

**Extract from Hansard**

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 7 November 2018]

p7877b-7892a

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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**SELECT COMMITTEE INTO THE  
GOVERNMENT'S LOCAL PROJECTS, LOCAL JOBS PROGRAM**

*Motion, as Amended*

Resumed from 31 October on the following motion, as amended, moved by Hon Tjorn Sibma —

- (1) The Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations shall conduct an inquiry into the government's Local Projects, Local Jobs program.
- (2) The committee is to inquire into the Local Projects, Local Jobs program, "the program", with particular reference to —
  - (a) how each project was developed, evaluated and selected for funding;
  - (b) how payments were made and acquitted under each project to ensure financial probity and accountability;
  - (c) how actual or perceived conflicts of interest were declared and managed under each project;
  - (d) the number of projects funded and, for each project, the amount of funding provided and number of jobs created;
  - (e) whether community, education, arts and sporting groups within the state were afforded an equal opportunity to access the program;
  - (f) whether funding to the program affected the quantum of funds available for grants or other funding sources for community, education, arts and sporting groups within the state; and, if so, in what way; and
  - (g) any other related matter.
- (3) For the purposes of this inquiry only, Hon Tjorn Sibma is appointed chair of the committee and Hon Alanna Clohesy is appointed deputy chair.
- (4) The committee is to report no later than 12 months after the referral.

**HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West)** [1.04 pm]: I will recap on where I got to the other day. I talked about the main areas of the Local Projects, Local Jobs program that we take issue with. First, I mentioned budget mismanagement; we believe the government has its priorities wrong. At the time of the election there was a \$2.6 billion budget deficit, but the government managed to find \$39 million for this program, up from the promised \$22 million. That is one of the main areas I have an issue with.

The second area is pork-barrelling; I will talk a little more about that. Obviously, everyone understands that if money was to be spent on projects, there should have been a lot more accountability, planning and proper consultation with the public. Many members have spoken about that. We highlighted that in Labor seats somewhere around \$1 million was spent, and in Liberal-held seats about \$84 000 was spent. The difference is pretty obvious. If the governments of both major parties continue to conduct themselves in that way, they will be dealing with more members of the crossbench in the future. I have already mentioned that.

The third area was the number of jobs created by the Local Projects, Local Jobs program. I just do not see that it has created any local jobs. There may be some in the maintenance area, but they are very few and far between for a spend of \$39 million. Other than jobs in playground construction and some maintenance areas, there has been obvious pork-barrelling that has not created jobs. That is because the government did not consult well, and for much of the spending, there were no business cases.

The fourth area I talked about was the lack of transparency and accountability. I have already mentioned that there was very little consultation, and the business cases were not well put. Looking at the government's priorities, are the nice-to-haves or the must-haves important? And what about the things that are not needed? Since being elected to this house, I have talked about various projects or programs on which a lot of money has been spent. The government has a spending and priority problem. The pork-barrelling is obvious, and the government's priorities are just wrong in many areas. There has been no sustained media scrutiny of this. There has been some media scrutiny, but it has not been strong enough. That is also concerning.

I will refer to and quote from an article in *The Sunday Times* on the things I have just mentioned. The article was written by Gareth Parker and commented on by Peter Kennedy. All members know Peter Kennedy. He has been

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around a long, long time—40 years—and has written articles about 11 different Premiers in that time. The voice and words of a man like that have a bit of credibility. Gareth Parker states in this article —

While country schoolkids are having services cut and power bills are rising, how is it that \$39 million can be found for new spending on projects that are nice to have but not a priority?

He says further on —

“It’s a slush fund,” a senior bureaucrat said when the program was raised in conversation “used by Labor to make election promises without any reference to anyone in (departments of) government.

It was a slush fund. As I mentioned, Peter Kennedy was reported as saying —

“It’s pretty crude,” he said. “It’s essentially buying votes with taxpayers’ money.”

I point out another comment in the article —

Everyone can see the pattern: Labor promised—and then spent—money in its own seats, and in seats it hoped to win from the Liberals and Nationals. In seats it could not win, it spent nothing.

There are comments all the way through this article stating some of the things I am saying. It is a fairly consistent view. A passing reader might be confused that Labor members of Parliament were handing over their own money, not money that belonged to taxpayers, it was that blatant. We have all seen photos in the papers. It is not a great way of doing business. Although I have not been in government before, I have listened to people who have been ministers in this house in the past. I have heard about the way they believe money should be accounted for. Although in their time they may not have always got things perfect, this has gone to another level, and that is the disappointing part.

With a lack of consultation, a lack of business cases and a lack of looking at priorities, I do not believe the Local Projects, Local Jobs program is a very good way of spending money. The \$39 million and the extra money found to be spent in this area just does not stack up. I will support this motion by Hon Tjorn Sibma. I have talked to my colleagues on the crossbench and I am reasonably sure there is a common thought process that Hon Tjorn Sibma’s motion is one that we will support.

**HON DIANE EVERS (South West)** [1.12 pm]: When I first saw this motion, I thought, “Really? Are we going to spend that sort of time and money going over something that happens at every election—something I have gone on about many times due to the different promises that are made?” It just did not make any sense. However, if this motion goes through, the issue will go before a committee that already does this sort of thing, so it will fit within the scope of what we are already doing. But I have to say that when we look at the Local Projects, Local Jobs program, we can see that it amounted to less than \$40 million. Although I acknowledge that the use of some of those funds was not the best use—these projects come up because somebody has an idea and believes that they might get a few more votes here or a few more votes there—it is something that people do as candidates.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** They shouldn’t. It’s got to stop. It’s outrageous.

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** I agree. If everyone agreed, that would be fantastic. But all parties have policies that they stand for and that is what people need to vote on. Some of those policies will cost money to implement. How is it determined whether it is a policy or a program that may cost the government significant money over many years? Then there are one-off projects such as a tennis court here, a swimming pool there, a new library or new playground equipment. Where does it stop? I do not have the answers to that, but it should change.

Were the funds for these projects fairly distributed? No. We are used to that; funds do not get fairly distributed. It is a two-party system in which members fight each other and try to take votes from the other party, so it is not fair. Sometimes I wonder whether we are in here to be fair. I find that is very important, but I am not sure that that is in all our thoughts when we are here talking about these things.

Local Projects, Local Jobs funds were spent on projects, but it is dubious whether jobs have come from some of them. But jobs have been the holy grail for the last 10 or 20 years: “You’re going to lose jobs; that’s bad. You’re going to create jobs; that’s good.” Who counts the number of jobs afterwards? I think it was Adani who said that his project would create 15 000 jobs. Then the number was cut back to 1 000; then it was about 300. I do not know the figures, but numbers of jobs are pulled out of the air and no follow-up occurs to see whether jobs were created by those projects.

Spending through royalties for regions was over \$7 billion and we are talking about less than \$40 million for the Local Projects, Local Jobs program. To illustrate that, if an A4 sheet is \$7 billion, this tiny piece of the corner of it is the \$40 million. That is the difference between what we are looking at here. We are looking at the minuscule compared with the large number of projects paid for by royalties for regions and mentioned in the Langoullant report. Many of those funds were not spent in the best interests of the state. We have talked about unfair

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distribution. Yes, the funding was supposed to go to the regions, but it was quite clearly spent in the mining regions—regions that would be picked up by Nationals candidates. It is wrong on both sides. It leaves us in a really difficult situation. We come here, I assume, wanting to be a candidate and wanting to be elected. Candidates probably have some good feelings that make them want to do good for the state in whatever area of policies their party presents. That is admirable. If candidates' intentions in getting in here are to make Western Australia a better place, that is fantastic. That makes candidates do things that maybe are not always in line with their ideals, and they end up making promises to people, to regions and to communities to get them to vote for them because they want to put in this great range of policies that they stand for. It does not always work. It is the system we have, but when the system is not working, that does not mean that we have to keep that system. We can change the system.

That is what we have to look at rather than looking at who did what, where, when, how and why. We need to look at how we can make this better. That is what I would like to see happen with this inquiry, if it gets up. I understand that we need to let voters know our intentions, so our policies should say that, but our policies are quite broad and sometimes we have to get down to the detail so that people understand what we mean and how it will affect them. Through the election cycle, we start putting in the detail, but that detail is often unknown. Somebody could come up with an idea for a new project saying, "This is what we're going to do", two or three days, three weeks or three months before the election, but without working out the cost ramifications of the project and what it will achieve. They put it out there and hope people will vote for them and then worry about the problems afterwards. That is why we go on about backflipping and who has been the latest to backflip.

We have to somehow get past that unfair distribution. It has to be targeted somehow so that it is fair across the state. It is disappointing. When I first came in here, I was handed two different documents about both Labor and Liberal election promises. They both added up to about \$5 billion. They were commitments for the next several years, possibly decades. That is part of it. That is policy, that is what the parties stand for and that is what they believe in. Sometimes that makes sense. Sometimes it is showing people what the party stands for. But when we get down to the small projects and we are just tossing money out to get votes, it gets a little more difficult to understand where we are going. Other jurisdictions have created a parliamentary budget office. A parliamentary budget office gives not only the government but also the opposition and minor parties, and even potentially candidates, access to the facilities to work out the cost of promises. Those on the crossbench with us will understand that if we had that sort of facility, we would actually be able to stand by the policies that we put up and say, "Hey, look, some people might think this is far-fetched, but a parliamentary budget office has gone through it and shown that it will not cost as much as many people might say it does." It is one of those things that opposition parties like.

I think it was in 2013 that the Labor Party said it should happen. Mike Nahan in the other place is saying that it should happen now. Both parties like it at one time or another. That suggests to me that it has a characteristic about it that might mean it will be useful to all of us indefinitely. Like I said, the federal government put this in place in 2012 and it is working. That was after New South Wales introduced it in 2010. Victoria introduced it in 2017. There is a state election coming up in Victoria, so parties in Victoria would be benefiting from the use of the Parliamentary Budget Office now. South Australia also introduced it.

I will take a few steps back to talk about the royalties for regions program. We know that the Langoulant report came out some time last year. The Langoulant report suggested that Western Australia introduce a parliamentary budget office to cost election commitments and review major project business cases. In fact, recommendation VII in the Langoulant report stated —

It is recommended that Government establish a Parliamentary Budget Office to enhance transparency and public understanding of election commitments, and the budget and fiscal policy settings.

I quote from that report because it is really relevant information when considering something like this. It continues —

The Special Inquirer concluded early in the Inquiry that a body modelled on the Commonwealth's Parliamentary Budget Office should be established in Western Australia.

The election campaigns in 2008, 2013 and 2017 were each characterised by dispute over election costings. In 2008 and 2013 in particular the issues of the Ellenbrook rail line and the Max Light Rail versus Metronet program and their respective costs were disputed vigorously.

Any person who was in WA at that time will remember the debate went back and forth about where we should go with that. The dollar values attached to it were all over the place. I continue quoting the Langoulant report —

The ability to access independent authority, such as a Parliamentary Budget Office, would have been beneficial at that time to bring greater objectivity to the costing process.

In addition to costing election commitments the Special Inquirer believes a Parliamentary Budget Office would also assist to bring greater transparency, in a contemporary time frame, to the debate over major

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projects. That would have been particularly so in the conduct of the Roe8 extension debate leading into the 2013 election where issues around the adequacy of the business case for that project was debated.

The cost of a Parliamentary Budget Office in Western Australia would not be large.

I am still quoting from the Langoulant report. If we say, “It’s going to cost too much”, the Langoulant report stated —

The cost of a Parliamentary Budget Office in Western Australia would not be large.

The report continues —

It will be essential that appointments made to the Office are concluded free from political involvement and strictly on merit.

The Special Inquirer notes that both the current Government (in 2013) and the Opposition Leader in his reply to the 2017 Budget proposed establishing a Parliamentary Budget Office.

I should also comment that during the last election campaign both the Leader of the Opposition and the current Premier agreed, on radio 6PR, on the need for a parliamentary budget office. It has gone around the state often enough. It has been progressed in other states, and they are making use of it and it is working. It seems as though it is something that should be done in Western Australia. Given the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations will look at Local Projects, Local Jobs, and we have been discussing all the issues relating to promises made at election time, and that the Leader of the Opposition in this house even suggested during debate that we need a parliamentary budget office, it seems as though we have been leading to that through much of this debate. Check *Hansard*—it is in there.

**Hon Peter Collier:** I agree with you. That is what the now government promised—it promised a parliamentary budget office.

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** I agree. I understand. Now the opposition is asking for it—that is right. We know that the two major parties swap sides every couple of elections. A parliamentary budget office would be just as much use to both sides. I hope that if, for some reason, the Labor government does not get around to it this term, maybe next time the Liberal Party is in—it is a long time off —

**Hon Nick Goiran:** Can you talk to them and make sure they do it this term?

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** Yes. We know we need to do this. We know it is coming. It is one of those changes that has come along as we progress. Why not just join the rest of them, get it over and done with, and have it in place for the next election? That is what I would like to see.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** Hear, hear! Did you hear that?

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** I appreciate hearing from the member on this because I will be moving an amendment in a few moments. The motion will call on the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations to inquire into the establishment of a parliamentary budget office. It can look at other jurisdictions to consider the options of how we can do that. There are all sorts of things that could become a part of this and actually make a change so we have something better when we come out of it. In saying, “They did this; we did that; he did that; she did this”, we go around in circles and it is a waste of time and money. What I would like to do is amend this motion so that we can actually have a positive step come out of this process and we can go forward with a parliamentary budget office, which would be nice.

*Amendment to Motion, as Amended*

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** I move —

To amend the motion by inserting after paragraph (2) —

- (3) The committee is to also inquire into the establishment of a parliamentary budget office for the independent costing of election promises and related purposes.

**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House)** [1.27 pm]: It is disappointing that the mover of the original motion appears not to have an opinion on an amendment to his motion. I was just checking with the Treasurer. We have said publicly to date—I think there was debate in the other place about it in recent weeks—that we are supportive of it and we are supportive of looking at it in greater detail in the lead-up to the next state election. I can certainly say that. I would not mind a copy of the actual words. I should be able to give the house an answer any minute now about what the government’s position will be.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** Who is the Leader of the House?

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Honestly, honourable member! Your side could not even stand —

**Hon Nick Goiran:** That's what you're paid the big bucks for. You've got to show some leadership.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** You know what happens when you interject? You're helping me.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** What kind of government are you running here?

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Member, only 20 minutes is allowed for debate on an amendment. You are chewing up the speaker's time. There should be no interjections. The Leader of the House is trying to put her position on this amendment.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We will support the amendment.

**HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition)** [1.29 pm]: The opposition will also support this amendment to the motion. In essence, the integrity of the motion is retained, because we are looking into Local Projects, Local Jobs. That is not an issue at all. Everything is retained. The Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations will still look into that project, which the opposition has serious problems with, and at the same time to a degree we will be looking in a broader sense at the establishment of a parliamentary budget office. We want the establishment of a parliamentary budget office because that is what the government has promised. Ideally, when the committee goes through its deliberations and looks at Local Projects, Local Jobs and sees how flawed it is, it will realise that in fact we need a parliamentary budget office, or it will make recommendations to that effect. I am not sure how the crossbench or the Nationals will go on this one, but in this instance it would be nice for the whole of the Legislative Council to agree to a parliamentary budget office. I would love to see the government stare down that one. However, at the same time I want to emphasise this: I say ditto to everything I said last week about the Local Projects, Local Jobs program. By inserting this amendment, in effect it retains the integrity of the motion while also asking us to look into the establishment of a parliamentary budget office.

Can I assume, just for clarity, that existing paragraph (3) will become paragraph (4)?

**The PRESIDENT:** The Clerk's amendment will sort that out.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** It will. I just seek clarification that that is the only thing that will change and that everything else will be retained. Are we still going to have a forensic investigation into Local Projects, Local Jobs?

**Hon Sue Ellery:** Well, read it.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** I have it. Hon Sue Ellery should not get huffy. I am just saying that there is already a paragraph (3). I want to make sure that the amendment does not exclude paragraph (3) in its existing form.

With that, I think we are on a winner with this one. In effect, the government, which has already said it supports this, will yet again confirm that it wants a parliamentary budget office. I can tell members that this inquiry will identify some serious misgivings with regard to that program and show exactly why we need a parliamentary budget office. The opposition will support the amendment.

**HON AARON STONEHOUSE (South Metropolitan)** [1.32 pm]: I am pleasantly surprised to read this amendment. I was not expecting an amendment like this. Taken in context, and keeping in mind that it does not water down or diminish in any way the intention of the original motion, which I think everyone here agrees on, I am inclined to support the insertion of a new paragraph to look into the establishment of a parliamentary budget office. It is a policy I support so I wholeheartedly support the amendment.

**HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA)** [1.33 pm]: I rise on behalf of the National Party to say that we will support the amendment as well. The Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations will undertake an enormous amount of work when we already have the Langoulant report that suggests that there needs to be a parliamentary budget office. Although there is already a body of work that the government has itself commissioned and determined and has a finding on, which has given it direction on the fact that it needs a parliamentary budget office, and still has not acted on it, I guess another inquiry could investigate the parliamentary budget office. I hope that that is not a considered waste of time. As Hon Diane Evers continually points out, the house does waste time. However, I am happy to support the amendment and I am interested to see, should the whole motion get up and the estimates committee does this inquiry into this very worthy motion, what the outcome of that will be.

**HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West)** [1.34 pm]: One Nation will support this amendment. I commend Hon Diane Evers for putting forward the amendment. This is exactly what One Nation has been looking for and what we have been talking about.

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Amendment put and passed.

*Motion, as Amended*

**HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [1.35 pm]: We now have five parts to the motion. I thank Hon Peter Collier for clarifying that. As other members have done, I congratulate Hon Diane Evers for moving the amendment. As Hon Peter Collier said, it retains the integrity of the motion, while hopefully engaging in that spirit that I have often talked about, which is that we should always be looking for the best outcome from these kinds of inquiries. Members who have heard me make my standard stump speech, when we get to that point in the second reading debate when we refer a bill to committee, whichever committee it might be—it does not necessarily have to be my committee; excellent committee though that is—will know that I think the committee process is a very valuable one. Indeed, there are many occasions—I think the Deputy President and Chair of Committees would agree with me—when the work we do in committees is the work of substance that informs what we do in this chamber.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Quite right.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** I thank the honourable member. I will continue that theme when I make my remarks on the substantive motion that is before us this afternoon.

I was not going to speak on this motion because, as you would well remember, Madam President, it was only two months ago that we had a lengthy debate essentially on this issue—not the referral to the committee but on the substance of the Local Projects, Local Jobs election commitment implementation program. I made a contribution to that debate and I felt that I had covered all the essential points that I needed to raise. This debate has raised a couple of other interesting aspects about the whole question of how we go about the business of electioneering, not just in Western Australia—we do not do anything radically different in this state to the rest of Australia—but basically in western democracies. Two amendments have been made to this motion. This is an unusual process. We are gradually getting a better outcome, which is what we always should be focused on. After all, every day we sit in this place we hear Madam President read the parliamentary prayer that talks about deliberating on the affairs affecting the wellbeing and good order of society in WA. That is what we ought to be focused on every moment that we are debating in this place. We are doing a reasonable job of that at the moment. I wish that we could say that more often.

I will make a few remarks, and then I will move a third amendment to this motion. It seems to me that we are giving the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations an opportunity to make some recommendations. The estimates committee in and of itself cannot change legislation or procedures, but it can make recommendations. I was around in the days when we established the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, as a few members here were. Some honourable members will recall that before we established that committee, essentially we used to do what the other place continues to do; that is, pack all of the budget questions into an hour or so on a couple of days a year and grill the minister and the senior officials from the department.

I think we do it in a much better way. The upper house has had a much better way of doing that and it has worked exceptionally well since it started. Our Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations meets virtually every single week of the year. It probably does not meet between Christmas and New Year's Day, but I know that there have been a couple of summers where it has continued to work pretty assiduously on both budget papers and annual reports. That makes the way that the Legislative Council governs better than it would without that work. It was a good move to refer this motion specifically to the estimates committee.

I have actually listened to this debate. I will confess that there are moments in other debates that I tune out because I have other urgent pieces of parliamentary business to attend to. However, I have actually listened very closely to this debate, and this is what I have heard said, particularly by crossbenchers. I always pay particular attention when any member of the crossbench speaks because they do not come from entrenched positions. Some of them are embedded in their communities in much the same way that we are in the major parties. It is a perspective that we do not always hear in this place. I have heard the very well enumerated concerns expressed by Hon Colin Tincknell. I would like to have an argument with him about some of the points he raised as a member for the South West Region. When he talks about not being convinced that we picked the right priorities in the south west, I would like to have the discussion with him about what he thinks should not have been funded and where he thinks the money should have gone. I think we have done quite well in the south west given that we have limited resources. We hold five out of eight seats in the South West Region, but we have delivered in the non-government seats as well as the five government seats. We have done a reasonable job in the south west. But I listened to what Hon Colin Tincknell said very seriously, and I understand that that is a more extended discussion than we can have in the context of this debate about things such as priorities and associating these small projects with job creation. If he thinks there is a better way of building particularly apprenticeships and traineeships into these projects, I would like to hear how he wants to do that. I hope that the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, which will

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flip its chair and deputy chair for the process of this inquiry, will look at whether there is a different way of doing that or a better way of getting figures out of those projects.

I took the remarks made by Hon Colin Tincknell very seriously, but I also noticed that last week during the debate Hon Aaron Stonehouse made a couple of interjections about pork-barrelling. I do not think that Hon Aaron Stonehouse has contributed to the debate thus far, and I notice that he has had to leave the chamber on urgent parliamentary business. I think these interjections were made when the Leader of the House talked about some promises that had been made by Liberal members and candidates. Hon Aaron Stonehouse said, "Yes, but it is all pork-barrelling." That led me to have some discussions with members on my side of the chamber about whether we might address these concerns in the spirit of getting a better outcome for the state—that is, in the spirit of what we say we commit to do in this place—and look at the way we campaign on election promises. I am particularly interested in those smaller promises. I do not know how members on the other side of chamber characterise these things, but when I spoke on the previous motion on the Local Projects, Local Jobs issue, I drew the distinction between the big ticket items such as stadiums, bypasses around country towns and things that cost millions if not hundreds of millions of dollars and these smaller projects—\$5 000 here and \$25 000 there—that provide shade cloths, skate parks and things like that. It is clear from what I am hearing that the crossbench does not like the way things are done at the moment. This is the opportunity for the crossbench to change things and make some recommendations that can be brought before this chamber for members to see whether they make sense. That seems to be very much in the spirit of the amendment we have already accepted from Hon Diane Evers. We need to see what the committee comes up with.

I do not agree with Hon Jacqui Boydell that there is a danger here of duplicating work or overloading the committee. The fact that a lot of work has already been done on the parliamentary budget office is a good thing. It is up to this committee to take that work and to turn it into a series of findings and recommendations. Given that the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations will do the work—a committee that already has serious runs on the board for getting good outcomes—and given that we as members of this chamber commit ourselves every day we sit to get the best outcomes for the people of Western Australia, I suggest that rather than just focusing on the Local Projects, Local Jobs program, which will be seen as a political stunt, we contemplate the following amendment. I will just circulate this amendment, which reads —

I move without notice —

To amend the motion by inserting after paragraph (f) —

Which I think is still paragraph (f), Hon Peter Collier —

- (g) how the program compares with the development and implementation of election commitments of other parties in the past in respect to the matters referred to in (a) to (f) above; and

I will go through some of the reasons the chamber should contemplate this amendment. There is a sense that whoever wins a general state or national election must constantly mount two hurdles—one is the charge that they are breaking their promises and the other is the charge that they are keeping their promises. In this case, the Labor government is being charged with keeping its election promises. I do not mean to recapitulate any of these points, as Hon Sue Ellery has made the case very eloquently that these were promises made from opposition without the benefit of the public sector providing assistance and costings. I outlined previously in my contribution to a similar debate how we went about doing this. I gave a number of details about my experience of campaigning on the ground in regional Western Australia and the way that every single project that we committed to in the south west was about providing or strengthening the glue that holds our regional communities together. That is why we have focused on things like improving basic facilities in schools, upgrading services for victims of family and domestic violence and providing skate parks, lighting for ovals, walking tracks and that sort of thing. As Hon Tjorn Sibma probably remembers, when I made my comments in a previous debate, I said that I agreed with him on one particular point: this is a story as old as time. This is about local members and local candidates going out and talking to their communities, finding out what matters to them and getting on with the job of saying, "If I am elected, I'll deliver this for you." That is what campaigning is about.

There are some outrageous examples of the things people say when they are on the hustings. As Hon Diane Evers pointed out, some people get excited when they get on the stump and say all kinds of things, which they perhaps go back and wish they had not said. Not all of us go on the radio when we are trying to become the Prime Minister and promise to take the GST off power bills, which was one recent example that did occur to me when I was putting my thoughts together on this issue. I noticed that in this Parliament the other day even the current Leader of the Opposition did a kind of mea culpa on Metro Area Express light rail. I am actually glad that we passed the amendment moved by Hon Diane Evers today about the parliamentary budget office, because it was in the context of talking about the parliamentary budget office and the need for one that Hon Dr Mike Nahan said something

**Extract from *Hansard***

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 7 November 2018]

p7877b-7892a

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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about MAX light rail. I do not think this was in the other place; it was probably in a media conference. I will make sure I am being completely accurate about what he said when he was arguing for the establishment of this office. He was talking about the government's MAX light rail proposal in 2013. The word he used was "disaster"; he said it was a disaster.

**Hon Alanna Clohesy:** He was right.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** He was absolutely right. It is one of those occasions when we can absolutely agree with the current Leader of the Opposition. I was not there and I do not know whether he was verbally by the journalist, but I have not seen any correction to this article. What I am going to put in *Hansard* is a direct quote from the Leader of the Opposition. This is what he said about MAX light rail —

"It was rushed out by my government in the run-up to an election," Dr Nahan said.

"It wasn't well thought out. That's why we walked away from it."

On the one hand we can say we all knew that and that it is refreshing to see the Leader of the Opposition front up and do the mea culpa over it, but I just remind those of us in this chamber who, like the crossbench, are quite properly concerned about process that this is a very, very serious matter. This was not a promise made from opposition. I am trying to be bipartisan about this. I am trying to be fair and reasonable. I am trying to not just score political points. I will score the odd political point if one comes my way, because I love doing that, but I am trying to not be partisan when I point that out. Now I am going to be partisan! I just want to point out, specifically to the crossbench, that Hon Dr Mike Nahan said that MAX light rail —

... was rushed out by my government in the run-up to an election," ...

"It wasn't well thought out. That's why we walked away from it."

We can compare that with Labor's Metronet promise in 2013, which was done from opposition. We had no assistance in putting those costings together. It is to Hon Ken Travers' eternal credit that he got it so right. Some adjustments were made once we began to get numbers from the government, but I can tell members, and particularly those on the other side of the chamber who have been involved in the private sector, that one knows what the margins of error are on projects the size of Metronet. I can tell members that the costings done by Hon Ken Travers came well within that margin of error. That was work done from opposition.

**Hon Robin Scott:** He would not get a job in the real world quoting on projects such as Metronet.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** I understand that Hon Ken Travers has actually got a job in the real world—driving headers for Hon Darren West. I guess that does not involve quoting on Metronet, but I think he has done a fairly good job at existing in the real world.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members! I do not know if you have noticed, but there is only one person on their feet and that person has the call. The rest of you might think you are helping, but you are not.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** Thank you, Madam President. I am making a deadly serious point here about a costing for a project that was conceived in government—the MAX light rail project—that then turned out to be what Hon Dr Mike Nahan confessed was a disaster. That can happen in government in the context of an election campaign, which was the point made by Hon Diane Evers—people get excited in election campaigns and rush stuff out that is not well thought through. The Leader of One Nation clearly thinks he has examples with Local Projects, Local Jobs, because he outlined those in four or five very well articulated points. I am suggesting that it is not hard to find examples on the other side of the chamber. If someone is a half-reasonable person, or even if they listened to the comments of the current Leader of the Opposition about what he did as Treasurer, they would have to agree that we need a better process. This is the opportunity for the estimates committee to make recommendations to this place about how we can get a better system. It would be good to have a system that we can all live with, as is often referred to, particularly by the newer people in this place, so that when we meet as a chamber we can actually get on with the business of government rather than rehashing complaints about the past. I think we would serve ourselves well if we adopted this amendment and made this another term of reference to give to the committee. There are other things that would add weight to my argument, but I wanted to start with that one, because it is the most obvious comparison of what happens during the excitement of an election campaign, even though, as I pointed out, Mike Nahan was Treasurer at the time.

Other things are done that clearly need more scrutiny and clearly trouble the crossbench, as much as they trouble the rest of us. With the previous incumbents, the Liberal–National government, we saw cost blowouts on things like Perth Children's Hospital and Fiona Stanley Hospital. There is the 30-year Serco contract that we are locked into. In my own patch, there was the loan that was given to Premier Coal, which the government refused to disclose, claiming, I think, commercial-in-confidence until it was published in the annual report of Premier Coal and the



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p7877b-7892a

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government had to say, “Well, yes, that was what we gave them.” All sorts of things like that have led the state into the difficult position it is now in as far as debt and deficit control goes. Again, I am going to address my comments specifically to the crossbench. The reason we ought to look at a comparison of the development and implementation of other parties’ election commitments in this inquiry is that, fundamentally, this comes down to a question about priorities. It comes down to a question of what we think matters in our electorates. I have said before that if we take the six members in this place who represent the south west, I suspect there would not be all that much we would disagree on. We might sometimes disagree about the timing of things if we ordered our priorities, but I am still going to maintain that I think we would basically have the same things on the long list—we might just disagree on what constitutes the first three or the first five on that list. That comes down to both the vision of what we want our local communities to look like and how we analyse the way our local communities are working at the moment. As I raised in my earlier remarks, it is that question about what provides the glue. I still say that if we can ascertain that these local commitments—these small funding projects—are making a difference in providing or consolidating that glue that makes communities work better, then they are good things.

A few other issues have been raised in the course of the debate. As I said, I have paid close attention to everything that has been said so far in the couple of hours we have had already. I wanted to address a couple of my remarks through you, Madam President, to the Leader of the Opposition in this place, Hon Peter Collier.

I notice that Hon Peter Collier was greatly vexed by some figures that he had quoted, which are on the public record, that are associated with the Local Projects, Local Jobs program and are about the net recurrent spend to 30 June 2020. I am not sure that he tabled the document from which I am reading. The document shows the project in the left-hand column and the amount in the right-hand column. Under “Local Projects, Local Jobs” is the figure of \$22.2 million. I do not think I am misquoting Hon Peter Collier when I say that he queried that figure of \$22.2 million from the pre-election costings document and asked why the current figure is a bit over \$38 million. I think he claimed that that represents a significant cost blowout. When I heard him say that, I went back and looked at these figures to get my own understanding clear. I suggest to him that that figure of \$22.2 million accurately represents the net impact of the recurrent spend. It is not the total cost of the program; it is the total difference that it makes in terms of recurrent expenditure.

**Hon Peter Collier:** Right!

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** This makes sense, Hon Peter Collier.

**Hon Peter Collier:** No, it does not.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** Hon Peter Collier of all people is familiar with this language. The \$22.2 million represents the net impact on the recurrent spend of government assumed as part of the election costings process, which is what we did in opposition. It is not the gross amount associated with the Local Projects, Local Jobs program. It is election commitments. For the benefit of Hon Peter Collier, I will just outline the three assumptions that underline that figure. Bear in mind that we are talking about the difference between \$22.2 million and a little over \$38 million—\$38.1 million. It is based on the following assumptions. The first assumption is that the regional Local Projects, Local Jobs election commitments will be funded under royalties for regions. The second assumption is that some of these projects could be funded through existing agency budgets. Hon Sue Ellery has given us an account of exactly how that has unfolded in practice.

**Hon Peter Collier:** You’re talking everyone into it! It’s unbelievable!

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** I thought Hon Peter Collier would be interested in this explanation.

**Hon Peter Collier:** I can’t believe you’re saying this! Your comments are absurd!

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** I thought Hon Peter Collier would be interested in this. It is good to be able to make our comments from an informed position, and that is what I am trying to do. I am here to help, truly.

We need to factor in the funding of some of those regional commitments from royalties for regions. I know that every time we say royalties for regions, the Liberal Party just collapses into fits of hysterics. We know how much that upsets members opposite. We know that this is the elephant in the room. But I am going to keep talking about it, because we are very proud of what we are doing under royalties for regions. We are very, very happy about the fact that when we came into government and were able to re-evaluate the royalties for regions legislation, we did not need to change one word. Royalties for regions is continuing exactly as it was established by the creators of that idea. So I will continue to talk about it, even though I know it reduces members opposite to a giggling heap.

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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The third three assumptions are that the amount of \$22.2 million funds the balance of the commitments, once we have taken into account that some of the projects are funded through existing agency budgets, and some of the regional commitments are funded by royalties for regions. I hope that provides some assistance to those opposite.

**Hon Peter Collier:** No, not even close!

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** I can only do what I can do, Hon Peter Collier. If Hon Peter Collier fails to understand that, that is hardly my problem.

I will wind up my comments now. I think we will get a better outcome that will serve the long-term benefit of the people of this state if we do not focus on just one particular suite of election commitments but look at the way in which we actually do this thing in this state.

In looking at the make-up of that committee, all five members of the committee absolutely know how to do their job. Some of them are very experienced. Some of them have professional qualifications in this field. All the members of the committee know what they are doing and will be able to bring back to this chamber a robust set of findings and recommendations that will enable us to make changes in the spirit in which we ought to engage in this kind of debate.

*Amendment to Motion, as Amended*

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** I therefore move —

To amend the motion by inserting after paragraph (f) —

- (g) how the program compares with the development and implementation of election commitments of other parties in the past in respect to the matters referred to in (a) to (f) above; and

**HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan)** [2.05 pm]: I will be opposing the amendment as moved by Hon Dr Sally Talbot. An inquiry in the terms of reference that have been put, with the addition of an inquiry into the desirability of a parliamentary budget office, will effectively make a very large workload for the standing committee to deal with. I also make the observation that the amendment moved by Hon Dr Sally Talbot is exceptionally open-ended and will provide little in the way of tangible benefit. I think it will be resource intensive. I must say also that I was anticipating an amendment such as this. However, I was not quite anticipating the charm offensive that came with it. That was a pleasurable but unexpected surprise. Nevertheless, I do not think the quality of this amendment stands on its own feet, and we will be opposing it.

**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House)** [2.06 pm]: I would like to speak in favour of the amendment and to outline the thinking behind the reason the government has moved this amendment. Members will recall that the proposition put to us by the mover of the substantive motion in his contribution included, in part, that the process that Labor in opposition employed to develop its election commitments was somehow extraordinary, unusual and inappropriate. If I can paraphrase, he used terminology to suggest that there was a whiff of something inappropriate in how the Labor Party in opposition developed its election commitments. If we accept the reasoning that he gave the house, the role of the committee will be to test whether that is the case. The only way the committee can test that is by looking at the process that has been used by other parties to come up with similar election commitments.

I take members back to the debate last Wednesday, when I described the process as “Compare the Pair”. I made the point about what was the difference between small electorate-based commitments made by the sitting member, and I used the case of the then member for Perth, who promised \$100 000 to a primary school for a nature playground, and the Labor candidate, who promised \$100 000 to a local primary school for a nature playground. What is the difference? There were some injections, first by Hon Aaron Stonehouse and then by Hon Colin Tincknell. I am reading from the *Hansard* of Wednesday, 31 October 2018. I was running through a list of locally based commitments in seats like Perth and Forrestfield, and I said: what is the difference between this small amount of money and that small amount of money? Hon Aaron Stonehouse interjected and said —

They are both pork-barrelling.

I said —

That may well be the case, my friend, but the keyword is “both”. The point I am trying to make is that there is nothing new in the way our party organised or came up with its election promises ...

Hon Colin Tincknell then interjected and said —

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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That is the exact problem. There is nothing new.

I then said —

If the honourable member wants to conduct an inquiry into how every major party develops its election commitments, ...

And the debate went on.

There is nothing in the amendment before us now that will remove, or, to use the expression used by the Leader of the Opposition, diminish the integrity of the motion before us. We seek to take nothing away from the existing motion. We are saying that if we accept the proposition that political parties need to be exposed—if we want to use that expression—in how they come up with their election promises, we need to look at more than one. If we accept the proposition put by Hon Tjorn Sibma that there was something unusual about the way in which the Labor Party in opposition developed its election promises, how would we test that other than by looking at how other parties developed their election commitments? There is no other way in which we can test that, because unless we compare it with something, we do not know whether that is the standard operating practice or something different. This amendment will not diminish in any way the guts of the motion as moved by Hon Tjorn Sibma in the points set out in paragraphs (a) to (f). We have now added an extra component with the parliamentary budget office. The essential elements that Hon Tjorn Sibma wanted examined are set out in paragraphs (a) to (f). This amendment takes nothing away from those components.

In his closing comments today, Hon Colin Tincknell made the point that his motivation for supporting the motion was his concern about a lack of consultation, a lack of business cases and a lack of priorities. Those are the three expressions that he used. I put to members that when election commitments are made by the major parties, they do not prepare a business case for those election commitments, particularly when they are in opposition. They do not have an open tender, broad-ranging consultation process. They set their priorities, frankly, based on their political judgement of what is most important to the community that they seek to represent. They know what the issues are and what the community expects from them. I put it to members that both the major parties, and I suspect also some of the other parties, do exactly the same thing. However, the committee will not know that unless it looks at it from both sides. Therefore, the proposition before the chamber will not diminish in any way the things that Hon Tjorn Sibma wants to examine. If we accept his motivation and if we accept the reason that has been put by some members already, albeit informally through interjection, that it might be the case that both major parties develop their election commitments in this way, we would ask the committee to examine that. That is the proposition that is in the amendment before members today. This is a time-limited debate, so I will not take all the time available to me to support it. But I am asking members to seriously consider that if they accept the proposition that the Labor Party in opposition did something different, how will they gather the evidence to demonstrate that if they do not look at how the other parties do it as well?

**HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition)** [2.13 pm]: I stand to say that the Liberal Party will most definitely not be supporting this amendment. In fact, Hon Dr Sally Talbot convinced me that we should not support this amendment with her very confused explanation of the distinction between the \$22.2 million and the \$38 million. I have absolutely no idea what she was talking about and, to be perfectly honest, I do not think she did either. I think she got some notes from the government. I pity her, because it was very confused. Having said that, after hearing the Leader of the House, I am even more convinced that we cannot support this amendment.

This house has, in good faith, supported the amendment moved by Hon Diane Evers. It is a very good amendment. We are considering the establishment of a parliamentary budget office, which is what members opposite stated prior to the election that they wanted to do. Mind you, the Treasurer said last week that he would not do so, so it will be fascinating to see what recommendation the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations comes up with for a parliamentary budget office. That is what we need for the integrity of election promises.

This amendment will damage the integrity of the motion —

Several members interjected.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Let me finish what I am about to say. This is a specific program that is fundamentally flawed. I am not talking about, as the Leader of the House suggested, an election commitment for a school in Rockingham or a school in Kingsley; I am talking about a program worth \$22.2 million before the election and \$39 million after the election. We have no clarity. That is the issue—there is no clarity. We do not need to ask a question about an election commitment for an administration block for a school in Kingsley because it is already there and we know the cost. What we do need is some clarity behind the hundreds and hundreds of projects within

**Extract from Hansard**

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 7 November 2018]

p7877b-7892a

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this program that have no clarity. The reason we have taken this path is that we cannot get answers to questions through the parliamentary processes. We have tried to get answers through the parliamentary processes and members opposite have been a brick wall. That is what I am saying: members opposite have been a brick wall. They have basically told us where to go each and every time. There is no clarity and no transparency behind this program. We are looking at this program in isolation, not the plethora of election commitments that exist from all political parties. Imagine the work that this committee would have if it had to look at the election commitments of other parties at past elections. There is not even a time frame on it. Are we going to go back to Sir Charles Court's time and have a look? What a ridiculous amendment. We cannot support this amendment. Every party has its election commitments. They are open and transparent. But this one is completely different. I draw members' attention to the Labor Party's election commitment that specifically refers to Local Projects, Local Jobs and \$22.2 million. There was no specificity about where that money would go; it was just there. The cost of the program has almost doubled between the election and when the government's first budget papers were brought down, when it came out at \$39 million with no clarity whatsoever. As Her Majesty's opposition, we said, "Hello, hello, hello; let's have a look at this thing. This thing reeks." We did exactly what we should do. We asked questions during estimates committee hearings, we asked questions on notice and we asked questions without notice, and we met a brick wall. This is a very specific program that needs the dedicated investigation of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations.

The government was as proud as punch of this program and it went so far as to try to congratulate itself for this program. It moved a motion to congratulate itself for this program. The house has ruled on that. The house said, "No, you are not going to get congratulated for this thing; you do not deserve to be congratulated for this thing." We are saying that we need to go further. If members of the public have to tighten their belts and go without because members on the treasury bench do not have any money, yet, at the same time, they can afford to double the cost of this program, which has no scrutiny or transparency whatsoever, honestly, that in itself is reason enough to ensure that this committee look solely and absolutely at the Local Projects, Local Jobs program.

There is added value today. The motion will have that very generic, dare I say it, altruistic and positive outcome of allowing the committee to look at the prospect of a parliamentary budget office, which the entire house has agreed to. From that perspective, we agree, but we do not agree to say that all of a sudden everyone is the same and to put them in the same bucket. Everyone is not in the same bucket. We all have our election commitments. That is not what we are talking about. We are talking about this specific election commitment. It is a discrete program with a line item in the budget. That is all it is. Trying to follow the tentacles of this line item is like finding a needle in a haystack. The only way we can do it is to go right through the Department of Education—I challenge members opposite to say this is inaccurate, because they would be misleading the house—and all 800 public schools in Western Australia and look at the shade cloth program. We can then click on the website and see the schools that got a letter out of the blue that said they have a shade cloth from the Local Projects, Local Jobs program. That is how it has been done. Forget about the poor schools that have waited endlessly for their shade cloths, done the right thing and had the pressure from the P&C, the board, the principal and the community to try to get \$20 000 for a shade cloth. That has gone out the window. Now, a member just gives a nudge and a wink to the Treasurer and says, "Let's put it in the Local Projects, Local Jobs cohort", and that is how they get it. That is exactly why this is unique. It is not like an election commitment, as the Leader of the House said, that we all make. We all make election commitments and transparently put them out there. We all put them on our websites. But we do not put them down there as just a little block that says they are for Labor seats, which is what Local Projects, Local Jobs is, and then divvy them up to all the local Labor members and say, "Here you go. Here's yours. We didn't expect you to win, but, here, you can have this." Sorry to be flippant, but that is what it is.

If the government really wants openness and transparency and some integrity behind this program, do not run away from it. Do not try to muddy the waters by putting it in with all the other election commitments from decades past. Goodness gracious, there will be two Parliaments before the old estimates committee comes back with a report! That is not what this is about. This is not about trying to find out issues around election commitments. Members opposite have been so self-righteous on this. They have constantly and relentlessly scoffed at us for having the gall to question the Local Projects, Local Jobs program, yet rather than say, "Well, come on, guys, bring it on! If you bring on an inquiry, we don't mind. We have nothing to hide", they are opposing the motion. I find that staggering. What do members opposite have to hide? They were trying to congratulate themselves on it two months ago! Not only that, if they have nothing to hide why not just support it?

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Who is the self-righteous one? You are!

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Why not support it?

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** You are the one who is wasting the time of the house!

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** How on earth am I —

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Order, members! The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** What a sensitive interjection! I almost feel like I might have struck a chord there! I say to members opposite —

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** It is nonsense. You have struck a chord—absolutely!

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Sorry?

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Come on, you've got only 10 minutes left.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** I might take the whole lot now, seeing as I am upsetting Hon Stephen Dawson so much!

If members of the Labor Party have so much confidence in this program and no problems whatsoever with it, I do not know why in the first place they are opposing the motion. But why on earth they would try to then muddy the waters in other areas is beyond me. It is nothing to do with that. Those guys should be open and transparent, as their Premier keeps on telling us. If they were being open and transparent, they would say, "Yes, here is our Local Projects, Local Jobs program on a platter. You guys have a look at it, and you will see there's nothing wrong with it." If they have that much confidence in it that they are willing to bring it to the house and ask us to say how wonderful it is and congratulate themselves on it, they should not only support the motion, but also not move this amendment because it is wrong. Having said that, the Liberal Party will be opposing the amendment.

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [2.23 pm]:** I listened with interest to my friend Hon Sally Talbot as she introduced her amendment to improve the motion that her party is going to vote against anyway. I thought: "I mean, if I didn't know her better it might have crossed my mind that she was trying to be just a tiny, weeny, teensy bit disingenuous."

**Hon Dr Sally Talbot:** You clearly don't know me.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** But I quickly put that thought and any notion of it firmly to one side, because I would never suggest that. In fact, I was instead overcome with a sense of admiration. I muttered words to that effect to my colleague here!

We all know that butter would not melt in the mouth of my dear friend opposite, who I have known for so long and worked with closely on many different matters over the years. I am sure she was quite sincere in putting forward the arguments she did. Although she was addressing the Chair, she was a bit oriented towards those who will decide this matter on the crossbenches—I include the Greens in that. She appealed to them about how this would be so well balanced and a gesture to improve things for the future. I went a bit moist at the time—I was reaching for the old hanky. I must have had something in my eye; it was so heart-rending, was it not?

**Hon Dr Sally Talbot:** Not a dry seat in the house!

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Not a dry —

**Hon Tjorn Sibma:** Dry eye, I hope! I hope that is what she was referring to!

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I recognised quite clearly that it was a masterful attempt to get support for her government. I do not know why she supports it, because she keeps getting overlooked for higher office, but, no, she is a true believer and will stick with it until the bitter end.

**Hon Tjorn Sibma:** She's too good!

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Yes, she is too good.

The member thought: "How are we going to disrupt this inquiry that is going to look at some of the carry-on that my party has been engaged in? We'll come up with this particular motion", in the terms that have now been circulated. "And how do I express it in terms that will appeal to the numbers that we will need to try to make the best out of a bad lot?" Well, it was a masterclass, and I am sure copies of *Hansard*, when corrected, will be available for signing by the honourable member to give out to people as a true example of how it is done.

But that is not really what we want done. The substantive motion is about examining the so-called Local Projects, Local Jobs program, how it was developed and everything about it. We are all now familiar with the terms of reference, which are just about complete and agreed on. They have now been augmented by a very good amendment moved by Hon Diane Evers that gives us the appropriate way forward. I am not being disingenuous when I say that. I thought: "Here's something very useful to come out of this." We want to see a parliamentary budget office, particularly as the Labor members here agree with Hon Diane Evers on that, although their colleagues in another place disagree. That is all a very positive development from our point of view.

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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But the honourable Leader of the Opposition has made quite clear that the amendment currently before us is about diluting and distracting from the key purpose at hand. The key purpose is about inquiring into a program whereby candidates of a certain major party aspiring to hold the government benches were told, "Here's the amount of slush fund money you have; go out and promise it to wherever you think it might have good effect. But just to make sure you are doing it right, you have to run it past your party organisation to make sure we are getting the voting bang for our buck." Even though it was a colossal \$22 million or something, we now find that \$39 million of taxpayers' funds, and probably more, have been committed without the checks and balances that any decent, civilised government accountability mechanism would allow.

I join the Leader of the Opposition in saying to the house—all of us—that this amendment, moved no doubt by our colleague with motives as pure as the driven snow, is not worthy of support. In fact, it would be counterproductive to all the collegiate spirit already expressed to move in the established direction of this debate.

Before I sit down, let me share with members some information that might be of interest because the argument advanced by the government—the government party on this occasion—in all this debate, amendments and all, has been that most desperate of excuses when one is caught with their hands apparently in the cookie jar: "But everyone does it." That is a pretty good summary of it, is it not? "But all parties do this." Does the Greens party do this? Do its members get out and splash around \$39 million and say, "Vote for us"? It might be that the Soros Foundation does a bit of that on their behalf, but that is another story. Does One Nation do that?

**Hon Colin Tincknell** interjected.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Hang on! We have just heard that all parties do it. That is what members have been told in this place. Do the Nats do it?

**Hon Diane Evers:** Policies that cost something.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Exactly. The electorate will decide collectively whether it likes the aggregate of those policies warts and all—agree with some, not particularly attracted by others—and it will make those sorts of assessments. In due course, a properly constituted government will go through properly constituted purposes to decide how those policies will be pursued and initiated. They are policies of weighing up value for money—policies about extracting money through this Parliament after the proper assessments by Treasury, a cabinet subcommittee and a whole range of other processes that seem to have been missing. We would like to find out through this inquiry whether they have been employed.

I will tell members what I know about what the Liberal Party does. There have been two leaders of the Parliamentary Liberal Party in my time who have taken us to an election—just two. We have had a few leaders but just two have taken us to an election. I totted it up and I was surprised as I counted; I got all the way to two and then had to stop, which was a bit of a surprise. In 1996, our leader was Richard Court. A few members met him for the first time the other day when he visited the house as the Ambassador to Japan. Richard Court was the parliamentary leader and Premier again in 2001 at that election, and I was actively involved as a candidate. I had been involved in other elections prior to that and heard much the same thing as I am about to recount. I was returned in the 1996 and the 2001 elections.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** You had some interesting things to say about Roe 8 at that time, as I recall. Going into that election, you had some interesting comments.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Did I, indeed? Perhaps, in due course, we will see how shaky Hon Alannah MacTiernan's memory is. I missed her yesterday when I was talking about a railway bill and I expressed that regret, but here she is today so that will be good.

In the 2005 election, Colin Barnett was our leader and he was leader again in 2008. Members opposite will remember that election, I am sure. He was also our leader in 2013 and again in 2017, when I was not perhaps as close to the action as I had been on the previous occasion. That is a lot of elections. In all that time, I saw quite clearly how those two leaders were instrumental in saying to groups or individual candidates, "This is how we do business if you are going to be a Liberal candidate." They both said, "You are not entitled to go out there and offer cash, so don't even come to us with that sort of idea. Yes, you can go out and say you will fight to get whatever bit of infrastructure or whatever it might be for this electorate that you want to represent. Yes, you will join with this club or that school P&C in lobbying hard to secure funds for shade sails or what have you. That is what you do." If, as an overarching policy, a party aspiring to government said it would put out a program to provide covered assembly areas, for example, to all schools north of the twenty-sixth parallel, or to all schools in Western Australia on a staggered basis over the next five years or something, any Liberal candidate could go out and say, "This is our party's policy if we come to government and I want to make sure that our schools have their rightful place in the pecking order when that policy is rolled out." Never have I heard it said, "Here's \$20 000 or \$10 000 that you can promise and commit as you see fit."

**Extract from Hansard**

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 7 November 2018]

p7877b-7892a

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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**Hon Michael Mischin:** Whether you want it or not.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Yes. Furthermore, we were told specifically, "You are not to do that." Over the last umpteen elections, that is what I have witnessed from within the Liberal Party room and during the Liberal campaign. If it was something different, I would tell members. What I am telling members now is the truth. It is what I have witnessed and what umpteen Liberal candidates have had drummed into them in elections from 1996 that I can personally account for, and that is a quite different scenario from the one the Leader of the House and others pretend exists within all parties.

In the 2005 election, I was our opposition spokesperson for disabilities. We took a big disabilities policy to that election and I can tell members, even from opposition, it was properly funded and properly costed. It can be done. It was not full of bribes; it was a program about what we would do in government to address some of the shortcomings in the disability sector. I can tell members that there was no handful of gold coins so we could say, "Here, vote for us." It was about here is what we stand for and here is how we costed it, because we had engaged skilled people in the sector to do it for nothing and our figures stood up. That is what I can give a personal account of. With all that in mind, I commend those remarks to all members in the house as they contemplate whether they want to support this amendment.

I will put some things on the record now, and they will not be counter-said by anyone in this house. If anyone on the other side of the house wants to accuse us again ever, while I am in this place, of saying, "You all do it", I suggest they are looking in a mirror because I am telling them from my own experience, from inside, that is not how we do it. Let us not be diverted by this proposed amendment that seeks to say, "Let's pursue the line that the Liberal Party does the same thing." What "same thing"? I have just told members what we do and what we have done during the last election and the one before that and the one before that and the one before that and the one before that and the one before that. I do not hear anybody calling me a liar, and they would not want to. With all due respect to the mover of the amendment, I suggest that we politely kick this amendment to the kerb.

**HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural)** [2.39 pm]: I rise to say that I will oppose the proposed amendment. Just looking at the motion before us, the heading on the notice paper is "Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations Inquiry into the Government's Local Projects Local Jobs program". That has been further amended today by Hon Diane Evers' amendment that provides for inquiring into the establishment of a parliamentary budget office for the independent costing of election promises and related purposes. I think that would take care of future promises that are made by parties as far as their election promises are concerned. The amendment before us now really is not consistent with the motion that was originally put. It is there only to muddy the waters. The Langoulant inquiry and report was into the performance of the past government. I do not see any need for the amendment that is before us.

**HON AARON STONEHOUSE (South Metropolitan)** [2.41 pm]: I am giving this proposed amendment considerable thought. This has all come on us fairly quickly. We have had one amendment to introduce a reference to a parliamentary budget office and now we are considering a second proposed amendment for a new subparagraph to compare the program in question with other parties and their election commitments. At first I was somewhat inclined to support this amendment in the sense that I do not get into this partisan fight across the chamber. I do not really care who wins points against each other. I think both parties are somewhat guilty of pork-barrelling during election campaigns. Whether they have a brand for it or not, I think they engage in very similar activity. What concerns me about the subparagraph in particular is that rather than assessing the Local Projects, Local Jobs program on its own merits, we may compare it with other pork-barrelling exercises of other parties in previous elections. When we look back through the past, we see that other parties engage in this activity and we may come to the conclusion that by comparison Local Projects, Local Jobs is fine; it is the same practice everybody engages in. I am concerned that that may water down the critical assessment of that particular project. I would like to have the committee look at Local Projects, Local Jobs on its own merits rather than comparing it with previous practices, although I think previous practices are rotten on their own.

Based on that, unless the government can give me a more compelling reason to support it in the last few minutes remaining, I am so far inclined not to support this amendment.

**HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West)** [2.42 pm]: One Nation has spoken fairly strongly in support of the motion moved by Hon Tjorn Sibma. I do not see this proposed amendment making any difference. It will not help get to the bottom of this particular issue that we have been discussing in this motion. I think it is there to muddy the waters and complicate matters. I proudly serve on the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations. Along with the rest of the members, I look forward to this inquiry. One Nation members will not support the amendment.

**Extract from Hansard**

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 7 November 2018]

p7877b-7892a

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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**HON PIERRE YANG (South Metropolitan)** [2.43 pm]: The proposed amendment to the motion before us is a very good one. It ensures equality and fairness in this exercise. The fundamental pillar of our democracy is based on fairness and equality, and based on the essence of the rule of law. It will look at one political party in particular, but we know that many political parties do these things. If we only target one, where is the fairness and equality? We have to look at that for the health and wellbeing of our democracy, to look at the fundamental values and issues of our democracy. This exercise has to be on a fair and equal ground. I urge members to think in the best interests of our democracy.

**HON MICHAEL MISCHIN (North Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [2.44 pm]: I listened with interest to Hon Pierre Yang's comments but he seems to have missed the entire point of the motion that is before the house. As has been explained, it is an examination of what has been dubbed as Local Projects, Local Jobs. At the time that it was discussed in the media by those seeking to explain and justify it, it was said that "jobs" was tacked on just as a feel-good measure because it resonated with the community. We have had depictions of cheques being handed out without any government branding on them, or even of the state of Western Australia, but appearing to be personal donations by members. We have had questions asked about details of what the commitments exactly were and to whom. I cannot even get an answer about Halidon Primary School. I am told, "Go and talk to the Labor Party." It looks like the house is going to have to talk to the Labor Party. The house is going to have to talk to people to find out what these commitments were, precisely how they were made, and to see that due process has been followed in the allocation of public funds. I cannot even get from the Minister for Education and Training information about what precisely went to her office that moved her to ask her department to put so much money into a particular primary school's administration block. I cannot get that out of her; I have tried. This seems to be the only way to go about it.

I agree that the proposed amendment is an attempt to dilute and muddy the waters. If the government feels that a broader inquiry needs to be made into election commitments in the past, I welcome it to put the motion forward to this house and it will be dealt with on its merit as a discrete inquiry. This motion is focused on a particular project, not election commitments generally. It is on a particular project that was originally said to cost \$22 million. We have had some explanation that it is really still \$22 million, even though it is \$39 million, which has not been adequately explained by any of the answers to the questions that have been posed by those interested in elements of that program over the last year and a half.

With respect, this amendment does nothing more than dilute the focus of the inquiry that has been proposed and that everyone seems to support. There is an adjunct to it in the comments that have been made by Hon Diane Evers. I have to say that I think she also was missing a bit of the point of this exercise by broadening it out but, again, the idea of looking into the merits of a parliamentary budget office, one that I should say advises on not only the costings of election commitments, so that every party can then get some advice on these things, but also hopefully what was contemplated before the last election—one that allows parties access to information about policies generally. If members look at the model that has been used in the commonwealth and elsewhere, there is an opportunity for every party to get advice on financial matters. That, I think, will be something of merit and a good adjunct to these sorts of inquiries. I will oppose the amendment and support the motion.

*Division*

Amendment put and a division taken, the Acting President (Hon Adele Farina) casting her vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (15)

Hon Robin Chapple  
Hon Tim Clifford  
Hon Alanna Clohesy  
Hon Stephen Dawson

Hon Sue Ellery  
Hon Diane Evers  
Hon Adele Farina  
Hon Laurie Graham

Hon Alannah MacTiernan  
Hon Martin Pritchard  
Hon Samantha Rowe  
Hon Matthew Swinbourn

Hon Dr Sally Talbot  
Hon Alison Xamon  
Hon Pierre Yang (*Teller*)

Noes (16)

Hon Martin Aldridge  
Hon Peter Collier  
Hon Colin de Grussa  
Hon Donna Faragher

Hon Nick Goiran  
Hon Colin Holt  
Hon Rick Mazza  
Hon Michael Mischin

Hon Simon O'Brien  
Hon Robin Scott  
Hon Tjorn Sibma  
Hon Charles Smith

Hon Aaron Stonehouse  
Hon Dr Steve Thomas  
Hon Colin Tincknell  
Hon Ken Baston (*Teller*)

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Pairs

Hon Darren West  
Hon Kyle McGinn

Hon Jacqui Boydell  
Hon Jim Chown

Amendment thus negatived.



**Extract from *Hansard***

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 7 November 2018]

p7877b-7892a

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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*Motion, as Amended*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Members, we are now dealing with the substantive motion, as amended previously.

*Division*

Question put and a division taken, the Acting President (Hon Adele Farina) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (20)

Hon Martin Aldridge  
Hon Robin Chapple  
Hon Tim Clifford  
Hon Peter Collier  
Hon Colin de Grussa

Hon Diane Evers  
Hon Donna Faragher  
Hon Nick Goiran  
Hon Colin Holt  
Hon Rick Mazza

Hon Michael Mischin  
Hon Simon O'Brien  
Hon Robin Scott  
Hon Tjorn Sibma  
Hon Charles Smith

Hon Aaron Stonehouse  
Hon Dr Steve Thomas  
Hon Colin Tincknell  
Hon Alison Xamon  
Hon Ken Baston (*Teller*)

Noes (11)

Hon Alanna Clohesy  
Hon Stephen Dawson  
Hon Sue Ellery

Hon Adele Farina  
Hon Laurie Graham  
Hon Alannah MacTiernan

Hon Martin Pritchard  
Hon Samantha Rowe  
Hon Matthew Swinbourn

Hon Dr Sally Talbot  
Hon Pierre Yang (*Teller*)

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Pairs

Hon Jacqui Boydell  
Hon Jim Chown

Hon Darren West  
Hon Kyle McGinn

Question (motion, as amended) thus passed.