overseas to sell the state. We had basically two and a half years in which no-one went anywhere outside Western Australia—literally. They could not go to the eastern states and did not go overseas. As we came out of COVID, I told ministers to go out and sell the state around the world. I told them to go out and sell our industries around the world. That is what ministers and the government should do, and the member comes in here and attacks that. He is attacking those sorts of initiatives that a government minister is taking. The minister's itinerary was very, very full. The amount of work and the number of meetings and so forth that the minister had to undertake while he was away was extreme. That is what ministers do. That is the role of a minister in the government, particularly in an economic portfolio. That is one of the important aspects of a minister's role. As the minister said earlier in question time, that is what the investment and business communities of Western Australia, Australia and the world expect him to do, because it creates jobs, opportunities and investments for the state. That is what ministers do; they sell the state. That is what I do and that is what ministers in the government do. It is lowbrow to attack that. I recall that under the last government, former Premier Barnett, Norman Moore and other ministers in similar portfolios did exactly the same thing. Members opposite did not catch us attacking them for it. It is tawdry, lowbrow and actually quite pathetic to attack a minister for doing those things.

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What did the minister do while he was overseas? He attended an extraordinary number of meetings, events and functions and made representations on behalf of Western Australia. He met with the government of Quebec, and he attended the International Mines Ministers Summit and tourism events promoting Western Australian tourism. He attended the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada conference and met with numerous investors in North America. He held meetings with senators and congressmen in the United States of America, and meetings with Albemarle, a major investor in the state, and Rio Tinto. He met with further representatives of government, seeking to understand and capitalise on the Inflation Reduction Act in the United States of America. In Seoul, he held meetings with Hyundai and POSCO—companies of that magnitude that have the opportunity to, and are looking to, invest in Western Australia, and the minister promoted those opportunities. He met with the Australian ambassador to Korea. In Japan, he met with companies like Mitsui and Mitsubishi, and hosted critical minerals events. What did the minister do while he was overseas? He promoted critical minerals; battery technology; opportunities to invest in renewables, carbon capture and storage; and other opportunities here in Western Australia, which is what you would expect the Minister for Mines and Petroleum to do. If he did not do that, the opposition would probably come in here and move a motion about why the minister is not out there doing that. People would be asking: after two and a half or three years of the state being unable to travel for obvious reasons, why is he not out there selling the state to the world? That is what the opposition, the business community and the press would be saying.

I know that in politics you cannot win, but I recall when I was opposition leader that we at least had some respect for the fact that the government has to do these sorts of things. Then Premier Barnett always prided himself on going to China, Japan and those sorts of places to sell the state, and that was a good thing for him to do. He was Minister for State Development and Premier; it was a good thing for him to do. We supported him in undertaking those steps. It is immature, lowbrow and actually quite pathetic to attack someone and come up with outrageous language like that as part of the Leader of the Opposition's motion, which will now be in *Hansard* forevermore. It essentially accuses someone falsely of secretly and hurriedly fleeing the state to avoid custody. What a pathetic motion. As I said, the minister was overseas doing all those sorts of things.

We have explained alloying many times, but I still do not think that the Leader of the Opposition understands what alloying a gold bar is. I think a lot of people do not understand what it is, but it is standard practice for gold bars. Every single gold bar that left the Perth Mint met international standards for the percentage of gold within it, which was over 99.99 per cent—every single one. Two gold bars were identified as having slightly more silver than the Shanghai Gold Exchange would like within the remaining 0.01 per cent of that gold bar. That is the extent of the alloying issue that the opposition is referring to in using all sorts of pejorative language and so forth.

This is the very disturbing thing about the Leader of the Opposition's comments. He came out with some very irresponsible language and used Parliament to allege money laundering and illegality with no evidence. The ABC and *Four Corners* did not say that. There is no evidence of it—none whatsoever. He used Parliament to do it because he wants to create more grief and trouble. That is what he is trying to do with his grossly irresponsible language that has no basis behind it. It is irresponsible for an opposition to do this. I would not have done this as opposition leader. I would not have tried to damage the state in the way that the opposition leader has. He actually has to support the state. Sure, if the opposition wants to take up the issue of the 0.01 per cent of two gold bars that have two parts per 100 000 too much silver and two parts per 100 000 too much copper, take up that issue—but it should understand it at least before it does take it up. To come in here and allege illegality and money laundering with no evidence whatsoever is grossly irresponsible. What the opposition is trying to do by using that language is create turmoil and, therefore, damage the state. That is all it is trying to do for its own political ends, and it is irresponsible of it to do that.

I will deal with one or two of the grab bag of issues the opposition raised. The Leader of the Liberal Party raised Banksia Hill Detention Centre. We obviously have an approach towards Banksia Hill, and we are investing around \$100 million in juvenile justice initiatives to improve the situation, but we do not take the side of people who riot. We do not take the side of people who throw things. I have seen someone out there taking their side, and that is Hon Peter Collier. He has always been out there defending them. He is always on television defending them. He gets on television, and he says that it is the government's fault that these detainees are undertaking this behaviour. Seriously! Wrecking a cell and throwing things at youth custodial officers is deplorable behaviour, and Mr Collier is out there defending them. Liberal Party members are so wound up and so hostile to the fact of where they are at in the world and their position in this state that their automatic position is to blame the government and take the side of anyone who is against the government. Even if they are rioting detainees in a youth custodial facility, members opposite will take their side because they are against the government. That is how they think now. Whoever is against the government, they are on their side because they are so wound up and have lost such judgement on everything. Peter Collier is out there taking the side of rioting detainees who are causing damage and hurting people.

Point of Order

Mr Shane Love; Ms Libby Mettam; Dr David Honey; Mr Mark McGowan; Deputy Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston;
Ms Rita Saffioti

Dr D.J. HONEY: I might remind the Premier that he should be using the proper honorific when he is referring to a member in the other place.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. I will not uphold this point of order, but when referring to people from the other place, please use the correct title.

Debate Resumed

Mr M. McGOWAN: Hon Peter Collier takes the side of people who riot and attack people doing their jobs. That is what the Liberal Party does. I have seen him on television doing it. We will continue to ensure that we do everything we can to protect the people of Western Australia. That is our approach to this issue.

On another matter, I have heard the former Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Cottesloe, speak about Collie. I just remind him that the policy he took to the last election was to shut it down in 2025. That was the policy he took. He now disowns that. I have seen Hon Dr Steve Thomas out there pretending that it never happened, and I have also seen the member for Cottesloe pretending that it never happened, even though he was the shadow minister for that policy. Now he is saying that we should never shut it down and never move out of coal. He is now saying that, whereas two years ago, virtually to the day, he was saying that it has all got to be ended, public and private, by 2025. That was his policy then. He then comes in here and uses his arguments in relation to Collie as part of this motion to attack the minister, even though that was his position two years ago! Extraordinary stuff! The opposition is so inconsistent and not recognising of its history and what it has done before. Anyway, we all know and will continue to remind people. We have a very sensible and very reasonable policy to move out of coal baseload generation by the end of this decade. It was carefully structured and thought through. The Liberal Party's policy was to shut it down by 2025, which would have caused chaos. That was the policy. It was not actually some flimflam document that someone put out. It was the main election policy it took to the election and not something said by some odd candidate who no-one had ever heard of. It was the number one policy that the leader of the party and shadow minister took to the election. We all know; we all remember. Some people remember. Admittedly, it is probably an election that opposition members want to forget, but some of us remember.

Anyway, we will not be supporting this motion. It is pathetically worded, ridiculously worded, to be honest, and I want to compliment Minister Johnston for all the hard work he is doing on behalf of the people of this state.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Mines and Petroleum) [3.28 pm]: I keep pointing out to the opposition that when it wants to do these things, it should pick one issue. The problem is that it has roamed across all these different issues and is either misinformed or does not understand. It has raised things that do not make any sense.

I take one example. I have been criticised by the opposition on a number of occasions in matters of public interest and in questions in the chamber because I was being too mean to detainees at Banksia Hill Detention Centre and I was too much on the side of staff. I remember opposition members getting upset with me when I said that there are three priorities. Priority number one is to protect the community. Priority number two is to protect the staff. Then, and only then, is priority number three, which is to deal with the needs of the detainees. I was howled down and criticised by the member opposite, who, as part of the opposition team, proposed an MPI that criticised me for saying that. Now, he comes in here, reversing the position so it is 180 degrees different from what Hon Peter Collier said.

When the riot happened in January, Hon Peter Collier said that it was my fault, and I said it was the rioters' fault. I was criticised by Hon Peter Collier and his friends for saying that it was the rioters' fault. Now I am being criticised because the rioters rioted. Staff security is uppermost in my mind. Regarding staffing levels, yes, there is a problem with staffing. We have never hidden that, but the point we keep making is that we are doing our best to hire people. Last year, we put a large number of youth custodial officers through the training program and we continue to do so. We are investing \$100 million in resolving the Banksia Hill Detention Centre problems. What is the opposition's solution? It is to build a new centre in five years. There are three blocks of land in Vasse that are suitable for a detention facility. The member for Vasse can choose which one of those blocks that the youth detention facility she is going to build will be in. If she is not prepared to put it in her own electorate, whose electorate will she put it in? She cannot run away from this. In five years, when the Leader of the Liberal Party spends \$250 million of taxpayers' money to build a new youth detention facility, will it be in her electorate? Three blocks of land owned by the government are suitable for a detention centre. The next time she comes in here, she can tell me which block of land in Vasse she will put a youth detention centre in, because if she is not prepared to do it in her own electorate, why is she prepared to do it in somebody else's?

Let us go on. One day, I hope that a man with a PhD will understand statistics, but in the meantime, the member for Cottesloe said that the average customer experience is one outage a year.

Dr D.J. Honey: No, I did not.

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Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: That is what he said. He said that there are 1.5 million outages. There are 1.5 million customers. That means one per customer. He also talked about declining performance in the CBD. Yes, that is correct. He knows that only because we published the figures and there was one outage. Because the CBD outage rate is so low, even a single outage puts us underneath the standard. The member also said that the CBD and regions had problems and, therefore, most customers. That is not correct. Most customers live in the suburbs. As the member pointed out, last year the suburbs experienced a better outcome than the standard. Most customers in Western Australia, those in the suburbs, received better outcomes than is the minimum standard. Having said that, let me make it clear: all outages are inconvenient. I have always apologised and we continue to invest more money than ever before to resolve this.

The member also talked about the amount that we spent. We spend the money that the Economic Regulation Authority allows us to spend. The ERA has indicated that we will be allowed to spend more money in the future than we have over the past five years. That means we will spend more money. That is a function of having a regulated system; it is actually part of the process. It reduces expenditure to try to save money, and then if problems exist, more money is put back in the system. That is the purpose of the regulation. The member for Cottesloe also said that both sides of politics supported our current arrangements. That is not correct either. I remember the attacks from the federal Liberal Party over our gas reservation policy. Ian Macfarlane of the federal Liberal Party gave a speech at the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association conference in Darwin, saying that our current arrangements would be the end of the oil and gas industry in Western Australia. I remember that. Do not forget that Hon Mike Nahan put legislation through this chamber, which did not pass the other chamber, that would have ended our capacity market and all the other structures in our electricity system that the member now says are essential to its operation. Do not forget that at the 2017 election, his promise was to sell Western Power. The former government sold Alinta. Privatisation is so engrained in the Liberal Party that we all know what it would do if it got into power. The Leader of the Opposition comes in here constantly quoting Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, which is a privatisation promotion business. Its purpose in life is to promote privatisation. He comes in here every single week quoting Infrastructure Partnerships Australia. We know what the agenda is; it is in the DNA of the Liberal Party and Nationals WA: sell, sell, sell. Privatisation is its solution.

Now we get on to the question of my overseas trip. I said earlier that I was in Toronto when I watched question time. I was not; I was in Korea. I correct the record. The Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada holds an annual conference in Toronto. It is the world's largest mining conference with 27 000 people attending. The idea that as minister I should not attend the number one conference is childish. I get criticised for doing exactly what my job is. When people start at the Chamber of Minerals and Energy as CEO, one of the first things they are asked to do is go to PDAC, which is what the conference is called. There were 27 000 delegates, and the opposition says that it was bad for me as the Minister for Mines and Petroleum to attend the world's number one mining conference. What bizarre world is that coming from? The Leader of the Liberal Party thinks that she is winning because she gets to talk to a journalist to criticise me for doing my job. This is bizarre. I am not criticising the journalist; I used to write good stories for him. I am the uncredited co-author of a number of articles from when I was in opposition. Nobody has a problem with the fact that opposition members work with journalists to get stories up, but they have to think it through before they make these comments. The member for Vasse is the Leader of the Liberal Party, who, along with the Leader of the Opposition, want to be Premier and Deputy Premier. How can they hold their heads up by criticising the Minister for Mines and Petroleum for going to the world's largest mining conference? It does not make sense. They are showing that they do not understand industry. Western Australia is a mining state, 157 000 people directly rely on jobs in the mining industry and the opposition is criticising the Minister for Mines and Petroleum for going to the world's largest mining conference. What planet do they think they live on that they can get away with such bad public policy? They are accountable. Ask people in the mining industry whether they think the Minister for Mines and Petroleum should attend Mining Indaba in South Africa, PDAC in Canada or Africa Down Under. If they ask them whether he should go to the International Mining and Resources Conference and these sorts of things, they will be told that that is what is required of a minister. I have been to each of those conferences, because that is what is required of me. That is my duty as Minister for Mines and Petroleum. The idea that I would criticise Bill Marmion, Norman Moore or whoever else for going to one of those conferences would never happen; I would never do it. When they criticise me as a minister for doing exactly what the industry expects me to do, it shows that they are not capable of leading a major party in this state.

I could go through all the meetings I had, but I make this point. When I was in Japan, one of the things that was raised with me, which I was not previously aware of, was that the Japanese government expects Japanese industry to do 140 000 million tonnes of carbon sequestration by 2040 or 2050. That is 70 Gorgon projects. That is a huge opportunity for Western Australia, if we can get our settings right. That is why I was pleased to engage with industry on these issues. Each of the companies that is buying energy from Western Australia is keeping Western Australians in jobs and helping support the domestic supply of natural gas that is critical to our industry. Forty per cent of the gas that comes down the pipeline is used by the former Leader of the Liberal Party's former employer. Think how

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critical natural gas is to Western Australia. It relies on investment from international partners and the opposition is saying that I should not go and talk to them. Members opposite are criticising me for going to do exactly what the community expects, and that is to engage.

I will finish on this one: our future battery industry. We have had amazing success in downstream processing in the battery sector. We have two operating hydroxide plants, with a third under construction. We have the nickel sulphate plant of BHP Nickel West, which took us from not producing any nickel sulphate to being the fourth largest producer in the world. Now we are looking at producing precursor chemicals and cathode-acting materials. This is revolutionary for Western Australia and will put us at the heart of this new battery industry. In the past, China has dominated the supply of these chemicals for the industry, and we have got this opportunity to do it. But we will not win this opportunity if we do not treat our international investors with respect. The idea that we should not go and talk to them or sit across the table and say, “I am here to listen. I respect you and I am engaging with you in your home country”, is childishly stupid. Again, I point out to the member for Vasse that nobody in the business community takes her seriously when she criticises me for doing exactly what I am asked to do.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The member for Vasse criticises me. She goes to a newspaper and criticises me for doing exactly what I am supposed to do. I have gone and engaged with these customers.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party, you had your say. You were not interrupted, much, by the other side.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: No; they were quite restrained. Therefore, please give the government the opportunity to respond—in silence.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I will wind up. I am proud to be in a government that is led by a superb person like the Premier. The leadership that we receive from the Premier is exactly what the community wants. People know that when the Premier makes a decision, he is doing it because he wants to support good outcomes for Western Australians. That is what upsets members opposite most of all because they know that is true.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [3.41 pm]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to comment on this matter of public interest. Again, we have seen a complete 180 degree turn in what the Leader of the Liberal Party said. The Leader of the Opposition put in a motion saying that the Minister for Mines and Petroleum absconded, but the Leader of the Liberal Party now says that that is not what was said. But the word “abscond” is in the motion. I want to go through this motion because I was the acting Minister for Mines and Petroleum for the last two weeks—thank you very much, Minister for Mines and Petroleum! Thank you very much for the opportunity to act on those portfolios over the past two weeks. We have an acting arrangement in this place, under the Westminster system, and I was the acting minister. I would have signed off on at least 15 questions for the upper house. Therefore, when members opposite ask why we did not provide information and why there was no access, there was; it was me. I was legally the acting Minister for Mines and Petroleum. I signed off on questions for the upper house, I appeared in the media a lot of times, and I was asked questions on this issue. The other thing members opposite could use in this place, if they were not lazy, are questions without notice with some notice given. If members opposite wanted to get further information from the acting minister, they could have asked me, with some notice, and we would have done that. But they never did.

When members opposite come in here and say that someone has absconded—run away from the law—it is a complete overstretch. I think the opposition went too far. I admit that last week I went too far in this place, and the opposition has to admit that it went too far in this MPI. As a result, everything that the members opposite have said, again, has matched the fact that this motion does not reflect reality.

The Leader of the Liberal Party has absconded from this place. The opposition has only six members, and it cannot even keep six members in their seats for an hour. It cannot even do that. The Leader of the Opposition stood up, moved the MPI and three members opposite disappeared until we noted that they had “absconded” and now the Leader of the Liberal Party has absconded. Run away from the law, has she? I do not know; she has absconded. She is not even here to deal with the facts, and the fact is: she completely contradicted her opposition spokesperson on the Banksia Hill Detention Centre. There was the idea that Hon Peter Collier did not say the following things, but he said these things. In an article in *The Canberra Times* of 1 January, Hon Peter Collier said —

Detainees at a controversial West Australian youth prison were left with no option but to riot ...

...

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“The only vehicle that they’ve got is to riot,” Mr Collier said on Sunday.

Those were his direct words. For the Leader of the Liberal Party to come here and pretend that she cares about the workers is complete hypocrisy. Sorry; she is back! That is great. The Leader of the Liberal Party, who absconded from this debate, is now back. If the Leader of the Liberal Party did not hear, she completely contradicted Hon Peter Collier, her numbers person in the other place and the person who kept his job after some very, very interesting comments about women. Does the Leader of the Liberal Party believe that what Hon Peter Collier said was correct? No; it is because she is never held to account. She says whatever. She is dial-a-quote. She is never held to account. The Leader of the Liberal Party completely contradicts her own people.

I agree with what the Minister for Mines and Petroleum said: dial-a-quote is easy. I have seen it. Members of the Liberal Party can say whatever. They can have a line here and there, but they have no policies. Basically, every member of the Liberal Party says different things, and there are only a couple of them, and they cannot even hold that together.

What the Leader of the Opposition claimed today was —

Ms A. Sanderson: Outrageous.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Outrageous; yes.

The Leader of the Opposition stood up and made a claim when he had no evidence. He sits here more offended about what happened with the Shanghai Gold Exchange than the Shanghai Gold Exchange. I do not get it. The Shanghai Gold Exchange is still buying our gold in record amounts. It issued a statement saying that the commentary of what happened is not very good and it asked that people please stop commenting. The Leader of the Opposition stands here on behalf of the Shanghai Gold Exchange when it does not want him to, because it is buying gold at record rates. I still do not understand why the Leader of the Opposition is more offended than the Shanghai Gold Exchange. The Shanghai Gold Exchange has moved on. It is buying our gold and is basically saying to please stop the commentary. The opposition is making some outrageous allegations that it cannot back up. Members opposite cannot stand up and say, without any evidence, that a government organisation is acting illegally.

I turn to the idea of a royal commission. The opposition calls for a royal commission on everything, including the Kimberley floods. The opposition says that we need a royal commission on the Kimberley floods.

Ms S.F. McGurk: And why it rains so much.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We need a royal commission on why it rains.

Is it the opposition’s commitment to undertake a royal commission?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, minister.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister! Thank you.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy Speaker casting his vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (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>)

Noes (45)

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

Question thus negatived.