

Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Martin Pritchard; Acting President; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Kyle McGinn

STATE BUDGET 2022–23 — SURPLUS

Motion

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [10.14 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house —

- (a) notes another near record budget surplus announced for the 2022–23 financial year in the May budget, which is likely to be upgraded to an even higher surplus in the September *Annual report on state finances*.

A government member interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Perhaps let the member move the motion first before we entertain Thursday business.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you. I will resist the urge to start again and move on to paragraph (b), President. The motion continues —

- (b) notes the government’s inability to deliver services, infrastructure and projects such as Metronet in a cost-efficient and timely manner, despite the massive increase in revenue that it has received;

A government member interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Would the member like me to speak more slowly? I continue —

- (c) notes the government is using these massive revenues for its own political gain rather than for the ultimate and efficient benefit of the Western Australian community; and
- (d) calls on the state government to improve its performance so that it might achieve better service delivery, genuine economic reform, the paying down of debt and better support of the community to manage cost-of-living rises.

Welcome to Thursday. What a good start to the day! I might just reflect on where Western Australia’s finances are. I would hate people to think that the McGowan Labor government is not flush with cash, because it is. It has an enormous amount of wealth. It has more wealth than any state government has received in the history of Western Australia, but, probably more importantly, it has received more income and greater surpluses than any state jurisdiction in the history of Australia.

Several members interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The government fell into an iron ore shower raining down gold!

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! Let us start again.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you, President.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Is the minister trying to claim credit for good economic management because the iron ore price went to over \$US200 a tonne and is currently \$US140 a tonne today? Is that the result of Mark McGowan’s policy? No, it is not. Unless Mark McGowan is responsible for initiating COVID somehow and did not tell us about it and unless he weakened the dam wall in South America, he cannot take the credit for the economic position we find ourselves in. I do not think so. Members, this is “lucky” Mark. I note that the Premier gave himself the job of Treasurer at a very opportune moment. This Premier fell into the greatest level of wealth. Imagine the Premier sitting on top of the money bin, President. The money bin is not very full. There is a bit in it but suddenly 2019 comes along and the money bin is full. When he falls into it to roll around in the money like Scrooge McDuck, he does not have far to fall because the money bin is full. That is what the Premier, Hon Mark McGowan, has achieved. He managed to fall into a very full money bin.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Honourable member, while you are baiting the hook, I will actually let you try to suffer from that which you reel in. However, we need an orderly chamber so that you can be heard.

A member interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Particularly while the Presiding Officer is speaking, members will be silent.

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Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They are an unruly bunch today, but it is Thursday, so I guess we offer a little bit of enthusiasm.

This Premier and this government have received a massive windfall in royalties. They are the sorts of royalties and revenues that we probably will not see again in our lifetime. It is not that this government has been a great financial manager and that expenditure has been kept under control, because we know that expenditure has risen. It is up, not down. Some of that is COVID expenditure. Well done; that is okay. But it means that the McGowan government cannot claim that good financial management has put it in the position it is in. Sheer good luck has put it in that position. It is sheer good luck that the world was engaged in massive infrastructure programs on the back of COVID.

A member interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I do not hear the member thanking the former Prime Minister who was the Treasurer who initiated it. I do not remember hearing him say thanks once. Not once did he thank the former coalition federal government for actually doing it. It was a coalition government that gave it back. All the state government could do was ask. Does the member know who gave it back? The federal coalition government gave it back—billions of additional dollars in revenue.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Peak tone has been reached.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you, President. I might struggle to keep the voice going at this rate.

We give great thanks to the previous coalition government for the GST, which the member rightly raises. It has also contributed to the financial position that the state finds itself in. We give great thanks to that government because, obviously, the McGowan government could not do it itself. It had to have the action of the federal government, and that is exactly what happened.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The only people who could do it were the Prime Minister and the federal Treasurer, and that is exactly what they did, and government members are still ungrateful, President. They cannot say thank you. It burns them, and they cannot move forward and say thank you.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I am just giving your voice a rest, momentarily.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you for your protection, President.

Let us get this straight. Obviously, this government has a mass of wealth. The question is not necessarily how it has come about. We know: it is written in the budget papers. Iron ore royalties that have generally and traditionally been \$5 billion to \$6 billion—probably \$6 billion with increases of throughput—are more like \$12 billion. There are \$6 billion of additional royalties, but probably \$5 billion for the current financial year because it has come back a little bit. Guess what the budget surpluses are? They were \$5.8 billion for the last financial year. This year, the estimate is \$5.7 billion, but I still have a bottle of red wine sitting on it getting close to \$6 billion. My original estimate was in the sixes, so I still think I might win. I still think there is a chance because the iron ore price is \$US140 a tonne today. This gives the government a little extra money to spend. Can it deliver good services, good policy and economic reform at a time when it has the greatest capacity in the history of the state of Western Australia to do so? Can it deliver for the people of Western Australia rather than for the political future of Labor members of Parliament and the McGowan government? Can it deliver for the people of Western Australia?

How is the health system performing? How is the ambulance ramping going? According to the former Minister for Health when he was the shadow health minister, it was a crisis when we had a couple of thousand hours of ambulance ramping. How is it going now? I think we are back down to 5 000 hours of ramping a month at the moment, so it is going wonderfully well! The Labor Party and the McGowan government's capacity to deliver services is on display for the people of Western Australia. If the government has this massive wealth, the question is: what it is going to do with it? Can it deliver services? Can it deliver projects on time and on budget? I am glad the Minister for Regional Development is here because she and I debated whether she was capable of doing it when she was Minister for Transport many years ago. That was an argument that looked a bit similar to the argument we have had so far today—it was about delivering on time and on budget. The reality is that the Minister for Regional Development is possibly better at getting things on time and on budget than the current transport minister. There were blowouts under the Minister for Regional Development when she was the infrastructure tsarina back in the 2000s. There were some blowouts, and I did make a bit of political mileage out of it at the time. That is part of the job.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

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Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The minister has paled into insignificance compared with the performance of the current transport minister and the blowouts in projects like Metronet, which my good friend Hon Tjorn Sibma will probably mention in a contribution in the not too distant future. I am sure he will have a very good look at the blowout. Metronet was a project that started at \$3 billion. Yes, it has had a few changes of scope, but it has blown out now to \$10 billion.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: What I will tell the minister about is the Bunbury Outer Ring Road, if she wants to know about a project that she might remember. She helped build the road down to it. Let us have a chat about the Bunbury Outer Ring Road.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Bring it back to a dull roar.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Let us have a chat about the Bunbury Outer Ring Road. It started out at \$750 million —
A member interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Do members want me to sing? No, members do not want me to sing. It is not a pleasant experience.

It was a \$750 million or \$850 million project, and then suddenly it is a \$1.25 billion project; the feds have put in \$320 million more, and the government is putting in \$80 million more. Guess what? It is not only that the price has blown out, but also for the extra \$400 million, this government still has to reduce the scope, so it is probably a \$1.5 billion or \$1.6 billion project. This government has taken all the graded roundabouts out and is putting in normal roundabouts. Instead of removing the traffic intersections, they are back to roundabouts. In fact, as I understand it, the freight logistics for trucks in particular will be horrendous. If trucks are coming out of what is currently Moore Street, they will have to come out, turn left, go a few hundred metres down the road and try to do a U-turn to come back up if they want to go north. For this massive hit in the efficiency of the road, people would think that the government is making a saving, but it is not. For this massive hit, it has a \$400 million blowout. From memory, I do not think even the Minister for Regional Development managed a \$400 million blowout of the same size, so well done. Less worse is better! That is great, but this government cannot manage its infrastructure projects, and, I suspect, when we eventually look, we might discover that Main Roads' original costings of \$750 million or \$850 million were a joke. That is what happens when a government does not manage its infrastructure process properly: it does not manage to get the job done, it does not get proper business cases, and it gets the sorts of blowouts that we are looking at in the Bunbury Outer Ring Road. This government struggles to deliver on the back of the massive fortune it has been able to amass.

We are going to run out of time, President. Part (c) says that the government is using these massive revenues for —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: You can move for an extension of time.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I would be delighted if the minister moves an extension. I would be absolutely delighted in eight and a half minutes' time.

What is this government doing with this massive amount of money? Its inefficiency in delivery means that everything is costing more. Partly, there are some reasonable reasons for an increase in costs around the place. There is a shortage of labour, and there is a shortage of materials. Some of that is reasonable, but the inefficiency of the McGowan Labor government is the other part of the blowout, and that needs to be considered. What else is it doing? The other issue is that this government cannot spend the money fast enough. It cannot invest more money in infrastructure because it cannot deliver the infrastructure program that it already has on the books. It is out there saying that it is going to build \$9 billion or \$10 billion worth of infrastructure when it manages to deliver \$5 billion or \$6 million worth. For the last few years, it has had a massive infrastructure program in place, but if we look at what it has actually managed to get out of the door, it is billions of dollars less because it cannot manage the infrastructure program that it has set for itself. It cannot deliver it. Now, we have a \$9 billion or \$10 billion program sent into the future, which this government will be completely unable to deliver.

It cannot put more in infrastructure, so what is it investing in? Interestingly, this is the clever part. It is actually storing money in special-purpose accounts so it has that money available for future financial years. We can see what the Treasurer is doing; the Premier is the Treasurer. He is trying to set up his political future. He is trying to look after the government of the future and he is going to set aside these things. Billions of dollars' worth of money is stashed away, ostensibly in the budget papers in particular accounts, but effectively in the Mark McGowan money bin. It is stashed away ready for his future use. That is precisely what this government is doing. There are even projects that are reasonable. Let us consider a couple. Hundreds of millions of dollars are set aside for the expansion of

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a softwood plantation area, and that is not a bad thing. There is massive investment, and that is great because there has been underinvestment—I have acknowledged that. How long will it take the government to spend that money? We might be asking that question when we debate the forestry bill. It will take it decades. This money will be sitting out there ready for the McGowan government to use for its own benefit. What is it not doing? It is not looking after the people of Western Australia and their interests and it is not putting their interests first.

Let us talk about the cost of living. That is probably the most pressing issue for the community of Western Australia. I would like to have proper time to address things such as economic reform, because this government has completely stalled on the economic reform process. I am waiting for someone to stand and give us some detail on how machinery-of-government changes are working for the government. It would be great if the government could give us an economic round out about the cost savings that machinery-of-government changes have delivered. I keep asking about it and I keep getting no answer. It is a bit like me asking how many jobs have been created in the Collie Futures fund and the Collie industry attraction and development fund. I originally received some answers but now the minister is too frightened to put the answers in because the government is a bit embarrassed about the lack of performance and delivery, particularly in a town such as Collie, which is undergoing a significant change at the moment. The lack of delivery is the problem this government has. Members will note that the motion—as I often try to do—does not condemn the Labor government for anything. I am not interested in saying that this house praises the McGowan government or condemns the McGowan government. The motion says, “Pick up your act. Pick up your act as a government.” It is not delivering the jobs it said it would deliver. It is not delivering the economic reform it said it would deliver.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: What is it costing? The minister can tell us in a minute. Out of the Collie industry attraction and development fund, is it a million dollars a permanent job? Is that what the cost is?

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Is that what the cost is—a million dollars a job? The government has paid their wages for 10 years. I bet it is \$1 million.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Here we go—we will put a little wager on it now. I am guessing a million dollars a job. That is the efficiency of that program.

I digress: we need to get back to the cost of living debate because we are going to run out of time. The minister can wave around whatever she likes; that will be interesting. I look forward to my extension of time.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: What is the most important job this government can do? It can minimise its own impact on the people of Western Australia. It can take its hand out of the hip pocket of the families in this state. What can it do? It can minimise the costs it imposes. I would like to say that it can do things more efficiently—provide an efficient health service, get things constructed on time and on budget—but let us not set the government a target that it cannot reach. Let us not set it a target that is designed to fail. Let us set it a target that it might be able to deliver over the next few years if it works really hard. We are very positive today; this is a positive motion of reinforcement. How about this government takes its hands out of the hip pockets of the families of Western Australians? How about freezing prices? It put out a \$400 electricity rebate, which I welcomed, that means that in the upcoming financial year there is a slight reduction of cost. That is \$400 million in cost because as a rough rule of thumb there are one million households at \$400 a pop. It is not exactly that but I will use round numbers because I do not want to confuse people. If this government decided to freeze fees and charges for the 2022–23 financial year, the initial cost would be another \$156 million. The government is happy to spend \$400 million effectively buying votes, but it could go a little further—just that little bit further. Here is my prediction: if the budget surplus that is reached in the *Annual report on state finances* in September is more than \$156 million higher than the estimate of the government in the budget, which is \$5.7 billion—if it is \$5.856 billion—this government, with the money that it did not even record in the budget, could have frozen fees and charges for the 2022–23 financial year. It could have taken its hands out of the pockets of Western Australian families just that bit more. It would not cost the government even the additional budget surplus it is about to receive. It is a very small amount that it could have given back, but it did not. Why does the Premier, who is the Treasurer, not do these things? Why does he not do significant economic reform? Why does he not look after the people of Western Australia? It is because he is addicted to his reputation. He loves big surpluses.

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A member interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: We have already agreed that Scott Morrison sorted out the GST for the government. The Premier loves big surpluses. He loves to attach his name to big revenues and big surpluses. In my opinion, in that way he is the embodiment of Scrooge McDuck. He is rolling around in the money bin because he loves big budget surpluses. He had the opportunity to give a significant amount back to the people of Western Australia, but he refused because he loves big surpluses. Come on, government—there is lots more it can do. It can make things better for people. Let us pick up the act.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [10.36 am]: I rise to support this excellent motion by Hon Dr Steve Thomas. It is a timely and well-structured motion. How welcome it is to come here on a Thursday morning and for this chamber to have resumed its usual Thursday morning broadcast. I welcome back to the chamber the Minister for Regional Development who is one of the more vociferous participants in these kinds of debates. The modulated reasonable tones of the Minister for Emergency Services, who was last dispatched to do this duty, was a welcome change. However, I like the kind of vigour, the scrutiny and the pugilism the Minister for Regional Development brings. I say this quite honestly because I believe that in a jurisdiction to our north, Singapore has the concept of the minister mentor. Quite frankly, I think the McGowan government could utilise the services of mentors such as the Minister for Regional Development.

I want to change gears somewhat in the course of this debate. We have had some of our fun, but we also need to reflect on some of the serious issues that my friend Hon Dr Steve Thomas has brought to the fore this morning. I will concentrate on the second limb of the motion and talk about Metronet. The first thing I will say is that obviously it is important for all governments to make investments in public transport infrastructure, but they must do so in a structured, sensible and professional way. I will use this opportunity to reflect on Metronet. Conceptually, Metronet is a very different beast now from what was pledged in 2017. If I am to take the Minister for Transport in the other place at her word, Metronet is not only a rail project now, but also a road project. During recent estimates hearings she threw in that it could also be a cycle pathway project as well. Conceptually, we have seen enormous scope creep in what Metronet is, because that is certainly not what it was supposed to be. The issue is that Metronet was taken to the public as an infrastructure investment valued at around \$3 billion, and that included new railcars. The full capital cost of Metronet, if we scrutinise the budget closely, is now closer to a \$10 billion capital allocation. That in itself is neither here nor there unless we determine how well each of those projects' subcomponents are being delivered. My suggestion, quite humbly but quite reasonably, is that they are being neither well developed nor well delivered. Two days ago in the other place we received evidence of that when the Minister for Transport advised the house that, as a consequence of the termination of the original radio systems replacement project, the government has had to pay out the Huawei–UGL consortia about \$6.6 million. That is obviously a very negative outcome because a contract could not be delivered.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: The minister will have plenty of opportunity later and I will welcome her contribution. This was an avoidable termination. It was terminated effectively because of a force majeure: a trade war between the United States and China. It was known globally and it was foreseeable, yet the state government entered into a contract with a provider that was more susceptible to sanctions and intervention than any other proponent. That was obviously a risk, yet the state government considered that Western Australia, strangely, was somewhat immune from every other global dynamic. It prosecuted this and went ahead. Inevitably, the contract collapsed. The process of termination was initiated in 2020. What does that mean? Frankly, it means that the contract that was supposed to deliver the service is going to be delayed. We do not yet know whether any payments were made under that contract leading up to the termination payment. I think that the overall contract had a value of around \$200 million. Subsequently, a new procurement contract has had to be let of a value greater than \$300 million. Effectively, the second contract costs 50 per cent more than the original contract.

Part of the reason why Metronet, as an overall project, has grown in cost by 300 per cent is because the individual components that make up Metronet have been so badly mishandled. Things happen and not everything is perfect. Difficulties are encountered in any infrastructure program or anything complicated, but a responsible government will do what it can to de-risk. In this particular instance, it did not. This issue is an interesting one —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: The minister is great. I like listening to her, but she will get an opportunity soon in reply and I will listen attentively. This particular contract, strangely, was never publicly announced. I do not know why it was never announced. There has been a brace of Metronet-related media statements over the course of the last five years—in excess of 400, I believe, probably more. This procurement, despite being worth more than \$200 million, with a preferred contractor and subject to international commentary and industry reservation, should

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have gone to cabinet. If I recall correctly, the Minister for Transport said that it did not, yet when we sought the contract details—as did I and colleagues of mine in this chamber and the other one—we were advised that we could not receive those documents because they were cabinet-in-confidence. The obvious incongruity was never explained.

Hon Sue Ellery: That’s a term that your government used to use a lot—cabinet-in-confidence.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I cannot deal in the past, honourable member. I can only deal with the present and the future. Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: It behoves a government to conduct itself responsibly. I will say that in this particular case, demonstrably this government behaved irresponsibly, recklessly and expensively. I do not mind a government patting itself on the back and its very loyal members reciting—one might say regurgitating—the talking points given to them by the Premier; Treasurer’s office or the minister’s office: “These are the talking points, comrades; we are to congratulate ourselves.” I do not mind them doing that so long as they are intellectually and morally honest as they do so. I know that that might be a difficult concept for some to even contemplate, and if they find it hard perhaps they should go and work on another hashtag. If members opposite want the acclaim here, they also need to grow up and accept responsibility and focus their minds at least on part (d) of this motion, which is to improve their performance.

Point of Order

Hon KATE DOUST: I refer to standing order 47 on relevance. The member said that he was going to talk to the third prong of the motion. I am yet to hear him talk about that. All he is doing is attacking the members on this side and I urge you to pull him back to the motion that we have before us today.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, honourable member. I note that the debate is wideranging, as is the motion. However, I do invite the honourable member to try to focus a little bit on the content of the motion.

Debate Resumed

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Thank you, President. I will be guided always by you. Hon Kate Doust may have misheard me. I was addressing my remarks to prong (d) of the motion, not the third prong, and I think that every comment that I have made is absolutely relevant to that. But as I have been invited to talk to the more generic issue, I ask members to concentrate their minds on limb (d), which is to do better and to lift their game. I think they have it in them—at least some of them might. Thank you very much.

HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral) [10.47 am]: I am going to attempt to stay out of the trenches as much as possible and take the moral high ground from the lofty heights of the crossbench. This motion is very wideranging. It casts a wide net and I thank the honourable member for allowing a bit of latitude in this debate today. In respect of service delivery, I would like to draw to the house’s attention a report that was recently tabled by the Attorney General titled *Information systems audit report 2022—State government entities*. It is a very good read and a compelling one. I acknowledge that members’ eyes tend to glaze over when we talk about information technology in this place, but I will attempt to break it down as much as possible. As members would expect, this report is an audit on information technology systems that outlines 59 different government entities. To give members an example, it includes Central Regional TAFE, Curtin University, the Departments of Finance, Transport and Treasury, and the list goes on. The report breaks it down into six different categories: information security, IT operations, business continuity, change control, management of IT risks and physical security. The AG uses industry best practice to look at these six different areas and has evaluated the efficacy of these information systems in respect of these six different controls. I will read from the report. The objectives of this audit are to —

... support the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information systems and the information they hold.

It is about ensuring that these systems work as intended, the information they contain is secure, and the trust of the Australian people is maintained. I think all members will agree that those are all good things.

I will now read the Auditor General’s own words from the overview of the report. It states —

Global trends show more organisations are experiencing information and cybersecurity attacks. Compromise of supply chains, ransomware, and exploitation of vulnerabilities remain high. Government entities are not immune to these attacks as they deliver key services and hold valuable citizen data. As internal and external threats continue to evolve it is important that entities constantly improve the key controls that protect their information systems and IT environments from information and cybersecurity risks.

The Australian Cyber Security Centre has recently released a report that indicates a potential \$64 billion cybercrime risk to the Australian economy. Cybercrime is rising; we know that, and WA obviously represents a piece of that

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\$64 billion pie. The government is certainly a party to that risk, and has a responsibility to ensure that we are not throwing money away to overseas hackers.

I refer again to the overview of the Auditor General's report, a more damning part of the report, which states —

This year's audits show many entities are still not addressing audit findings quickly, with nearly half of all findings previously reported remaining unresolved by the following year's audit. It is also disappointing that many entities continue to have poor controls over information security. Only 50% of entities met our benchmark in this area, with no noticeable improvement from the previous year.

That is pretty damning stuff. This is an independent body, the Auditor General's office, that made recommendations about weaknesses and flaws in state government information systems a year ago, but 49 per cent of them had not been addressed by the following year. The information technology sector moves very quickly, as does the cybercrime and cybersecurity sector. For it to have taken more than a year to address the issues raised by the Auditor General shows complete disdain, in my opinion. The report continues —

It is disappointing that 49% of this year's audit findings were weaknesses unresolved from the previous year, compared to 42% unresolved last year.

That shows an upward trend. It continues —

As internal and external threats continue to evolve it is important entities promptly address audit findings to protect their information systems and IT environments.

The 36 entities that had capability assessments improved ...

So there was slight upward trend in some of these categories, overall. The report continues —

However, information security is still our biggest area of concern with no noticeable improvement from the previous year, and similar to prior years. Half of the entities failed to meet our benchmark in this area and implement effective controls to protect their information systems. At 6 entities control weaknesses were so pervasive and significant that their financial audit controls opinions were qualified.

Their opinions were also qualified in another report, *Audit results report: Annual 2020-21 financial audits of state government entities*. It does not actually say which of these entities it is referring to—that is made anonymous—but members could make a comparison between the two reports and ascertain that quite quickly, if they were so inclined.

It is important to acknowledge both the good and the bad, and there are a couple of agencies that did quite well. Nine of the entities that undergo a capability assessment every year have consistently demonstrated good practice across all six controls, and I will read them out now, because they deserve some acknowledgement: the Department of the Premier and Cabinet; Racing and Wagering Western Australia; Landgate; Curtin University; Edith Cowan University; the Department of Training and Workforce Development; the Lotteries Commission; South Metropolitan TAFE; and the Department of Finance. These entities all deserve a gold star and a pat on the back.

I will read from a few case studies in the report. They provide specifics on what the Auditor General has uncovered in her investigation, and some of it is pretty enlightening and damning stuff. Case study 6 is headed "Highly sensitive information could be accessed without logging and monitoring controls". It states —

At 1 entity we found staff could access highly sensitive reports sourced from multiple systems without logging and monitoring controls. Entity allowed this access only to those staff who had appropriate security clearance however, we found that over 200 staff with access to the reports did not have the required security clearances.

This speaks to the blast radius of these documents. Some sensitive documents are being sought on a network somewhere, and more than 200 staff in this department have access to them. That speaks to a lack of authorisation and not using a role-based authorisation in the system, which is a basic feature of any IT system.

Case study 7 is titled, "Lack of appropriate process to manage contractor access". It states —

We identified 8 contractor accounts that accessed the entity's network (4 remotely accessed) after their termination date recorded in the system. While the entity's security team identified these accounts for termination, and advised the IT team, the IT team did not disable the accounts.

There was a known issue with access that was communicated to the IT team. It was told to fix it, but it did not. I do not know how government agencies work, but in the private space, if that scenario was raised, there would be

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repercussions and one would expect heads to roll. That is obviously a pretty significant weakness and an issue that is being swept under the rug.

Case study 9 states —

A large State government entity used 4 different finance systems, despite also having a licensed enterprise system for the entity with about 500 user licences not in use. In addition to being inefficient, this use of multiple finance systems increases financial risk and underutilises licensed resources.

I do not know what the cost of this system is, but one can imagine an enterprise with a finance system that has more than 500 licences; I think that would probably run into six figures. That shows a complete lack of integrity, and it is basically throwing money at the wall at that point.

I am running out of time, but I encourage the government to look at these recommendations and take the Auditor General's reports seriously.

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [10.57 am]: I rise to speak in particular to paragraph (c) of the motion, "notes that government is using these massive revenues for its own political gain". I can say that the geniuses in the Labor Party are going to be in for a very big shock in regional Western Australia. I can assure members that after the neglect of the regions there will be only one way, and that is south. We have already seen that in the latest polling, which shows a massive swing towards the Liberals in the bush. I can tell members that Ali Kent and Kevin Michel will be going through the data and looking at what happened since the last state election —

Point of Order

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: Could the Acting President please remind the member to refer to members in the other chamber by their correct titles, please?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot): I do not think the member needs me to remind him of that rule, which applies to everyone here. Will he please take note of the point that his colleague made.

Debate Resumed

Hon NEIL THOMSON: If the members for Kalgoorlie and Pilbara look at the results in the last federal election and translate them to this state, they will be very worried, because there is not a lot of confidence in the Labor Party after 2020–21. We are seeing the reason why people in the regions are coming back to the Liberal Party. It is because of the complete abrogation of any sense of honesty or integrity about the upper house electoral reforms. The Labor Party is even toying with the idea of not running a candidate in the next by-election. I know why. It does not want to be embarrassed by the terrible abrogation of anything that happens in the bush. It does not want to see those results creeping back. This government has completely ignored the bush. Despite the record surpluses and despite all the money in the money bin, it has completely ignored the bush. We see the government lurching from crisis to crisis.

Let us start with the basic need of electricity in the city of Kalgoorlie. What a joke. The power went off and on just like we were in some developing nation, and people lost tens of thousands of dollars' worth of goods, of opportunity, because they could not even keep the power on. How embarrassing. That is a terrible disgrace and I feel for those small businesses that have lost tens of thousands of dollars in goods and services because the Labor Party is ignoring the bush.

The Labor Party is not taking responsibility for the most basic issues of safety. We have seen record crime rates across regional Western Australia, even to the point that in the Kimberley the government delayed the Operation Regional Shield and things got far out of control. Finally, the Minister for Police woke up and thought he had to do something about it and put a few more officers out there. But there is ongoing crime in the bush. I speak to people on a daily basis when I am out in the regions and they have had enough. I say to all our geniuses over there who think it is a good thing, and a genius idea for political gain, to focus on metropolitan Perth and shut down the Armadale train line for 18 months that if they want to get political gain, they should maybe turn their eyes to the bush and start providing it with safety, which is the basic, number one issue. For example, let us look at the town of Carnarvon. What a disgrace! In 2018–19 in Carnarvon, there were about 60 crimes against persons. In 2020–21, there were 120. In each suburb in Carnarvon, that rate is going up. That is what we are seeing.

A government member interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: The member can look at it.

People opposite should look at their own data, because it is available. They can sort it out, but the problem is that they are not even looking. They are sitting there feeling smug in their own victory in 2021 and not considering the fact that people are missing out.

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Let us look at the situation in health. What a crisis! There is an absolute crisis in regional health. I believe Carnarvon is going to lose, or has already lost, its maternity services. An expectant mother in the bush has to fly to Perth six weeks before she is due because the government is shutting down those services. The Labor Party does not care about the bush. It does not care about North West Central; it does not even want to run a candidate. This is what the Labor Party is going to do. It does not care. I can tell members that the Liberal Party is going to be out there defending the people of Western Australia.

We have a situation in Kununurra. Look at it. What a disgrace! Kununurra Hospital does not even have enough staff to keep its doors open. It is struggling to maintain services. Look at the emergency department monthly report. The only time members opposite get any data is when the opposition presents it to them. I encourage them to do their own research and have a look at the data in the emergency department monthly report. We see that there is a constant decline. In the graphs in that report, which is available on the website, we see the constant decline in the number of admissions in the four-hour time frames. We see this constant time decline in attendance related to the length of episode; it is falling. People are having to wait longer to get service because they simply do not have the services in those towns. In the town of Wyndham, for example, there is a combination of law and order problems. Those poor nursing staff out there are being constantly harassed because of the lawlessness that is going on in our community. We are losing staff and having to slow down the hours. I could keep going on about the failure to deliver in the bush.

We see the failure in education. We saw the terrible situation and treatment of staff who actually had the audacity to speak up about attendance in Halls Creek. What a disgrace. The Australian Early Development Census shows an increase in the rate of vulnerable children in one or more domains in the town of Halls Creek. There is a crisis. We are losing a whole generation of children because this government will not invest in education and culturally appropriate education in our regional areas. It will not take the necessary action and deal with the crisis of a whole generation of young people who no longer attend school because education is not even seen as an option. We have a Minister for Education and Training who grabs some fake data presented by the department and goes on the public record. That gets undermined by an honest staff member, and all the government wants to do is put that person through the legal system. That is terrible. What a disgrace! This is the nature of this government. It does not want to know the truth, it does not want to know data, it does not want the facts and it does not want to defend regional Western Australia. It is only about its own political gain. In fact, it is so desperate about it that it wants to rig the system so that that it can ensure its dominance. Regional Western Australia has been left in the dark, literally in Kalgoorlie, because the government cannot invest in Western Power's necessary infrastructure to ensure that we have the vital services that we need.

I was in Newman the other day and we were talking about the sewerage system. How many things do we have to talk about in this place? The regions are groaning under the pressure. There is no support for all those regional local governments to support the investment in vital infrastructure. There is no support whatsoever. Let us look at safety, crime and health services. Let us think about it. There is basic power. We are in a very wealthy state. Let us think about it. There is sewerage. It is almost a joke when we think about it. The government cannot invest in the basics because it is focused only on its political gain. The government will focus on metropolitan Perth and that is all it will do. It is ignoring the bush and abandoning the people out there. I can tell government members that if they wait until the next election, those people will be gone.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (South West — Minister for Regional Development) [11.08 am]: I attempted to give as many members as possible an opportunity to stand, hoping that I might find something of substance that I could respond to. But, alas, I will leave one of my colleagues to address the contribution of the last member. I will try to weave through the basic proposition of the motion, which is a fundamental critique of the McGowan government liking surpluses. It is shocking that we actually try to balance the books! It is a shocking thing for a Labor government to do! I know that the Liberal Party has had a long tradition of not being able to deliver surpluses. I think that five out of eight Court government budgets were deficit budgets. We know that the performance of the Barnett government and its disdain for economic management resulted in a cash deficit for each of the years it was in government. No-one could ever accuse the Liberal Party of having an addiction to surpluses. We could accuse it of not having the capability for fiscal discipline that enables a surplus to be produced. This is absolutely true. It is an important point. I can see the same theme coming through with the comments of the Leader of the Opposition. That is quite regrettable because he is one of the more "on the ball" members. We can see the same fallacy and the inability to understand that a government needs to have structural control over the budget. The process adopted under Mr Barnett of indiscriminate spending increases led to major structural problems in the budget. This is what happened.

The Leader of the Opposition was trying to advance the theme that we had lots of money coming in, so it was really easy for us. He should go back and look at the iron ore price over much of the Barnett government's term. I think it got up to \$US170 a tonne. For most of its term, it was above \$US100 a tonne, so the money was coming in. The

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Leader of the Opposition's proposition is that this is all about the iron ore price. He is forgetting what the iron ore price was during most of the Barnett government's term. Let us look at comments made by an agency group that knows about these things. I turn to commentary from Standard and Poor's.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas interjected.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: This is really important. This agency gives governments an economic rating; it looks at performance and the structural elements of budgets. Apparently, a massive revival is occurring within the Liberal Party. There is no evidence of it anywhere else. The Liberal Party even lost the seat of Curtin. My goodness! Its members come into this place after their federal counterparts lost five seats in this state and talk about their great revival. Honestly, you dudes are going to be out of office for quite some time!

It is important that we deal with this issue today. If the smarter people in the Liberal Party, who might take office in 10 years, have not learnt that fundamental lesson of how to manage a budget and the structural increases that are put within it —

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I know this will probably be a case of pearls before swine for Hon Neil Thomson. I will read what Moody's said about the previous government —

Persistently high levels of spending could lead to a downgrade.

Of course, that went unheeded. This was back in 2013–14, when the iron ore price was well above \$US100 a tonne. Moody's warned the previous government that this persistently high level of spending could lead to a downgrade. That was totally ignored, and we continued to see cash deficits. Consequently, the state's AAA credit rating was lost in 2014. The opposition cannot deny that and it cannot deny its absolute failure in economic management because it did not understand this issue of structural spending in the budget was really at the heart of its downfall.

In contrast, comments have been made by the credit rating agencies about our performance. Standard and Poor's commented on the McGowan Labor government's continued budget "outperformance of domestic and global peers" and "exceptional fiscal metrics".

It is not all about a mini iron ore boom. When the Liberal Party came to government after seven and a half years of a Labor government, it had a \$4 billion debt. When it walked out the door eight years later, there was a \$44 billion debt. That is pretty incredible. Liberal members have the nerve and audacity to come in here and criticise us for generating surpluses that will help us drive down the debt that they created. Seriously! Honestly! I think it is really sad for democracy that we see the Liberal Party in the state that it is. It is not healthy.

I cannot believe the fundamental propositions that Liberal members have been putting here today. They are basically unsound. They tell us that notwithstanding the disastrous economic performance and the judgement that has been made by the people of Western Australia, they are still travelling on the same tram track. It is absolutely unbelievable. Perhaps Hon Tjorn Sibma is the one shining light who might understand that governments cannot just keep increasing their cost structures. Members opposite will notice some of the things that we have done when in a challenging position. We have ensured that we are not artificially constraining the price of the delivery of utilities. We recognised that until we had a federal Labor government and we got a proper increase in wages, there was an immediate problem. Without building in a structural underperformance in revenue collection, we were able to give that \$400 energy credit to the citizens of Western Australia out of our surplus.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas interjected.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: We could have. When the Liberal Party next gets back into government—I suspect it will be some time away—one of the things that it can be assured of is that it will not be left, like we were, with a budget with all these structural problems. The Labor Party has had to manage and it has been hard. We have had to manage wage levels within the public sector. We have done that. We are now in a position where we have the budget in a more positive state and we can start improving those levels. We cannot keep wanting to be popular and not take into account how we are going to pay for those things.

The opposition's critique is that in the budget, we currently underestimate the iron ore surplus. We base it on a very similar process to that used by the federal government. It is important and it is part of that fiscal discipline, in exact contrast to the federal government. Let me talk about when Christian Porter was the Treasurer of this state. He built into the budget an enhanced GST return. He did not just talk about it; he actually wrote that into the budget. Of course, he could not deliver it, but he had already written it into the budget, and the government was going off and spending it before it even got it. The Leader of the Opposition talked about how thankful we should be to the federal government because it gave us the GST deal. I ask members opposite: why were they incapable of getting that

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deal? I think it is because there was a level of indifference to the budget. They just kept spending! It did not matter; they did not have to go and have that fight, because they just kept spending. They said, “Just make the deficit a bit bigger, it’s only \$10 billion this year. We won’t try to fix this up, we won’t try to deal with the structural problems; we’ll just build a bigger deficit.” Members opposite have not explained how it is that when their own team was in federal government and they were here, they were not able to do it. We got into government and we got the federal Liberal coalition government to recognise that fundamental injustice. It is an injustice that we predicted would occur right from the very outset. We can go back to those debates in 1996 when former Premier Richard Court signed off on this deal. It was raised time and again in Parliament that it was actually a bad deal for Western Australia. But we corrected it, and now we have a fairer deal in our position within the commonwealth. Members opposite need to explain to us, firstly, how they could write those increases into the budget when they were not forthcoming; secondly, why were they not able to get that fairer deal.

I refer to the management of projects. Yes—at this time, we are well aware that with any project in the private or public sector, coming out of COVID, we have such levels of economic activity that prices are increasing. What was really amazing about members opposite is that even when we were virtually in a recession, when there was high unemployment—do members remember the children’s hospital? Do they remember the stadium? Do they remember those well-publicised projects?

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: I thought you liked the stadium!

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I do like it, but talk about management of risk!

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot): Members, the question is that the motion be agreed, and I give the call to Hon Colin de Grussa. I draw his attention to the fact that when 10 minutes remains, I will give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: No, it is non-government business. That is motions.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I looked it up and that is what it told me, but I will take advice on that.

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [11.23 am]: I, too, rise to contribute to this excellent motion brought to the chamber today by the Leader of the Opposition. I think that we all look forward to Thursdays in this chamber. The contributions of members on both sides and the interest shown by the members on the government’s side obviously speaks to the quality of the motions and the debate that we bring to this place, as well as the excellent contributions, of course, from the minister, whom we missed when she was away on urgent parliamentary business for the last couple of non-government business motions.

I want to talk about one particular limb of this excellent motion, and that is service delivery and the opportunity for this government to improve that service delivery. We have raised some of these issues in this place ad nauseam for the past five years. The government likes to go back further in time, but I like to live in the present moment. We, and my colleague Hon Tjorn Sibma, have raised numerous times the issue of the machinery-of-government changes, of course—the damage they have done, the time that has been used up by those changes and the issues that they have created within the public service, which has obviously been expected to deliver some of these huge projects that the government has been promising. One thing is for certain: if a government comes into power and immediately guts the public service, the rebuild process for that will take some time, so how is it going to deliver the projects that the government has been promising for years? We can look at the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, for example, and the qualified audit opinions that the Auditor General has delivered on the significant weaknesses in the computer controls. There is still money allocated in the current budget to fix the mess that was created by that merger. There is still plenty of money allocated in the budget to fix the IT systems after five years. They still have not managed to successfully get those systems to work together. They merged all those departments; I will not go into that.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: We need another Office of Shared Services!

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: The Office of Shared Services; we are going back to that!

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: That was a good investment!

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: We will not go into the mess that is the department or the super department of Communities and God knows what else, and the 400 ministers that it reports to, and the problems that have been created in that. Then there are the problems within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. We could go on forever about these problems! We could go on forever about the loss of knowledge out of those public services, because the good people left when they were threatened, basically. The government created a weapon of mass departures—a WMD—for public service members who could not stay in that department. They lost their jobs, they lost their job security, and that created massive mental health issues. We have been through that. We have seen

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reports from unions that have come out and said how bad the state of mental health was in those departments after that machinery-of-government change. We have seen that across other departments. We have seen a failure in those departments —

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: How much money have they saved?

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Yes, how much money have they saved? Not much! We look at all the different investments made by this government into those various areas. It still has not been able to fix the mess it created with the machinery-of-government changes that has led to instability in our public service, and now it expects that public service to be able to deliver the projects and infrastructure that this state needs to go forward. Whenever we raise issues in this place, all the government wants to do is go back to the past. It is somebody else's fault! It is not our fault; it is everybody else's fault!

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Ministers are living decades ago.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: They are living decades ago! We are almost stuck in the last century. It is everybody else's fault. We go back to the good old days of Brian Burke and co.

I want to talk about another Auditor General report, which is the report into the Water Corporation. It is staggering that we have this core piece of infrastructure and service delivery, yet this organisation is wasting so much water through its inability to maintain its systems. We see all these glitzy ads on TV reminding us about the significant impact of climate change—it is a significant impact; it will obviously have a significant impact on many of our industries right across Western Australia—yet the Water Corporation seems unable to prevent the loss of billions of litres of water. In fact, it has lost nearly 52 billion litres of water. It is unbilled; no-one gets charged for it. Who pays for that? The consumer pays. Everyone else has to pay for that loss of water. That is another example of the government digging into the hip pockets of ordinary Western Australians because it has failed to manage the Water Corporation's assets and to keep up its maintenance program of fixing faulty meters. It has got worse under this government, not better. The government is telling everyone to save water by using less water: "Don't waste your water, but, by the way, we're losing enough water for the average Western Australian to have a seven-minute shower every day for a year." The government is just letting that go and losing that amount of water every day because it will not address those issues. That is partly because of the machinery-of-government changes that have gutted those departments and created a huge level of uncertainty within the public sector. We need the best and brightest in our public service. They need to be far smarter than all of us in order to deliver the programs, infrastructure and services that the state needs, but we are not getting that because this government came in with its agenda to weaponise the public service and turn it into an arm of the Labor Party by kicking out the good members and merging departments and creating this uncertainty —

Several members interjected.

Point of Order

Hon PETER COLLIER: I am sorry, Acting President, I have been very tolerant up to this point, but I cannot hear a word the honourable member is saying because of the constant interjections from members opposite.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot): Thank you for drawing that to my attention, as if I could have missed it. I could actually hear the honourable member speaking and he was not indicating that he was very unhappy with the situation. I urge everybody to look at the clock. There are only a few more minutes left and then we will be on to more serious things.

Debate Resumed

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: I think this is a very serious motion. I beg to differ a little there, Acting President. It is a very important motion to debate the government's record on delivering services and infrastructure.

As I was saying, this government wasted no time in weaponising and gutting the public service when it came to office. It wreaked havoc across the public sector by creating such uncertainty that we lost a lot of very experienced and capable people in the public sector. That was a disaster for Western Australia because the public sector is —

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: All without making any savings.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: The government did not make any savings. We were told it was going to save money, but it did not save any money and now we have more people working there. The government came in with a mantra of cutting back and reducing the size of the public service. It is now bigger than it was, of course. That was another falsehood of the McGowan government when it came to power. It is a government that does not take responsibility for anything it does. It is always someone else's fault. It is happy to take responsibility for something that happened before its time. That is always the case with the current government.

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Several members interjected.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: We could go back a long time. It is not happy to be responsible for the actions of former Premier Brian Burke, of course. No. It is everybody else's fault. This government will not be held to account because it refuses to accept when it is at fault and has created a problem. It does not address those issues. As a result, it struggles to deliver services and infrastructure for the people of Western Australia. I could go on for hours about kicking the can down the road with Westport. That will be decades away. The government cannot even answer simple questions about the modelling. Nothing is happening. We cannot get answers to simple questions about the modelling. The government says, "No, we're still working on that. We haven't done that yet." We are 10 years away from seeing anything happen in that space. It will never happen—not in our political lifetime.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.34 am]: What a pleasure it is to get up and put some real data into this debate, because I know that a certain honourable member on the other side was asking for some data. I will give Hon Neil Thomson some data, but he is not going to like it because he just made up a bit of a fib in his speech. He said that Labor went backwards in the regions at the federal election. Let us look at the data on a two-party preferred basis, including Melissa Price versus the Labor Party. The result of the swings to Labor were 10 per cent in Broome; 12.74 per cent in Karratha; 14.3 per cent in Port Hedland; 11.86 per cent in South Hedland; and 9.9 per cent in Geraldton, the home town of Melissa Price —

Several members interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Is it a point of order? It used to be her home town.

Hon Neil Thomson talked about Kalgoorlie. The member for Kalgoorlie, Ali Kent, is doing a fabulous job. She must be because there was a 10.3 per cent swing to Labor in Kalgoorlie. Let us look at Collie where we have been doing all this fabulous work. The minister has been working tirelessly there. There was a 10.6 per cent swing. Looking at Carnarvon, there was a 9.17 per cent swing. Unbelievable.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: It is over, members. Settle down.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.