

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 16 June on the following motion moved by Hon Helen Morton (Minister for Mental Health) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 2877A–E (2015–16 budget papers) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 14 May 2015.

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [5.10 pm]: I started by asking myself what sort of budget this is. The answer is very clear: it is a blown budget; well and truly blown, on every front, and the sad thing is that every member of the Western Australian community is going to pay for that blown budget. Before I go through my detailed analysis of just how blown this budget is, I note that there is one enormously significant element of the budget for which the government—and, indeed, this Parliament, for the way in which members have raised the issue over the years—deserve the community's congratulations, and that is that this is the budget through which, for the first time, Western Australia is to have a no-fault catastrophic injury compulsory third-party insurance scheme.

I well remember a function in this place some months ago, upstairs on the second floor, outside the Aboriginal People's Room, where the case for a no-fault catastrophic injury third-party insurance scheme was canvassed by what we might loosely call the sector, or stakeholders. That does not in any way convey the strength of the argument put by three young men who had suffered catastrophic injuries and had found themselves not covered by any sort of insurance whatsoever. According to the budget papers, about 44 people a year in Western Australia find themselves in that category. Every year about 92 people suffer a catastrophic injury in a car or on the roads, and about 48 of them are covered by some kind of insurance scheme or compensation scheme, but that leaves 44 people who find themselves in the position that we heard described in graphic detail that evening upstairs in this place. That, if nothing else, surely persuaded every member present that this was the only way we had to take. While it has been on the books for a number of years, we could not let another cycle go by without biting this bullet, so I want to mark that fact; I think it is a very important, highly symbolic and well and truly overdue step for Western Australia to take. In making that note, I should also pay tribute to the work done on this issue over the years by Hon Sue Ellery, the Leader of the Opposition in this place. She, of course, drew on the direct experience that her family went through after her mother's accident. I think she has done a very significant amount, as an individual and as a member of Parliament, in driving that policy through the various layers of policy development.

Sadly, that, I think, is the only good thing I can find in this budget. As I say, when one asks what sort of budget this is, the answer is that it is a blown budget. It is the worst budget in the state's history, and if anyone on the other side of the chamber disagrees with that analysis, I would dearly love to hear them make their argument. I would like to hear from government members, both frontbenchers and backbenchers, how they can go out to their electorates and defend the economic irresponsibility of their own political masters—the Premier and the various Treasurers who have presided over this mess over the years. The sad thing is, of course, that it is not members of the government who will directly feel the pain. My favourite date is the second Saturday in March 2017, and they will, of course, feel the pain that day.

Hon Ken Travers: The eleventh.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I thank Hon Ken Travers; he too is doing the countdown: 11 March 2017.

Hon Ken Travers: On 12 March there will be a Labor government.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: On 12 March we will all be moving in and they will be moving out; absolutely. I will have more to say about that in a minute, because as someone who is intensely interested in politics—as are most people in this place—I always look for political parallels; one can learn a lot from history. In preparing to make my comments on this budget, I did exactly that: I looked to history to find the parallels and, my goodness me, did I find them. I will come to that in a moment.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Sally Talbot has the call.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Thank you, Madam Deputy President.

The sad thing is that because of what this government is doing in terms of debt, deficit, increased charges and funding and resource cuts to the community, it is not members of the government and the Premier who will directly feel this pain. They are opening up the amount of inequality in our society, and I have made this point in the chamber before, but I say again: it is not that small percentage of people who sit comfortably at the top of the income scale who will feel this pain; those people know that in a few years' time, they will still be able to afford to go on holiday. Those are not the people who have to do what ordinary families in this state are having

increasingly to do, which is to look at the amount of money they spend on birthday presents for their kids, to look at the amount of money they give their kids to buy clothes, and to look at the amount of money they are outlaying on things such as fees for sporting clubs and sport uniforms. It is not the people at the top of the income bracket who will feel that pain; the pain is going to be felt solidly by ordinary working men and women and their families in Western Australia. They are going to be the people who will pay for this government's incompetence and ineffectiveness for the next decade or so.

The Premier knows this and talks about it but he seems to be convinced that on election day, as people drive to the polling booth past the Perth Stadium or Elizabeth Quay—assuming there is any traffic moving through the city by that stage, which again is something that is in great doubt—they will thank him and say that all the pain for the next couple of decades will be worth it because they have: fill in the missing word. That is not going to happen, because this kind of pain is not the kind of pain that can be assuaged by a few sparkly baubles. It is not the kind of pain that the government can spend away, because it is the pain that is felt by people who no longer have secure jobs. It is the pain felt by people who no longer have training opportunities, whether they are young people wanting to train to go into a trade or a profession or whether they are older people who need or want to do what is now one of the main characteristics of our workforce, which is to change professions, to change trades or to upgrade their skills. Those training opportunities are not going to be available to them. That sort of pain cannot be assuaged by a few sparkling new buildings or a few big business deals that see Crown Perth casino grow by X per cent, because this is the kind of pain that actually changes people's lives. Because that pain has been inflicted by this government, I am certain that the community, in March 2017, will want to change its government.

What it all boils down to is that in the financial year that we are about enter in two or three weeks' time, 2015–16, this government will spend \$5.1 billion more than it collects in revenue. I have made the point that it has been interesting that, over the last few weeks going back to the fortnight before the budget was brought down in May, we have spent pretty much every hour of our time in this place talking about the dreadful state of our economy and the dreadful economic mismanagement that has been inflicted on the economy by this government. Almost every hour in this place has been spent talking about that. Before the budget was introduced, we were doing another tranche of taxation bills, which were both breaking promises and imposing more cost imposts on small business in Western Australia. We then moved straight into the Loan Bill, which is the bill Madam Deputy President contributed to very eloquently last night, whereby the government is seeking to increase its total borrowings over six and a half years to more than \$20 billion. We have spent so many hours talking about this, yet still the government is proceeding down this reckless course. I have made the point before on a couple of occasions that there is an easy answer to the question: "What would you do?" It is an unusual question to answer, nearly two years out from the state election, but it is easy to answer because it is all there on the record. One does not have to be a student of political history to remember that a few short years ago when we had a Labor government, that government, under the direction of Treasurer Eric Ripper, used to save 13c in every dollar it collected. We would spend only 87c of every dollar of revenue. We can compare that with what we are doing now, whereby in the next financial year, 2015–16, the government will spend \$5.1 billion more than it collects in revenue.

I have referred in previous debates to the fact that my favourite budget paper is budget paper No 3, because that is where we read the narrative about the state. That is where we read the big story about how the state got to where it is today and where we can expect the state to go over the next 12 months. We know that the government is very cavalier with its budget documents. I always do my first read through from the back of the document. I am not sure why; I think it is genetic because my mother used to do exactly the same thing with newspapers. On my first read through from the front, this is what I found. I ask honourable members to look at page 5 of budget paper No 3 where we see under the heading "Economic and Fiscal Outlook", the following sentence —

The Western Australian economy continues to transition from a period of rapid growth in business investment into a more moderate growth phase driven by a large expansion in resource exports.

Does that sound like a statement that sends a frisson of fear through members? It does not to me. When I read that, it said to me that the economy continues to transition. It sounds like a pretty managed process, does it not—"to transition from a period of rapid growth in business investment into a more moderate growth phase"? We are even still talking about growth, just from a period of rapid growth to a period of more moderate growth, driven by a large expansion in resource exports. We are even given, in that short sentence, a pretty calm account of where we are financially, fiscally and economically, and we are given the point to look for a confirmation that we are moving into a more moderate growth phase—still a growth phase—because we are supposed to look to the large expansion in resource exports. I ask honourable members to compare that sentence with the opening sentence of chapter 1 on page 1, which states —

HIGHLIGHTS

- The 2015–16 Budget has been framed in the most challenging economic and fiscal environment the State has faced in the last two to three decades.

It just does not sound to me as though those two sentences could coexist within five pages of each other. They cannot both be right. The sad thing is that I suspect that under any leadership other than that of this mob, we would be very confidently asserting the first sentence that I read out: the Western Australian economy continues to transition from a period of rapid growth in business investment into a more moderate growth phase driven by a large expansion in resource exports. The sad thing is that because we have this mob of bandits driving the cart, they have turned around what should be a natural and well historically documented phase of the Western Australian economy, because, as we have noted over and over again, we are a resource-based economy. Resource-based economies always know how to respond to that boom-and-bust cycle. They do not go bust during the downturns, because they know how to diversify and they know how to build confidence in the economy so that if primary commodity prices go down, or any other kind of fiscal cloud comes over the horizon, we have enough safety measures built into the economy to withstand that. We do not have that with the current economic leadership in this state. What in fact is described on page 5 of budget paper No 3 as a transition period of rapid growth to a period of more moderate growth is described on page 1 as “the most challenging economic and fiscal environment the state has faced in the last two to three decades”. I do not have to go through the dot points that follow that observation because we all know what they are. They have been canvassed over and over again by the government by way of excuse for what is happening. They have been canvassed very thoroughly by my colleagues on this side of the house who have methodically picked apart those excuses and shown them to be full of the kind of hollow rhetoric that we have come to expect of this government.

Further into chapter 1 of budget paper No 3, we find the section on budget objectives. Again, I am speaking under my very broad heading of “what sort of a budget is this?” I have already said that it is a blown budget, but I thought I would turn to the budget papers to find out what sort of budget it is, or what sort of budget this mob wants us to believe it is. Under “Budget Objectives”, the first heading I find is “Securing our Economic Future”. The best thing that the Western Australian electorate could have done to secure the economic future of the state was to not vote in this mob in 2008 in the first place.

Until this government got hold of the reins of power and had its fingers on the economic buttons, we had a very small debt and no deficit. It has taken the government six and a half years of pretty solid work—I get the impression that some members have taken this on as a mission—to blow the budget. It took the government six and a half years to do it but it has succeeded. If we were handing out gold stars for budget wrecking, this government would definitely get them in spades.

Securing our economic future is supposed to be one of the headline items in this budget. When I turn the page, I find the heading “The Efficient Delivery of Quality Services”. Is this a new objective? Are we supposed to be excited about this? Is it supposed to set the pulses racing? Is it supposed to reassure us? Is it a fact that, until now, the government has been quite happy to preside over the inefficient delivery of quality services or maybe even the inefficient delivery of poor-quality services? It does not make any sense to have a budget that is so comprehensively blown and then see these mealy-mouthed words about securing our economic future and the efficient delivery of quality services. The fact is that the government cannot deliver quality services when one of its mechanisms for trying to restore some kind of order to a completely disordered budget is to impose cuts on those very services on which the community depends to pay for this government’s enormous spending promises for its trophy projects.

The third heading is “Supporting and Protecting Our Community”. I note that the one point for which I think we would all congratulate the government—certainly the community stands to benefit from it—is the introduction of no-fault catastrophic injury insurance, which is the number one item under the heading “Supporting and Protecting Our Community”. However, that is all, because the reality is that right across the measures that are supposed to support and protect the community, we have had cuts, broken promises and failures to deliver what this government talked up so greatly during the two election campaigns it has fought.

The final heading in that section of budget objectives is “Investing in Infrastructure to Support Our Growing State”. I paid close attention to the debates that we have had over many hours on the Loan Bill in this place, and there is no question that if we were looking for any kind of manifest competence in investing in infrastructure in Western Australia, we would not look at the Liberal–National government. If anything, we would look to it for an example of how not to do it and how to ruin an infrastructure program that had so much money in it potentially that the pot was almost dripping over the edges. I think the figure I saw was over \$120 billion in investment infrastructure promised by the private sector at one stage. How did we go from that situation a few years ago to a situation in which only a matter of weeks ago, somewhere in the region of 1 200 to 1 300 people were put out of work in one week in this state? How did we get there? It was because this government is totally incompetent at managing any sort of investment in infrastructure, particularly investment in infrastructure that is supposed to support the state. It is very good at managing investment in infrastructure that is supposed to con

people into voting for it again in March 2017, even when there is no money left. A couple of days ago when we debated the Loan Bill, I shared with the house my observations about the way the Premier had spoken about the fact that there was no money left but he was still building things. I think the phrase was “We’re running out of money, mate, but you can still have your trophy projects.”

That was a very brief look at chapter 1 of budget paper No 3 and a very brief account of how profoundly this budget fails to deliver what it promises as outlined in that first chapter. It is not just me saying this. I was taken, in a kind of horrific sense, by the terminology used by Joe Aston in *The Australian Financial Review* of 9 April 2015, shortly before the budget came down. He referred to Perth as a ghost town left behind by mining services. That is what we have been reduced to in six and a half years—a ghost town. I will read his comments in full. He stated —

Despite enjoying the tail end of resources boom revenue, he —

That is the Premier —

has done little to improve infrastructure and services, ... Now what does he have to show for it, with the state economy in the utter doldrums ... A ghost town left behind by mining services and \$30 billion of debt on the state’s balance sheet.

As I said, that was 9 April 2015, six weeks before the budget was brought down. Of course, we now know that we do not have \$30 billion of debt on the books; in a few years, we will actually have just over \$36 billion worth of debt.

The Australian Financial Review also notes the Premier’s failure to do anything to improve infrastructure and services. That is exactly the point I am making about budget paper No 3. In the sixth or seventh budget that this government has brought down, it is still talking about investing in infrastructure to support our growing state, because that is all it does—talk. It does not deliver anything; it just talks. It is all empty rhetoric.

What does this mean in terms of the dollar figures? Let us look. I said at the beginning of my remarks that we were looking at deficit and debt, but we are also looking at charges and cuts, so let us get a feel for those charges. I will go through the charges in the categories of electricity; water; water, sewerage and drainage; public transport; the emergency services levy; and the general cost-of-living increases. That is how we can break down the malfunction in this government’s reasoning. What has happened over seven years? We have seen an 84.84 per cent increase in electricity charges.

People are also facing the reality of being in insecure employment. I remind honourable members that a couple of years ago, the Australian Council of Trade Unions commissioned a report, which I think was chaired by Brian Howe, a previous commonwealth Labor minister, that concluded that 40 per cent of Australian jobs were technically classified as being insecure jobs. It is worth spending one moment explaining exactly what that means. An insecure job is a job that does not have the kinds of entitlements that 60 per cent of people in the workforce take for granted, such as paid leave, sick leave, loadings, overtime and all those things that help people work around the various circumstances of their employment contracts and help employers maintain that constancy of employment. Forty per cent of Australian workers do not have those entitlements attached to their jobs. They do not have a full-time job that they know is going to be there in a year or two years. Of course, because of the government’s failure to handle the consequences of a diminution in primary product prices, not only are they in insecure jobs at the moment, but also they do not know whether they will have their job as a fly in, fly out worker or a mining service provider in 12 months, they do not know whether their current boss will still be in business in 12 months, and they do not know whether they will be able to find work at that time. That was not the case five years ago when people were able pretty much to pick and choose if they were working in the boom sectors of the economy. They might not have had secure employment at the time, but they at least had the security of knowing that there was plenty of work out there. Both of those things have now crashed through the floor, and 40 per cent of our workers are still in insecure jobs and do not know whether there will be anything for them to do when that insecure job comes to an end. Those people are wondering whether it is them. Many people who walk into my electorate office say to me, “What have I done wrong? Is it me? We are living in a rich state, we are supposed to have a first-world economy and yet suddenly I’m struggling.”

I went to Foodbank in Bunbury the other day, with which I know the Deputy President is familiar, and I talked to the manager and staff there. I asked them, “Who are the people that are coming in?” They told me, of course—it will not be a surprise to members on this side of the house—that the majority of their clientele now are not people who 10 years ago might have been using the service, people who found themselves through illness or some other kind of calamity in their lives having to rely on a short-term basis on Foodbank; many of those people only a few short months ago were living the life of Riley. They were on good incomes. They were hocked up to the eyeballs, but they were on good incomes. They were the people who were in those jobs that did not have secure conditions attached to them. They now find themselves in a position in which they cannot feed their families. They walk through the door in my electorate office, and I know they walk through the door of the

Deputy President's electorate office. Remember that one of the things that often happens in electorate offices is that when people stop talking to us, we know we have a problem. Maybe they have given up walking into the electorate offices of government members, but they are certainly walking into our offices and what they say is: "We live in a rich state, we live in a first-world economy and yet I cannot feed my kids. I cannot go on holiday. I cannot afford clothes. My kids cannot afford to play sport. Is it me?" It is not them, and that is what these figures show. It is not them; it is what this government has done to them.

There has been a nearly 85 per cent increase in electricity charges over seven years, up by \$817. Water is up by 98 per cent. That is an eight-year increase of \$359. Other water costs, including sewerage and drainage, are up by 70 per cent—that is an extra \$643 a year. Interestingly, the increases in public transport are significantly smaller. Public transport is up by 33 per cent over eight years. That is still between \$400 and \$500 per year per household over those six years. When all of that is added together and then we put in the emergency services levy, which has seen a seven-year increase of over 81 per cent, an extra \$117 a year, we are looking at cost-of-living increases that are up about nearly 55 per cent. That is why people are hurting. That is the kind of pain this government has directly inflicted on the ordinary working people of this state. That is why people are now flooding into Foodbank, flooding to financial counselling services—believe it or not, I will have a bit more to say about that later—because of the pain inflicted by the government, and they will not be bought off by the shiny baubles the government is offering in the shape of sports stadia and flash riverside developments.

When the budget was brought down in May, we had already had Standard and Poor's credit rating downgrade. Since then, on 10 June, Moody's Investors Service came to the same conclusion. Madam Deputy President, I put it to you and honourable members that it makes chilling reading. It states —

Moody's Investors Service has revised the outlook on Western Australian Treasury Corporation's (WATC) Aa1 ratings—backed by the State of Western Australia—to negative from stable.

I have a lot I want to get through, so I will not read the whole of Moody's report, but I want to pull out a few key phrases. I will point out what I see as my eyes go down the page. Western Australia has been downgraded from stable to negative. The following page of the report is written in the following terms: it refers to ongoing deterioration in WA's "financial and debt metrics"; it refers to the forecast of a record high deficit equal to 13.8 per cent of revenues for the financial year 2015–16; it refers to the rapid rise in the state's debt burden. When it refers to the positive note, it states, "On a positive note, the state has implemented some structural changes to ease the rapid growth", and it goes through some of those measures about which we will have a lot to discuss when we move into estimates, such as involuntary redundancies, revenue measures including a series of upward adjustments to the state's land tax et cetera. The next paragraph starts with "however". That is not what we want to see after the paragraph that starts with "On a positive note".

The next paragraph starts —

... however, Moody's thinks that the state will be hard pressed to achieve the much lower level of current spending forecast, unless the government fortifies its commitment to budget improvements.

That means that we have to find some guts to do this, and the government has not shown that guts so far, because it has been happy just to flick the pain out into the community and hope it will go away.

Moody's report goes on to refer to the ability to raise taxes and reprioritise its high levels of capital expenditure. What is that saying? Is the government supposed to find some solace in this? Moody's is saying, "You can get out of this as long as you increase taxes." That is a sign of the sorry state to which we have been brought.

I listened to some comments on ABC 720 this morning, when the Leader of the Opposition, Hon Mark McGowan, was interviewed. It was put to him that perhaps the Premier has a plan and that perhaps that plan is to increase the debt so high and to rack up the deficit to such an unprecedented level that when the government loses the election in 2017 it will be impossible for an incoming Labor government to do anything it wants to do. That is roughly the position that the interviewer put to Hon Mark McGowan on the radio this morning. I thought Hon Mark McGowan's response was very telling and accurate. He said what a terrible punishment to inflict on the Western Australian community, just to inflict pain on an incoming Labor government. What a terrible wrecking strategy to adopt, to be actually willing to crush the state's economy to hobble the next Labor government. I agree with Hon Mark McGowan 100 per cent, and without having consulted my colleagues I daresay they all agree too, because that is absolutely unconscionable behaviour; but it is behaviour to which this mob will be held accountable by us and, ultimately, by the people of Western Australia.

Hon Ken Travers: "Mob" suggests they are more organised than they are.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is true. A mob denotes some kind of control, and there is no defining characteristic of this rabble.

I want to make one more point about the Moody's report before I move on. It states, under the paragraph about what we can do to rescue this disastrous situation —

In particular, an accelerated pace of hospital reform will be critical to lower the state's above-average healthcare costs.

An accelerated pace of hospital reform? How do we accelerate from a snail's pace? What have we heard about hospital reform from this mob opposite over the last six and a half years? What we are doing at the moment, frankly, is just hanging on. That is because of the judicious economic management of the Minister for Health in the last Labor government. This government has no plans. It does not know what it wants to do about this situation. It has no vision. It has no strategy for moving into more difficult economic times. Thank goodness we had that eight years of stable economic management under the previous Labor government, particularly in the health portfolio, because otherwise we would have a complete catastrophe in the health sector and hospital reform would still be a decade away.

Hon Ken Travers: Have you been to any hospitals lately?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have, actually, Hon Ken Travers.

Hon Ken Travers: I have, and they are not a pretty place.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: They are not a pretty place at all. Hon Ken Travers is absolutely right.

So, where is this hospital reform? I cannot see it. The fact is that we will be paying for generations for the mess that this government has made.

I want to make a quick observation here. I referred earlier to learning from history. I know everybody is waiting for the quiz. I am not going to do a quiz. We can overuse these rhetorical devices, so members will have to wait for the next quiz. However, I want to share with honourable members the following comments that were made by an opposition in response to a government's budget. I will give a couple of quotes to give members the flavour of what the opposition at this stage was saying. The first quote is —

Each budget was to deliver so much, yet the community has received so little.

I ask members whether this could be said in relation to the 2015–16 budget brought down by the Barnett government.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! There are too many audible conversations taking place in the chamber, making it very difficult for Hansard to hear and record the comments of Hon Sally Talbot.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Thank you, Madam Deputy President. It continues —

Three years ago, the Premier promised a social dividend to the community and then he slugged it with high taxes and charges. Two years ago he promised a debt free future for Western Australians. Since then he has increased government debt.

It says also —

This Government has failed to deliver, even though it has had an abundance of opportunities. The Government has not been able to translate the revenue it has received into priority expenditures that will make a real difference to the quality of life of Western Australians.

That was said the last time a Liberal government wrecked the economy. That was said in May 2000 by Hon Dr Geoff Gallop in the other place, in responding to the last budget that the Court Liberal government brought down in 2000. It goes on. It is absolutely eerie reading this. The government has not learnt. The government is doing exactly what the Court Liberal government did in 2000. The government has not learnt that if it crashes the economy in this way, the community will throw it out of office. The community is going to throw this government out of office, just as it threw the Court Liberal government out of office in 2000.

It goes on to say —

In comparing increases in taxation revenue across the nation, only Queensland has experienced more growth ...

In 2015, we are seeing exactly the same thing. This was 15 years ago. It continues —

Indicator after indicator shows that Western Australia is performing badly. This Government has had record revenue growth, but that growth has not been translated into programs and expenditures in the key areas of health, education and police that make a real difference to the community.

It gets even eerier when we go further into the debate. I am very sad that I do not have a couple of hours to speak on this issue, because I am sure honourable members would find this very, very interesting.

It goes on to quote Mike Nahan, who at the time was at the Institute of Public Affairs and is now the Treasurer, who said 15 years ago —

... it shows in a background paper that the Budget has been in deficit each of the four ... of the four last years, and let's emphasise what this deficit is. It's an operating deficit.

The quote from Mike Nahan continues —

... the funding of today's operating costs on the future generations. That's typically what is known, in political jargon, as living on the bankcard, and so they've run in the deficit.

This government is living on the bankcard. The budget that the Court Liberal government brought down in 2000, just before it was run out of office, was exactly the same as the budget that this government has just brought down. This government is living on the bankcard.

My final quote from the debate of 23 May 2000 is from the shadow Treasurer at the time.

Hon Stephen Dawson: What number was he?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Eric Ripper was our one and only Treasurer, because no-one could have done better in those eight years than Treasurer Ripper. This is what Hon Eric Ripper said in 2000 when he was the shadow Treasurer —

The bottom line is that the State's finances are deteriorating as we get more recent forecasts. This is a critical issue for the maintenance of this State's AAA credit rating.

As I have said, in 2000 the government had not yet blown the state's AAA credit rating. Eric Ripper goes on to say —

When Standard and Poor's (Australia) Pty Ltd reported on the State's credit rating and confirmed the AAA rating, it sounded a warning. Standard and Poor's told the Government that the fiscal trend evident in 2000 had to be reversed if the AAA credit rating were to be maintained.

This is a remarkable piece of history. Sadly, what we are seeing now is history being repeated, almost down to the last detail. My hope and expectation is that it will be repeated in terms of the outcome as well, and this government will be marched out of office, just as the Court Liberal government was marched out of office in 2001.

Recognising that we have a long way to go next week when we can pull out the details of the budget, I want to move now to a particular issue. In preparing for my comments on the budget, I was looking for an issue that I thought might convey to the government the kind of pain that it is inflicting on the community, in a graphic way, so that it is not just me standing here and spouting on about how this government is inflicting pain and how it will not be able to bribe people with baubles. What came across my desk were two cases in my electorate. Hon Adele Farina referred to these cases last night, but only in passing, because she was constrained by time. I have spoken to both the families involved and I assure honourable members that they are very happy to have all their details shared with honourable members in this place. This is how the first case goes —

We are writing to express our concern and dismay about the way in which children with disabilities living outside the metropolitan area are disadvantaged in regards to DSC finding, even with families who are willing to travel to Perth at their own expense.

Both these families live in the south west, one in Bunbury and the other in Leschenault, which is north of Bunbury.

It continues —

Our son Micah was diagnosed with the most severe level of Autism Spectrum Disorder on the 4th March this year at the age of 2 years and 10 months. Early intervention is essential to make a difference to the future prospects for our little boy. Specifically intensive evidence based therapy using Applied Behaviour Analysis dots has the strongest evidence and has been supported in this government commissioned report—A Review of the Research to Identify the Most Effective Models of Practice in

Early Intervention for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. ABA is the best approach to help our son.

Residing in Bunbury we have limited access or no access to ABA therapy for our son. There are seven metropolitan services that offer DSC funded places listed on the Helping Children with Autism document. However in the regional areas there are no DSC funded ABA services listed. We understand that recruitment, population etc. are major factors in offering an equivalent service. We have been informed that the Early Years Consultancy Team, the DSC funded service to regional areas, have few or no effective therapy assistance in the Bunbury area.

We are asking for the same choices families living in the metro area have. We are willing to drive to Perth at our own expense just as Perth families are expected to do. It does not seem fair, equitable or a legitimate decision that regional families are not supported by DSC to have the same choices and opportunities that Perth families do. This disadvantages families and our son. The future independence, capacity and quality of life for Micah is seriously impacted by this decision.

We have visited, undertaken training and negotiated with two metro providers for a DSC funded place yet we are unable to access them as DSC have said no. Why? We do not know. Do we need to sell our house, leave our amazing family and friend support network, and up root our older son to a new school, find new jobs and move 150km up the road to access essential therapy for our son?

Please help us. We are not alone in our worry and concern. ... Our Autism Advisor and Local Area Coordinators have asked the question too. The response has been no we are unable to access metro services using DSC funding due to our post code. Micah deserves the same opportunities as children living 150km north of us. How can this be a morally or ethically justifiable decision? We are not asking for our travel or accommodation to be paid for. We just want to give Micah the best chance to achieve his potential and live a fulfilling and happy life.

That is from Elizabeth and Matthew Martin, who live in South Bunbury.

Around the same time, I received another approach from Rob and Gemma Foxall, which reads as follows —

We are writing to you to raise your awareness about a heartbreaking decision made by ... DSC ... that is having a negative and detrimental effect on many families who have young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder ...

Early Intervention is widely acknowledged to be crucial in supporting children with ASD, and consequently the DSC endorse state-funded places at many service providers. **However, as of last week we have been informed that children from families residing outside the Metropolitan area will no longer be able to access a state-funded place with any of the endorsed providers.** If the child is residing in an area with a preferred postcode, they will be eligible to access a state-funded service that best suits their needs, as selected by their parents, until their child is seven years old.

Our son, Peter, was diagnosed with ASD in March 2015 at the age of 17 months, assessed at the most severe level in all domains. We have gratefully accessed the federal funding (DSS / HCWA), coordinated by the Autism Association of WA, and our autism advisor ...

Peter's diagnostic report states clearly that ABA Early Intervention is required, and that it should begin as soon as possible. We visited a range of service providers and selected ISADD (ABA specialists) to support Peter and provide intensive Early Intervention. However, once our federal funding runs out we can no longer access the therapy Peter needs unless we move to Perth. ISADD have been instructed not to offer us a state-funded place because we live in a regional area. Our location is irrelevant, given we travel to Perth at our own cost. Our ... LAC ... has confirmed that DSC will not support regional families to access an Early Intervention service provider endorsed by the DSC. There are zero state-funded places at Early Intervention providers outside of the Metropolitan area, so it's not like regional families get an alternative choice!

The letter goes on and finishes —

Our family is in crisis. If Peter receives the appropriate Early Intervention then he will have the best possible chance at having an independent life. As parents we are absolutely desperate to get this decision overturned. Our world has been turned upside down and we need your help.

I make this point because, as I say, I want to give a very real and human face to my remarks about the pain being caused by the way this government is running the economy. My question is this: how does each minister account for the spending that has led to the debt? Make no mistake, it is because of the debt and because of the deficit that we are unable to provide proper, adequate services for people such as these two families whose accounts I have just read into *Hansard*. It is because of the state of the economy that we cannot deliver a decent level of services, at least in this case, outside Perth. Members will remember that I went through chapter 1 of budget

paper No 3, which refers specifically to one of the budget objectives being the efficient delivery of quality services. There are no quality services. We know what we ought to be doing. Our deficit is not a deficit of ideas. Our deficit is that we cannot afford to do it. I therefore want to know how every minister sits around that cabinet table and endorses this spending on Liberal–National trophies when, because of that spending, they cannot afford to deliver the services that desperate families need. Listen to the language those families are using. This is not made-up affectation; this is real pain coming through these accounts. It is pain, it is confusion, it is uncertainty and it is deep, deep concern about the future for these children. Everybody knows that autism is best addressed by early intervention, yet these families are faced with the completely unacceptable decision about having to relocate, uproot their families, lose their family network support and their friend network support and move to a place where those services might be available.

How do these ministers sitting around that cabinet table think that that is okay? How do backbenchers explain to the constituents they meet in their daily rounds why they cannot have access to these kinds of services? Do they actually say, “It’s okay; you can go and watch a footy game at the new stadium; or you’ll be able to go and have a cup of coffee down at Elizabeth Quay; or if you’re really wealthy, you’ll be able to go and stay at a flash hotel that overlooks the river”? Is that what they say? Is that how they are trying to buy people off? I can tell them that it does not wash with my constituents. It does not address their pain because their pain is about needing help right here and now to provide decent first-world economy services to their children who need help, not the promise of being able to sit down and have a world-class cappuccino with a great view in four years. It just does not wash.

The tragedy of this budget is being played out today, right here and now, in families such as the two families I have just referred to, yet what we have from this government is just more of the same: more borrowing, more debt and more deficits while waitlists increase and our schools fall to pieces. There is no money for Collie Senior High School, despite the fact that the government has been talking up money for Collie Senior High School for years. It has been taken away this year. Collie Senior High School was supposed to have eight classrooms.

Hon Helen Morton: You lose credibility when you make silly statements like that.

Hon Adele Farina: I don’t know why it’s a silly statement. You made it; you promised.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Absolutely! This is not something that we have made up. This is not a need that we have concocted out of thin air. This was the government’s own diagnosis of what was needed at Collie Senior High School. I suspect that that goes on all the time. I suspect that Hon Helen Morton knows very well what those families in the south west need. I suspect that she knows very well, but the problem is —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Simon O’Brien): Order! Leader of the Opposition, give the member on her feet a go, please!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Leader of the House, leave the Leader of the Opposition alone! Do not encourage her to interject either. Hon Sally Talbot has the call.

Hon Ken Travers: Name them both!

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I am not doing them any favours!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I suspect that the story about Collie Senior High School is the same as the story about not providing decent services for those families in the south west. I suspect that the government knows full well that they are needed, but “We’re running out of money, mate” is what the Premier says every time ministers sit around that cabinet table. They are hoping that on the second Saturday of March 2017, as people drive to the polling booth, they will look at the stadium, they will look at Elizabeth Quay and they will say, “She’ll be right.” I can tell members that it is simply not going to happen.

Hon Kate Doust: No; they’ll be stuck in the traffic trying to get to it.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: As Hon Kate Doust said, it is doubtful that the traffic will be moving anyway.

I have talked about service provision and I have talked about classrooms. Of course, roads is the other issue that is the perpetual bane of people in the south west. I ask honourable members to go and drive along one of the prime tourist routes in Western Australia, the stretch of road between Manjimup and Walpole, and tell me why, after six and half years, not a cent has been spent on it. I know that there is talk about it, and I know that there has been community consultation. The next election is only 19 months away, and the government will have to do something by then, because that is one of the most dangerous stretches of road in the state. People telephone me almost on a daily basis to beg me to try and get this mob to do something, and the government does absolutely nothing. Country roads fall to bits while this government pours money into its metropolitan trophy projects. This is very much a broken budget.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Peter Collier (Leader of the House)**.

