

LOAN BILL 2017

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural) [5.08 pm]: It is always a bit difficult to recommence an address to this place after a break of 40-odd minutes for question time.

Hon Nick Goiran: Start again!

Hon JIM CHOWN: I am tempted to start again, Hon Nick Goiran, but rather than bore the house for another 20 minutes, I will continue with my remarks. I may recap at a later time.

I had been talking about Metronet, which is a major policy that the Labor Party has gone forward with, and Hon Stephen Dawson engaged in a bit of repartee about the cost. May I say at this stage that I hold Hon Stephen Dawson in very high regard. I believe he is an honourable person and a gentleman. I would say the same about Hon Sue Ellery.

Hon Sue Ellery: I am not a gentleman, thank you!

Hon JIM CHOWN: I am getting to that, please. I will not take that interjection. I think Hon Sue Ellery is a lady of great ability. Both Hon Stephen Dawson and Hon Sue Ellery would be outstanding ministers in the right government. Unfortunately, they are in the wrong government.

Several members interjected.

Hon JIM CHOWN: That is a backhanded compliment to both of them, but I mean that sincerely.

Hon Sue Ellery: We love you too, Jim!

Hon JIM CHOWN: We will get back to Metronet. This has been a baseline program of the Labor Party. I will not go into all the lines and the intentions of putting in place this \$2.5 billion of expenditure. I am sure the Loan Bill will have a fair bit to do with that piece of infrastructure at some stage in the future.

We need to bear in mind that if \$2.5 billion is borrowed to put infrastructure in place, public transport is actually subsidised from the budget by about 80 per cent as well. As I said earlier, patronage on public transport has been declining at a massive rate since 2012. I have questions about the Loan Bill 2017 and the minister's second reading reply, and I am more than happy to put them to the minister during the committee stage on the short title: What is the estimated cost of Metronet? How much of the Loan Bill will be used to pay for Metronet? Has Metronet been costed appropriately by the Department of Transport? These questions are very pertinent to whether this house approves this bill. I would also like to ask the minister representing the Treasurer about the government's debt-reduction strategy. It has been brought up by more than one speaker in this place this afternoon and it was advocated as a policy prior to the Labor Party coming into government. Labor went to the people and said that it was going to reduce debt. Mark McGowan, the now Premier, said that the government would do it slowly and responsibly, but that it will have a debt-reduction strategy.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Just like paying off the family home.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Just like paying off the family home. By 2020 or 2021, he said that we will have a slight surplus of a couple of hundred million dollars. I would like to know what that debt-reduction strategy encapsulates, when it is likely to be put in place; and, if it cannot be put in place, why not. They are the sort of questions we expect answered in this house before we meet the government's request for us to approve this bill of \$11 billion over four years. In life we take people, entities and companies on face value. If somebody lets us down or tells us a blatant lie, we hold them in great disrespect. We actually have great suspicions about anything they have to say to us in future, and that is where I am at with this government—I really am. I will just go through a few things.

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

Hon JIM CHOWN: I nearly voted for them. I was starting to believe the rhetoric, as did a major part of the population. As I said in a previous address in this place, I thought that the Prime Minister must have whispered in the Premier's ear and said, "You're going to get 80c of your GST back, boyo, and you can go ahead and spend and spend. You are going to have \$5 billion of GST revenue year after year." Of course, that was just nonsense. Labor still went out there and made these massive promises to the electorate at large. It is the old Goebbels principle back in the 1940s: tell a lie often enough and the general public will come along with you. The blame for this falls on not only the Labor Party, but also the Western Australian press that is just atrocious in its ability to forensically look at some of the statements that were made by all parties. As the fourth estate it has a massive responsibility to forensically analyse statements and put it out in the public arena on talkback radio or anywhere. The press should dig down on government policies and say, "Look, this is not going to swing. This is not going to work." There is only one journalist in this state who I hold in high regard, and that is Paul Murray. He is unbiased in his statements

and he does good research work on some of the statements he has made in his editorials. I hope he keeps doing it, I really do. Gareth Parker is getting there. He does some good work. A headline in the paper states words to the effect of “Honeymoon over as promises haunt Labor”, and so it should be. The Barnett government had a honeymoon period of at least six years. This government is struggling at this stage to get a honeymoon period of three months. In fact, as I go around my electorate and the metropolitan area, people are a little bit disappointed with the government at this stage. People are saying that if things do not improve in three years, they will start putting up placards saying “Don’t blame me. I didn’t vote Labor”.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Who is telling you that, member? Are you making this stuff up?

Hon JIM CHOWN: The minister needs to get out of his bubble. He needs to get out of Dumas House now and again. He should stop surrounding himself with all those acolytes he has brought in to support him and go back and meet the real people. Surely he has not forgotten his roots.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Show me on the hands.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Seriously, just you wait.

Hon Simon O’Brien: Don’t blame me.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Yes, “Don’t blame me. I didn’t vote Labor”. Exactly. I mean, no new taxes —

Hon Stephen Dawson: How many people voted for Liberal in the member’s electorate in the Agricultural Region? Not too many.

Hon Simon O’Brien: What? Do you think he doesn’t know? He can name them.

Hon JIM CHOWN: No, I cannot actually. This government went to the election with a policy of no new taxes. What is it going to do? When the budget comes down—this is serious—it is going to tax commercial residents in this state \$375. It will be very interesting and members need to take notice. When provision comes forward in the bill, the wording of it is absolutely critical. I understand that if one word is out of place, every resident in this state could be taxed by the Labor Party to pay for its promises that were unfunded and uncosted. It had a couple of Labor acolytes stand up and say, “Yes, tick, tick: this is all done. We are independent.” The government would not put any costings to the Department of Treasury. This is a very important point as we are expected to approve a bill worth \$11 billion without a budget. It is the same premise. On absolute faith, the Labor Party is keeping everybody in this state in the dark like mushrooms about its ability to cost anything. What about this government’s broken promises? We now know that Labor would not sell Western Power because the unions would not let it; that is the bottom line.

Hon Stephen Dawson: It was because the people did not want to sell Western Power, member. Where have you been? Where were you on 11 March? The people voted not to sell Western Power.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Tell me why. It was because Labor went out and told absolute lies about the sale of Western Power. The advertisement was very good; it was a blatant lie. Every night the Treasurer goes home to bed and says to himself, “The Liberal policy on Western Power was brilliant. I wish we hadn’t come out so hard against it. I wish the damn unions had left me alone because then I would not be in the financial trouble that I am now experiencing.” If Labor had sold Western Power, it would have probably been a better damn government than it is now. That will be its undoing over the next three to four years.

Hon Peter Collier: Ask your Labor colleagues in the other states. They don’t mind.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Exactly. The chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Rod Sims, said that the sale of Western Power in this state will not increase power prices. In fact, it could lower them through efficiency gains as a commercial entity. What will this government do? It is going to increase power prices by at least 15 per cent over the next two years. Hon Colin Tincknell —

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Madam President.

The PRESIDENT: You are right. I can see that you need my protection. You were on your feet, Hon Jim Chown, and I suggest you continue for another minute or two before you finish.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Thank you. Hon Colin Tincknell quite correctly asked about the people who cannot afford the price increases. It is actually bigger than that. We are now in an economy that is flat and we have an unemployment rate of about six per cent. In Mandurah the youth unemployment is about 27 per cent. In other areas in the metropolitan area the adult unemployment rate is about 12 or 13 per cent. If power prices are increased to 14 to 15 per cent, as this government is going to do, it will affect business owners. Wages and power are the two major expenses of any business. What is a business owner to do if the business is breaking even but the cost of power goes up by 15 per cent when the business is trying to keep its workforce—its core of workers—so that when things improve the business can operate at a profit again? He will have to tell his staff, “Some of you guys have to go.

I can't afford to employ you anymore. I have to keep the business running because that is my income. I have spent my whole life building up this business, but Labor Party's increase in power is making me make you unemployed." That is what is going to happen. Labor said that there would be 50 000 new jobs, but 50 000 people will be unemployed under this government and it will happen over the next 12 months following the next budget. That is my concern as a responsible member of this house representing regional Western Australia. We should all be concerned on this side of the house about where this government is going.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.