

Mr Michael Sutherland; Acting Speaker; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr John McGrath; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr John Hyde; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Troy Buswell

APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) RECURRENT 2009-10 BILL 2009
APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) CAPITAL 2009-10 BILL 2009

Estimates Committees A and B Reports and Minutes — Presentation

MR M.W. SUTHERLAND (Mount Lawley — Deputy Speaker) [10.50 am]: I present the Legislative Assembly's reports and minutes of Estimates Committees A and B, and I wish to table the documents.

[See papers 962 and 963.]

Estimates Committee A Report — Adoption

Mr M.W. SUTHERLAND: I move —

That the report of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

Mr P.B. Watson: Did you write this report?

Mr M.W. SUTHERLAND: What business is it of the member for Albany if I wrote this report? The member should not worry about who wrote this report. He should worry about his business. What a cheek!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis): Oder! I advise the member for Albany that it might help if he does not bait the member on his feet.

Mr M.W. SUTHERLAND: The member for Albany should go back to sleep.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Speaker has the call.

Mr M.W. SUTHERLAND: In Estimates Committee A, a total of 44 requests were made for supplementary information. I am advised that all the information requested has been provided.

It was apparent that the questioning of many agencies was often not extensive and advisers were left sitting around for long periods and then barely asked a question, if they were asked one at all. This seems to be an ongoing occurrence. I note from previous reports that this issue has been raised, but it has not been properly addressed. For example, in committee A no questions were asked of the Zoological Parks Authority, the Governor's Establishment, the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal, the Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission or the Public Transport Authority. Only one question was asked of the Curriculum Council. The waste of time and cost associated with having officials sitting around for many hours should be addressed. This issue should be referred to the Procedure and Privileges Committee for further consideration. To begin with, I believe that members should be canvassed, which is the procedure followed for off-budget authorities, to ascertain whether they wish to ask questions of the agencies. Those agencies about which members do not want to ask questions could then be excluded from the process. Smaller agencies in a division should be dealt with first to enable the officials to be released. Having a standing committee question ministers and the relevant agencies for which they are responsible, and advising members of the time and date of these hearings, could perhaps also obviate the problem. It is also possible for questioning to be undertaken by the Public Accounts Committee over a number of weeks. I am sure the privileges committee will find a way to improve the system.

In committee A, the government asked 171 questions, which comprised 19.5 per cent of all questions asked, and the opposition asked 707 questions, which comprised 80.5 per cent of all questions asked.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham) [10.53 am]: As manager of opposition business I will make a few remarks about Estimates Committee A. Depending on what else is said I might make a few remarks on committee B.

I note what the Deputy Speaker said about officials being left waiting around, as he termed it. The simple fact of the matter is, having been through 12 rounds of estimates committees, that happens every year. Each year public officers are required to attend the Parliament to be available to assist ministers in answering questions about their portfolio. Sometimes they get some attention and sometimes they do not. That is a fact of life when we are dealing with issues involving billions of dollars of taxpayers' money and members of Parliament have the capacity to ask questions. If people are required to wait around for some time during the day, that is a fact of life of the parliamentary process. Often it cannot be determined how long will be spent on a certain portfolio area or certain part of a portfolio area. It is indeterminate before the event. Naturally, as things proceed, we get a handle on it, but sometimes people are required to wait around, as the Deputy Speaker put it.

The other point about that is that while these people are senior and well-paid public officers, this building has the capacity to access wireless technology and mobile phone technology. Members would know that these days most

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work in business is done by using those forms of technology. It is not as though these public officers who are in the building cannot be at work while they are here. They should be required to be here to answer questions if required by the Parliament, and that is a fact of life. I cannot see that changing. However, if public officers wanted it, it could be arranged for a venue or room to be available to them in which they could use their technology. That is what should be provided. They can then proceed to do their work while waiting here for hours and be called upon when they are required. That is the best way to handle this situation.

I will make a couple of points about the estimates committees. I note some ministers are better at answering questions than others. I particularly acknowledge what is an interesting phenomenon; that is, ministers who were not responsible for the portfolios for which they were answering questions were better at doing that than answering questions and providing information on the portfolios for which they are responsible. I will give an example. The Minister for Water was representing the Minister for Environment and he provided succinct and clear answers. He deferred to the senior staff of the Department of Environment and Conservation and, when required, they provided answers to the questions. It was an excellent example by the Minister for Water of the way to answer questions about a portfolio for which he is not responsible. If only he acted in that way with his own portfolio, things would improve. He is a decent man and he did a good job as environment spokesperson in this house.

Another person I will acknowledge is the Minister for Planning, the alternative music expert, for the way in which he answered questions on the planning portfolio. He did a good job and was good at answering questions. The two ministers I would like to acknowledge as not being as good are the Premier and Treasurer. Both of them adopt a stance of animosity in this place when asked questions. It is as though being asked a question is offensive to them and every single question that is asked is somehow to be treated with contempt. A minister in this place, when answering a question from a member of Parliament elected by the people of Western Australia, should not adopt that stance of animosity and hostility to the question and should try to provide an answer to the question.

I noted that there was a reluctance by some ministers to provide supplementary information, particularly the Treasurer in his capacity as Minister for Housing. When I asked him for supplementary information, he said no. I will quote a specific example involving the Premier. When I asked for supplementary information, the answer I received through that process was not an answer to the question I asked. While he agreed to provide some information by way of supplementary information, the information he provided was not what I asked for. Specifically what I asked for was different from what I was provided with. That should be addressed in the future. Although the Speaker, Deputy Speaker and Acting Speakers try to work out what the question is, because of the style of some ministers, particularly the Premier, it gets confused. We need to be very clear about what is required to be provided by way of supplementary information.

Another point I raise is about the committee report that was just provided. We noted amongst the public servants who come to answer the questions a divergence in their style and the way they acted. Some public servants are professional and provide factual information when asked by the relevant minister to answer the question. I was impressed by some of them, although I will not indicate who they were. I want to speak about one public servant; that is, Mr Peter Conran, who sat next to the Premier. He was asked to provide information on a number of occasions. I have the *Hansard* here with me, but I think it is uncorrected so I will not quote from it. He was asked on a couple of occasions about certain issues within portfolios. He was requested by the Premier to provide information. He then provided value judgements on the performance of ministers. On one occasion he said what a great job the Minister for Education was doing and how she was taking up the big challenges of education in her portfolio. Mr Conran is a public servant who is meant to be above the political fray and above political value judgements. I think it was very instructive—it was noted by a number of us—that when asked to comment upon these sorts of things, he inserted a degree of political partisanship and bias into his answers. To me, if any public servant lauds another minister in the government when answering a question, it indicates that partisanship and bias. I was disappointed, but perhaps not surprised, to see that he did that in his answers to questions. I would quote from the *Hansard* if it were not uncorrected. However, those members who are in the chamber will be able to verify what I say about it.

Mr R.F. Johnson: You can paraphrase it if you want to. That's not a problem.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I have told the house what he said. He inserted some political-style comments into his answers. I just thought it was unprofessional and he should not have done it. In particular, a guy like him, who is under the sort of scrutiny that he is, should be absolutely scrupulous about not being partisan in his public commentary. It seems to me to be a no-brainer for someone in his position to act in that fashion and to not be partisan in his commentary.

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I will make my last point. We raised this when the Speaker was in the estimates hearing answering questions. I thought the Speaker was very good in answering questions. I believe he is an honest, decent chap. I raised with him the fact that a number of people who are now chairing these committees and chairing the Parliament are brand-new members of Parliament. I said to the Speaker that I think it is a mistake and that it is unfair on those individuals who arrive here one day to be sitting in the chair the next day adjudicating over proceedings in the house. Whether it be when the house is in session or in an estimates committee, I do not think it is right. I think that there is a significant problem with members not understanding the standing orders and the ebb and flow of the house. This is a place in which members should be allowed to have free and frank debate, and not be cut off arbitrarily without being allowed to have their say. During the estimates committees, I observed overzealousness on the part of Chairs of the estimates committees. It is a historic mistake. It has not happened just under this government. It is a mistake that has been occurring for a long time.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I have a genuine question. I have listened to what you have said about that. However, have you looked back at 2001 to see which new members who came into this place when Labor took government in 2001 chaired committees? I suspect that it was very similar to —

Mr P.B. Watson: No, it was not. This is the first time we have seen it.

Mr M. McGOWAN: There is obviously a problem with new members who have no experience chairing the house and chairing committees. There is a problem, and there was a problem in 2001. I agree that there was that problem of a new member being in that position. However, as I said, some people are overzealous in cutting off debate and stopping members from making a contribution. Perhaps acting in an overtly partisan fashion has become endemic now.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Do you mean chairing the estimates committees or chairing the house?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Chairing both the estimates committees and the house. I was saying that during debate in the estimates committees, that is a problem that we faced. I think that people sitting in the chamber will observe the aggression and overzealousness that are exhibited by some members in the chair these days. I saw it in the estimates committees. I am commenting on the estimates committees, but I would extend my remarks to the broader conduct of operations in the house. I think it is a problem for us. New members and new Chairs should sit back and maybe let things happen a bit more than they do. They should not stop the debate all the time. They should let people have their say. That is what the house is about; that is what we are here for. If it continues, it will lead to outbursts from members on the floor of the house against the members who sit in the chair, which will mean that members will be thrown out of the house. I think members need to calm down a bit more when they are in the chair, learn the standing orders and perhaps take advice from members who have been in this place a while longer, even if they are on the other side of the house, about the way in which they should conduct themselves when they are in the chair. As I said, new members assumed the role in 2001 also, but I am talking about the way it is happening now. I am finding it to not be a very good way of proceedings taking place in this house at the moment. That was my other observation from the estimates committees. I will keep making that point. If it keeps happening, with members being treated the way they have been in the house, we might find explosions or outbursts from members that should not happen.

Mr R.F. Johnson: But there are already explosions and outbursts. Some of your members just don't obey the standing orders. You know that.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am providing constructive advice, and the problem with the Leader of the House is that he does not listen. Anyway, I am giving the Leader of the House some constructive advice in as reasonable a way as I can in this position. I ask that he listen to what I am saying to him and that members who might otherwise be in the chair learn about and watch what more experienced members do and not assume that they know everything just because they are given a senior position as one of the members who carry out the role of Acting Speaker at various times.

Mr R.F. Johnson: That's a fair bit of advice.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I think it is good advice.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I think everybody is on a learning curve when they first come into this place.

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is the point I am making. If members are on a learning curve, they should not think they know everything.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I would be surprised if they had that attitude; I really would—I have to be honest with you. Sometimes some of the new members who are Acting Speakers or acting Chairs are very reluctant to pull people up. Thinking back over the past seven and a half years, the situation was very different, of course. When Hon

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Fred Riebeling was Speaker—he was a friend of mine in many ways; I had a lot of time for Fred—I believe he was very strict.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will not comment on Hon Fred Riebeling, because he is a constituent of mine and I might lose his vote! Therefore, I will not comment on him, because he could read the *Hansard* and have something to say.

Mr P. Papalia: Speak of him in glowing terms.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Yes, I will speak of him in glowing terms. For his age, he is a very good golfer. I will conclude my remarks at that point.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [11.08 am]: As I am the Whip, it means that I have an opportunity to watch very carefully and participate very actively in the estimates committee process. Therefore, I am very pleased to make some comments about the way in which the committees operated this year. I have some serious concerns that I would like to raise, and I will refer to a couple of the divisions in particular that I think underpin some major flaws in how the committee system operated this year. Of course, ministers of the Crown are all well paid. I have been one myself. However, I was absolutely astounded—this is a very serious matter—that one particular minister in Estimates Committee B was allocated only one hour for three areas of his portfolio responsibilities—local government, heritage and citizenship. That is abhorrent. Quite frankly, in terms of accountability processes, it is absolutely impossible for an opposition to effectively question a minister when one hour has been allocated to his portfolio. I know why the minister was allocated one hour. In fact, a government member told me—he is a very honest man and that is why I will not name him—that the minister is so vulnerable and pathetic that the government had to give him only one hour otherwise he would have fallen over.

Mr P. Papalia: Name him.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, I will not name him. He is a good friend of mine now. The serious fact is that one minister of the Crown who holds an important office and who is responsible for three portfolio areas was allocated only one hour. It was quite amazing to see what happened during that particular hour. We were trying to ask some questions and get some answers and feedback because the 60 minutes was rapidly disappearing. The minister was pontificating and going on totally off track. When he tried to answer questions, he was totally incapable of doing so. That is one example. I do not think that minister will be in that position next year when estimates committees are being established and time is being allocated. A paltry amount of time was allocated. He is the only minister who got one hour; all the others got more than that. That was in committee B.

In committee A, I was concerned about the presentation of the budget. My very good friend the Minister for Water was the minister representing the Minister for Child Protection; Community Services. I had some very legitimate questions to ask about volunteering within the community services portfolio. The Minister for Community Services, Hon Robyn McSweeney, also looks after seniors' interests, carers, volunteering et cetera. The specific question I was seeking to ask related to the appropriation allocation in the budget to volunteer resource centres throughout the state of Western Australia. I wanted to know what the appropriation allocation was to around 20 volunteer resource centres throughout the state. The Minister for Water saw my frustration when I said, "Minister, I want to ask this question but there's no line item for me to ask it." Not one line item was relevant to my questions. The budget papers were very poorly presented. They are different from previous budget papers. When I was the Minister for Communities in the previous government, we would highlight a range of trends or issues in the budget papers that allowed members of the opposition and the government to ask questions relating to those specific portfolio responsibilities. There was nothing in part 14, division 62. It gave a poor presentation of those examples. I understand that other members had legitimate questions to ask in other portfolios but struggled to find a line item to which they could refer their question.

One of the other criticisms that I have about the whole process was highlighted by my very good friend the member for South Perth, my counterpart Whip.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Is he the one who was honest?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I would never name him. That is very disgraceful. How could the member for Victoria Park even intimate that? My very good friend the member for South Perth made a legitimate comment when we were asking questions of the Swan River Trust. We had fewer than 10 minutes to go and he quite rightly highlighted the fact that we had no opportunity to ask legitimate questions about the Swan River Trust. We asked two questions, from memory, because of the time constraints. Because of the time spent on the Department of Environment and Conservation, we let the chief executive officer and staff of the Zoological Parks Authority go early because we were running out of time. The member for South Perth made a very good

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point: We had fewer than 10 minutes to debate the most important environmental asset within the city of Perth—the Swan and Canning river system.

I also have a criticism about how the regional development commission was listed. Being the member for Mandurah in the Peel region, the Peel Development Commission is quite often —

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am turning my back on the member; he can talk to my hand. The Peel Development Commission quite often —

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will have to seek protection; I am feeling very vulnerable. The Peel Development Commission is quite often not given the opportunity to be quizzed. The Peel region is very important and should have that opportunity —

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, and I am peeved about that.

We have seen some glaring gaps in the estimates committee system this year. In his brief report, the Deputy Speaker highlighted some ongoing issues that were raised previously. I hope that before we convene the estimates committees next year, some of the issues that have been raised, including the ones that I have raised, will be appropriately addressed. I do not wish to be scathing of the Acting Speakers or the Deputy Speaker but, as the member for Rockingham, the manager of opposition business, highlighted, we witnessed very concerning behaviour by some Acting Speakers in their view of allowing free debate and allowing convention to be adhered to. I know that the Deputy Speaker highlighted the fact that 80 per cent of the time was used for opposition questions. We need to be reminded that it is always convention that the opposition is given the first question; in fact, it is usually given the first few questions. The estimates committee system is primarily for the opposition to seek answers to questions. That is important. I would hope that in his pre-committee discussions with the Acting Speakers next year, the Speaker will perhaps tighten up some of the issues that have been highlighted in this report this year.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: I can't believe you're blaming the umpires.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: When we have only one hour to question the Minister for Local Government on important local government, heritage, multicultural interests and citizenship matters, we have to have a pretty good Chair in charge otherwise we do not have time to address very important matters. It is important that the Chair allows us to ask as many questions as possible and keep the minister or the minister representing on track so that we get to ask those answers. When we have only one hour to ask questions, it is absolutely unbelievable when that does not happen. I have not counted the number of questions that were able to be asked of the Minister for Local Government; Heritage; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, but if I had counted them, I am sure that there would have been very few. I think that was a debacle, particularly with regard to division 64 in part 16 of the budget papers.

Mr R.F. Johnson: In actual fact, I believe that there was an hour more in total for the budget estimates hearings this year. Also, if you or the manager of opposition business had come to me beforehand and said that there was not enough time for local government or whatever, and that you would give up an hour on another section, I am sure that that could have been arranged.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is possible, but, to be totally honest, it is the job of the Deputy Speaker of the house to organise effectively the estimates committee system. I do not know whether that happened. I remind the Leader of the House that the opposition is absolutely serious about bringing this government to account. When he was in opposition, I can remember finishing a number of divisions up to an hour or more early simply because the then opposition had no further questions to ask. I found it quite astounding that that happened. This year we had a range of questions; we could have gone on for longer. I think that the system needs to be improved next year.

MR A.J. SIMPSON (Darling Range — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.20 am]: I want to refer to a couple of points that the member for Mandurah raised. I, too, noted the issue with the estimates hearing on community services and volunteering. I know that the member for Mandurah is a strong supporter, as I am, of Volunteering WA. I will take on board his comments and refer them to the minister's office to ensure that it is rectified for next year so that members can ask questions of a very great organisation in Western Australia that provides support for our communities. I just wanted to put on the record that I will take those thoughts to the minister and

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make sure that Volunteering WA has a line item in the budget so that members can ask questions during the estimates hearing.

MR P.B. WATSON (Albany) [11.21 am]: First of all, I congratulate the staff of the estimates committees. The clerks who sat by and helped the Chairmen did a tremendous job. They were always there, and they probably do not get the credit that they should. I think this was the first time in eight budgets that I have seen such indifference by ministers or a lack of knowledge of their portfolios. It was all right when they had staff around them, but they would not take supplementary questions. I have never seen that happen before. As a Chairman, I know that ministers can knock back questions, but the number of supplementary questions that were not accepted during the hearings really surprised me.

Members have talked about the Chairmen. I know that being a Chairman is very difficult. I congratulate the member for Scarborough and the member for Maylands, two new members of this place, but I was a little disappointed with the Deputy Speaker and the member for Jandakot. I thought that they politicised the Chairman's position. I thought it was a little disappointing.

Point of Order

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I think it is totally unparliamentary for any member of this house to reflect adversely on the Chair, no matter who it is, whether it be the Speaker in the full chamber or the Chairman in estimates committees.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis): I take the Leader of the House's point of order. The member for Albany should know better than to reflect on Acting Speakers, such as himself. Patience, member for Warnbro! So that we can move on, I am happy to discuss this with the Speaker later.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I was not talking as a Chair; I was talking as the member for Albany taking part in a committee hearing.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! The member for Albany specifically referred to another member by his seat, and the member knows that that is not acceptable.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: When he referred to a member who was in the chair, he mentioned a particular member. The member for Albany knows that that is unacceptable.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Mr Acting Speaker, I never mentioned the person in the chair; I mentioned the person by his electorate. It is my understanding that a member can mention someone by his electorate.

Mr T.R. Buswell: You want to get yourself a big mirror in relation to your performance.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Talking about pigs from the Treasurer —

The ACTING SPEAKER: My advice is that if the member for Albany wants to criticise the Chair, he should do so by substantive motion, not by debate.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Okay; we will do that.

Debate Resumed

Mr P.B. WATSON: As I have said, in the previous eight budgets, members could read the budget papers and know where the money was going and where it was coming from, but in this year's budget papers members could not. The money was hidden; members could not find it anywhere. There was no accountability. When members asked the ministers where the money was, they said that it was here, that they had put it there or that something was going to happen. When members wanted to talk about projects in their electorates, they could not find them in the budget; they just were not there. That was another thing that was very disappointing. There was only one-third of a page on the Forest Products Commission and it was all about its furnishings; there was nothing about forest products, which is a huge issue in my electorate at the moment. Once again, I congratulate the staff of the committees. I congratulate the member for Scarborough, the member for Maylands and the member for North West on their performance.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Leader of the House) [11.25 am]: I do not intend to take up very much time on the motion before the house, and I mean that. However, it is incumbent on me to put the record straight because of the comments of the member for Mandurah. Some members, particularly those on the other side, seem to be under some misapprehension that the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker organise the timetable and the allocation of time for the estimates hearings.

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A member interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, it has been said. The Deputy Speaker has been criticised and I will not stand for that.

Mr P.B. Watson: He didn't organise it anyway.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, he did not organise it. It is up to the management committee of this house, which includes me, the manager of opposition business and two other members, to organise the timetable and framework for Estimates Committees A and B, and that happened. If opposition members felt that there was not enough time for a particular portfolio, that was the opportunity to say so. As Leader of the House, I would have been more than happy to have accommodated any concern that the opposition had. As it stands, in overall terms there was one extra hour for budget estimates hearings this year compared with the situation last year.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am not taking interjections from the member anymore. There is just verbal diarrhoea from his seat and I am getting sick to death of it.

It is important that this house knows that that is how estimates committees are timetabled and time framed. Any complaint that there was not enough time for any particular area should have been raised at that stage. In fact, I think the member who complained was the member who should have been at the management committee meeting to organise it. The manager of opposition business is keeping very quiet. I think he accepts that that is the way it works. It worked that way when he was in government, and it has worked that way this year. If there are any complaints, that is the time to raise them, not afterwards in hindsight. Certainly, we tried to be fair and that is why an extra hour was allocated. If members opposite do not like the fact that some portfolio hearings are longer than others, they should say so at the appropriate time. They should not criticise the Deputy Speaker for doing nothing wrong whatsoever. He carried out his job in an exemplary way.

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park) [11.28 am]: I rise to make some brief comments about the estimates committee process. I note the comments made by the Deputy Speaker in his report that outlined the problems that he saw with having officials and public servants at Parliament for an extended period before they either were asked questions or, on some occasions, were not asked any questions. The member for Rockingham, the leader of opposition business, has addressed this matter. He is right; there could be a more effective use of their time, but that can certainly take place in Parliament itself. We have wireless access, and while those public servants are here, they certainly have the capacity to continue working for their departments. The fact of the matter is that the timetables for the estimates committees are inherently unreliable and fluid, and we need those officials to be available to assist ministers in answering questions. I also note the break-up of the questions as outlined by the Deputy Speaker. Apparently government members asked 171 questions, or 19.5 per cent of all questions asked, and opposition members asked 707 questions, or 80.5 per cent of all questions asked. I would like to see—the Deputy Speaker will not have this information; I dare say nobody has this information—the percentage break-up of the time spent on each question. I dare to say that it probably took about 40 per cent of the total estimates time to deal with the 19.5 per cent of dorothy dix questions asked by the government members.

I am not naive. I am aware of the role played by dorothy dix questions in this house, but I think they have long since served their purpose, particularly when it comes to holding government to account. Answers tend to become ministerial statements—there is another process by which those statements can take place—more particularly so during the estimates process. It is my view that chapter 21 of the Legislative Assembly standing orders—I make these comments because I know that the Deputy Speaker will be taking up some of these issues with the Procedure and Privileges Committee—needs an overhaul. The federal estimates process has been referred to as a suitable model; however, I am not saying that that model is one that we should pursue because I have not done sufficient research to make such comments. The estimates process is the one time of the year, the one week of the year, in which opposition and other non-government members of Parliament can cross-examine ministers and, more particularly, the senior staff who advise the ministers, on government and the budget, including the assumptions in the budget; the spending commitments in the budget; where alleged savings will be found; and the fine details in the budget line items and the assumptions made about them.

The role of dorothy dix questions during the estimates process is, I believe, one that should be removed. Such questions no longer serve the purpose of estimates. During the estimates process I spent time questioning the Treasurer and, in my view, he performed much better when answering questions from the opposition than when answering dorothy dix questions. Our questions brought out good discussions, certainly while the Under Treasurer was sitting next to the Treasurer, and more information was elicited to not only the advantage of the opposition but also for general good governance. I think the dorothy dix process has run its course.

Mr T.R. Buswell: We did not ask a lot of dorothy dix questions.

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Mr B.S. WYATT: No, but the Treasurer spent a lot of time answering them—that is the point I was making before the Treasurer came into the chamber. I think that we can, in the time provided—as I have said, estimates is only one week of the year and really is an opportunity to cross-examine the government—make the estimates process one that favours non-government members of Parliament, because I think that is really the purpose of the estimates hearings.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Did you hold this view last year?

Mr B.S. WYATT: I accept that this decision can only be made by the government. The Treasurer held this view last year and he is now in the position to make these changes. I dare say he will not. The Deputy Speaker has already indicated that the Procedure and Privileges Committee will look at some of these details. Now is the time that we need to revisit and perhaps to rewrite chapter 21 of the standing orders in a way that reflects modern governance. The complexity of governance has changed considerably since this process started. Parliaments all over Australia have revisited this process over the past few years and have established much better estimates processes than those we have here. I look forward to the Deputy Speaker and the Procedure and Privileges Committee looking at these issues. I note that the member for Alfred Cove, who is not with us at the moment, is writing to the committee about the hours that we sit. I think that that is really a minor point as opposed to exactly what it is that we do here through the questioning of the government, particularly through the estimates process.

I do not intend to say much more than that. I have noted the time spent on government questions and opposition questions outlined by the Deputy Speaker. It is not so much the number of questions that I am concerned with, but the time spent by ministers answering dorothy dix questions from members of the government.

MR J.E. McGRATH (South Perth) [11.34 am]: I will make a few brief comments. I was worried that the member for Mandurah would take my name in vain at one stage there.

Mr D.A. Templeman: I would never do that.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: He raised the point that I raised during estimates, about the time that was allocated to the Swan River Trust. That has been well canvassed so I am not going to go over that. As the member for Victoria Park said, we have very flexible arrangements with estimates hearings. On any given day we never know how many questions will be asked of any particular minister or on any particular division. One night I felt sorry for advisers from the Zoological Parks Authority, who were sent home after arriving here. The Perth Zoo is in my electorate. I would have liked an opportunity to ask questions of them. I felt for the people from that authority who had come in here and were not able to make a contribution.

Mr P. Papalia: The Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services, as the member knows, is a fairly significant organisation. One would think that at this time, when prisons are overcrowded, we should be able to ask questions. Officers came in, and exactly the same thing happened to them. I am not blaming the minister—he was here for hours—but clearly that was inadequate. They spent all night here and had to leave after sitting down.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: A good point, member. It is something that has to be raised. I am sure that the Deputy Speaker and the Procedure and Privileges Committee will look at it. I do not know whether we need to allocate more time to budget estimates. On speaking to a colleague from Canberra, I told him that we had had a long week in budget estimates. He asked how many days we sat. I said, “Three days—from 10.00 am until 10.00 pm.” He said, “We go for two weeks.” Obviously it is a much bigger budget. We do need to look at it.

I will make a point about dorothy dixers. The Premier told us in the party room that budget estimates were for the opposition. He said that he did not want us asking dorothy dixers just for the sake of it. He said we had to be fair to the opposition. I remember sitting over there in one of the estimates hearings and saying to a couple of new members, who were very keen to ask some questions, “We have to give the opposition this opportunity. We must be fair about that.”

Mr M.P. Murray: The member is the only one in the house who did!

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I think that is what the process is all about. While we were in opposition, the former member for Yokine was an expert at dorothy dixers. He could spin one out for an hour! He would go on about a subject that was close to his heart. We would be sitting on the other side in opposition so exasperated and frustrated that we could not get to ask questions of the ministers that we wanted to ask. We understand what it is like. Most people get a chance on both sides of this house. It is only fair that the opposition gets more time. I note that 85 per cent of the questions were asked by the opposition; 19.5 per cent by —

Mr B.S. Wyatt: 80.5 per cent.

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Mr J.E. McGRATH: 80.5 per cent by the opposition and 19.5 per cent by the government. I think that is good. The member for Victoria Park makes a good point.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: It is the number of questions.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: It is the number of questions. It is probably more relevant the time that is spent on those questions. This can be discussed by the Deputy Speaker and the Procedure and Privileges Committee. The chairperson has a role to control the debate a little bit more and know what is coming up so that he or she can remind members that there are more divisions to come. Often, the chair will say that there are more divisions to come. As I said, it is an inexact science but maybe we need to look at it. We need to make sure that when people come in from agencies, they are given every opportunity to assist the minister and for the minister to be probed on that aspect of the budget.

It was my fifth experience of budget estimate hearings. I thought the estimates process went pretty well. I thought our new members conducted themselves well. I was very aware that the opposition was very well prepared.

Members raised the question of supplementary questions. At one stage I thought that members of the opposition had a fax machine outside the chamber and they were just bringing them in one after the other. The ministers were in danger of being engulfed with supplementary questions. Their officers would have been working 24 hours a day to provide all the answers in the time required. That was why some of the ministers said that they would prefer the questions to be put on notice. All in all, I think the process went well. There is no process that cannot be looked at, and improved. I look forward to the findings of this committee and to the Deputy Speaker, possibly, tinkering with the process next year.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington) [11.39 am]: I want to make a couple of comments. The first one relates to supplementary information. This should be a very important part of scrutiny of the government's agenda. In committee A, I asked a detailed question on the cost savings that are brought to account by the government in the budget for the Department of Education and Training. The answer I got was completely unsatisfactory. I asked —

What number of education assistants is the department budgeting for on 31 March 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013, and what was the position prior to the decision to reduce that number by 450 people? What was the budgeted position for each of those dates

The answer was —

The number of education assistants employed with the Department of Education and Training as at March 2009 was 5 655 ...

And it goes on to say —

... The Department does not project budgeted FTE education assistants as the number required will vary considerably from year to year due to the number and distribution of student enrolments, and the number and distribution of students eligible to receive specialist education assistance.

The number of education assistants employed with the Department of Education and Training as at June 2008 was 5 561 FTE.

The problem with that answer is that even though the government has brought to account a budget saving in the budget papers presented to the opposition, the department cannot justify how that saving was calculated. One of the problems with the budget estimates process is that it is restricted to a short period of time. We are looking at \$20 billion of expenditure in a limited time frame, and the government says it is saving this or spending that amount of money, but when we go into the details of the budget, we do not get a proper answer. Nobody would say that this was a proper answer, because the department is saying it does not know how it calculated the cost savings, and it does not know what effect it will have on the department, much less on its clients—the students in individual schools in each electorate.

The Deputy Speaker has raised a very important point about the lack of effectiveness of this accountability process. This is about \$20 billion of expenditure of public money—\$85 billion over four years—and there is a lack of opportunity to properly hold the government to account through this process. If we are going to examine this, it is a good thing, but it should be done as a way of ensuring a proper opportunity for genuine accountability by the government to the Parliament and, through members of Parliament, to the people of Western Australia.

It is also interesting to note that local government is not able to be examined in the same way as we are trying to do with the state government. For example, the Melville city council wasted \$20 million in a gamble—nothing

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more than a lottery effort—in the United States on sub-prime mortgages. I understand the overall loss across local government in Western Australia is \$60 million. As I understand it, those investments were made on the recommendation of the WA Local Government Association. The Parliament of Western Australia is asked to authorise the expenditure of that money to be used through local government —

Mr T.R. Buswell: Are you saying those investments were on the recommendation of WALGA?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I understand that Lehman Brothers was on a list of investments that WALGA recommended to local government authorities —

Mr T.R. Buswell: It does not surprise me.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: — as media reports have it. However, the point I am making is that members of Parliament do not have the opportunity to examine local government authorities through the budget estimates process and ask why they did this stupid thing—why they risked millions of dollars of ratepayers' money. That was on the authority of this Parliament, yet we do not get an opportunity to look at that.

Mr J.J.M. Bowler interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I am happy to take that interjection, member for Kalgoorlie. The point is that the investment was in sub-prime mortgages. Those loans are called “sub-prime” because they are a high-risk investment. People were told they would get a big return because the risk of losing all their money was very high.

Mr J.J.M. Bowler: To invest in Lehman Brothers is different from investing in sub-prime loans.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: No, but that is what they were.

Mr J.J.M. Bowler: They didn't know where it was going.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: With respect, they did know where it was going. They were told where the investment was going; they were obviously not capable of understanding what they were being offered. That is my point: imagine if a minister came in this place and said that the government had lost \$20 million because it took a gamble on a sub-prime loan. That minister would have to quit.

Mr T.R. Buswell: The previous government lost \$200 million on a gamble on the Office of Shared Services!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I notice that the Treasurer is investing more money into the gamble of the Office of Shared Services. One of the comments I always make, Treasurer, is that the Liberal Party's rhetoric in opposition and action in government are completely different. I thank the Treasurer for raising another example of action whilst in government being 100 per cent opposite from what it talked about when it was in opposition.

Mr E.S. Ripper: That's a very good point.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I take the Deputy Speaker's point that there was probably some time wasted for officers waiting around for questioning, but this is a very important process of parliamentary democracy. Expenditure of \$85 billion of taxpayers' money is talked about in the budget—\$20.5 billion for the current year, and \$85 billion over the forward estimates. That is a bucketload of money, and it is appropriate that parliamentarians have a detailed investigation into the expenditure. The answers we were provided by the government were not in the sort of detail needed to decide whether this money will be properly spent.

Question put and passed.

Estimates Committee B Report — Adoption

MR M.W. SUTHERLAND (Mount Lawley — Deputy Speaker) [11.46 am]: I move —

That the report of Estimates Committee B be adopted.

During the Estimates Committee B hearing 30 requests for supplementary information were made. I am advised that all information has now been provided. No questions were asked of a number of authorities, including the Gascoyne Development Commission, Kimberley Development Commission, the Western Australian Land Information Authority, Treasury and Finance's service “Royalties for Regions Fund”, the rural Small Business Development Corporation, the National Trust, and one question was asked of the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services.

We have been through this before and have heard comments from members opposite as to what they believe should and should not happen, but I do not believe it is good practice to have highly paid civil servants sitting

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around for hours and hours waiting to answer questions. It might be possible to set aside a room for them to work in, but this is quite a pent-up atmosphere and people are primed to answer questions. The chances of them working in a big room will not happen. In any event, I think the Procedure and Privileges Committee should investigate how estimates committees are conducted, and members should raise any ideas about how to improve the system. That is a bipartisan approach, and I thank the member for Victoria Park for his positive comments.

During the Estimates Committee B hearing, the government asked 126 questions, which made up 18.4 per cent of questions asked; the opposition asked 554 questions, which made up 80.09 per cent; and the Independents asked five questions, which was 0.7 per cent. In all, 685 questions were asked. It would be interesting to find out what the percentages were last year, which I will endeavour to do. I do not think it is feasible to now start putting times to questions; it would be collecting useless data.

I am quite surprised at the member for Albany's remarks about the chairmen of the various committees. I think the member for Albany should get over, once and for all, that the Labor Party did not win the last election and that he was not elected as the Speaker of this house.

Mr M.P. Murray: You're arrogant!

Mr M.W. SUTHERLAND: He shows time and time again that he is not over it, and I have noticed his demeanour in the house when people are sitting in the chair. I think he should now get over it and move on in the spirit of cooperation.

Several members interjected.

Mr M.W. SUTHERLAND: Has the member finished?

I wish to thank the Speaker for overseeing the timetabling of the chairmen, the government and opposition Whips, the Acting Speakers for ably chairing the committees, and the members for their assistance and cooperation during the hearing. The process was well run by the Clerks and Assembly staff, who gave adequate advice and assistance whenever necessary.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham) [11.49 am]: I would like to comment briefly on Estimates Committee B. First of all, I have noted that members have been quoting statistics about the number of questions asked by government and opposition members. I am sure we have all heard the wonderful phrase, "lies, damned lies and statistics". Statistics can often be misleading. When we are dealing in estimates committees with questions, a question from a government member is often prepared and the minister will have extensive notes and will talk at length on the matter. Whereas, of course, questions from an opposition member often come without notice; therefore, the answer might be quite brief. In counting the number of questions, people have counted follow-up questions that have dwelt on a particular subject, so answers to follow-up questions get shorter and shorter. I observed that the majority of the questions were asked by the opposition in the committees I was involved with. But, at times, government members asked questions that involved an extensive answer by a minister. In my experience as a minister I actually preferred questions from the opposition to questions from government members. The now Leader of the Opposition found in his eight years as Treasurer that the most difficult question he was asked came from me. I cannot even remember what it was. Nonetheless, it seems to be indelibly printed on his mind and he is unable to get over it.

Mr E.S. Ripper: I will never forget that question.

Mr M. McGOWAN: We found in government that the member for Collie-Preston asked the most difficult questions of any ministers, perhaps in the history of the chamber! However, generally, I liked the opposition questions more. I did not particularly like reading out long-winded answers to dorothy dix questions from government backbenchers. The point the member for Victoria Park made about placing some restrictions on questions from government members is a good one, except that it would be impossible to enforce without the person in the chair —

Mr J.E. McGrath: Will you take an interjection?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will when I have finished what I am saying.

All members of this house are elected and all members have a right to ask questions of ministers and that right cannot be removed. However, the chairpersons could act somewhat judiciously to ensure that what is in effect an opportunity for the opposition to question the expenditure of \$20 billion remains a priority rather than a dorothy dix approach. As the government's term in office goes on, that sort of intensity from government backbenchers to ask questions diminishes. Does the member for South Perth want to ask me something?

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Mr J.E. McGrath: I asked questions of our ministers that they may not have been too happy about. But, as you said, all members of Parliament, irrespective of whether they are in government or not, represent their electorates and they should be able to ask questions.

Mr M. McGOWAN: There is no doubt that they have the right. Government backbenchers sometimes ask very pertinent question about their electorates because they have not been getting any satisfaction in private conversation. That is entirely a reasonable thing to do. However, as I said, a government backbencher's hunting around to save the minister from intense questioning from the opposition is not a good look. We need people in the chair who will crack down on that practice a little.

The member for South Perth made an interesting and insightful contribution, as he always does, and referred to a former minister who perhaps gave long-winded answers. For the interest of members, I was in this place when Arthur Marshall was the parliamentary secretary who answered questions about the sport portfolio. I was the shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation in 1999 and 2000. I think I got one question out, and he talked about football and tennis, particularly relating to his career, for, as I recall, something in the vicinity of 30 minutes, and no effort to pull him off that track, no device that I could construct, would deter him from the history of his involvement in West Australian Football League football in the 1950s or 1960s or his contribution to tennis and the development of world tennis over many decades. Anyway, it was an interesting experience, and I think that different people have different styles.

Another point I will make is about a minister. I think people were referring to the Minister for Local Government who had only an hour to answer questions. If only an hour was allocated, that was my mistake, as we are presented with a list of times allocated that we sign off on. I can assure members that next year I will watch very closely to ensure that the time allocated for the Minister for Local Government is not only an hour.

Another point is that I noted that ministers had a propensity for having their political staff on the floor. Certainly, I never had any of my personal staff on the floor, but I noted that most ministers had a personal staff member sitting next to them during the estimates committee proceedings. I am not sure whether I think that is a good idea, and it might be something that I will consider a bit more. However, to have a political staffer on the floor was a definite change that I observed that has taken place in the proceedings since I was a minister.

The second to last point I make relates to Mr Conran. I was challenged by the Leader of the House to produce evidence of Mr Conran making political-style statements while sitting in the house. He was questioned on 28 May about different issues and at the conclusion of some commentary he said these words about the Minister for Education —

I know that the Minister for Education is very focused on improving educational outcomes across the board, and she is very focused on disadvantaged and disabled kids.

That was one comment in the midst of a number of comments. Furthermore, Mr Conran challenged the Leader of the Opposition to look at the state of his office because he indicated that he felt that conditions in his office were insufficient. There was sort of a partisan tone in his commentary. I do not think it was appropriate for Mr Conran, as the most senior public servant in the state—that is, public servant, not political appointee—as the Premier claims he is, to make commentary that was partisan. I thought that if he ever reads *Hansard* or is watching the television now, it will perhaps be a lesson for him for next year that he and all the other staff who appear on the floor should not act in that fashion; they should act in a completely non-political manner and not make any commentary that is in the slightest bit political.

The last point I make is that Estimates Committee B sits in the upper house's chamber. It is perhaps the only occasion during the course of the year that we sit in that chamber. I personally thought the chamber set-up was fine. I thought the two blue chairs in the chamber were an improvement in the way that chamber is set up. I note that some members and former members of the other place think that is some sort of affront to the upper house and that it is somehow an enormous issue that we should all be quite concerned about. However, I thought it was fine and that the two blue chairs were an attractive and comfortable place in which to sit. I asked a question about the cost of removing those two blue chairs and converting the seats in the other place. I was advised by the Speaker by way of supplementary information that the cost is \$2.5 million. The original estimate was \$2.27 million, so there has been a cost increase of \$230 000. It will cost \$2.5 million to replace chairs or convert chairs to modern ergonomic standards in the other place. The decision was made post November 2008. I do not think it is necessary. If we did need to convert the two blue chairs, I know some people who run an upholstery business. I am pretty sure that for \$2.5 million they would have given us a bit of change. I wanted to make that point, because my experience of the upper house chamber is that it is air conditioned and fine. It is not necessary to go through \$2.5 million of expenditure.

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MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro) [12.01 pm]: I am thankful for the opportunity to rise to discuss particularly Estimates Committee B. I also rise following comments about me made by the Leader of the House in response to an interjection. I understand I interject a lot these days, and it is no doubt annoying him, so I can understand him getting a little irritated.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Inconsequential.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is, yes.

Mr T.R. Buswell: No, you are.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am not inconsequential. How can the Treasurer say that!

What was concerning about the comments of the Leader of the House on the estimates process were those he made about the Minister for Local Government; Heritage; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests having only one hour allocated in estimates. I have just heard the member for Rockingham, the manager of opposition business, confess that he is the culprit who allowed that time frame of only one hour of Estimates Committee B to be allocated to the minister in question. I condemn the member for Rockingham for that failure! It is probably the worst thing he has done this year. He is an excellent manager of opposition business, but in my opinion that was an appalling failure.

Mr T.R. Buswell: I will give you an hour.

Mr P. PAPALIA: This is the point: I had the privilege of attending two sessions with ministers in Estimates Committee B. One was the Attorney General and Minister for Corrective Services. I place on record now that I commend him for his professionalism, his willingness to engage in the estimates process and his acknowledgement that estimates is the process of opposition members asking questions of ministers on behalf of the taxpayers of Western Australia. I think that his preparation was unparalleled when compared with that of the other ministers whom I witnessed. He accepted a number of questions of which some notice was given a week before in writing. He accepted them as being read into the *Hansard* so that he might not waste any of the committee's time on my having to read those into the record and also so that we could move on, acknowledging that he would provide me with written answers to those questions, which he did. I thank him for that on behalf of the taxpayers of Western Australia whom we represent. I need to contrast that with the Minister for Local Government; Heritage; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests. Having provided initially the suggestion that he should be exposed to only one hour—I am assuming he had something to do with that —

Mr T.R. Buswell: No.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Nothing at all; okay. In that case I retract that statement. Having the knowledge that he would be facing questions for only one hour, he also received a number of questions of which some notice was given. In fact, I gave four multilayered questions to each minister. When the estimates committee process commenced, I asked him the same question that I ultimately asked the Minister for Corrective Services later in the day. The response was completely different. The Minister for Corrective Services sat for something like five hours—I am not sure of the entire time—and the component I had available was also only one hour because we ended up getting a component of that particular committee of only one hour of questioning. However, because he had taken those questions of which some notice had been given, it extended the amount of information that could be gleaned in the first place. He was thoroughly reasonable. I also said to him at the outset —

I note that 55 minutes are left for the remaining two divisions. I would appreciate any efforts that the minister can make to suppress the enthusiasm of his backbench with dorothy dixers.

The minister did that. He recognised the importance of focusing on answering some of the real questions, and he asked his backbenchers to refrain, and they did. The outcome was good for both sides. The minister got to demonstrate his professionalism and knowledge of the portfolio, and provide information that was appropriate and necessary in the light of what was going on in the prison system of Western Australia. The growth in the prison muster and the response that he is preparing for it is unprecedented.

Conversely, the Minister for Local Government—I can refer only to the local government component, because my colleague the member for Perth will talk shortly about the other portfolios—was asked at the outset whether, in light of the short time frame, he would consider the questions of which some notice had been given to be accepted as read. His response was that he would not. He wanted us to read the questions in so that he could determine whether he would provide the answers as supplementary information or tell us to put them on notice. My natural response to that was to say that I would not do it, and that I would ask some other questions, knowing full well that he had received the information on the questions of which some notice had been given, and he would stretch out any response he gave me. I would have thought that that indicates one thing to everyone. I do

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not have to say it, but it gives a very clear indication of where the minister was coming from when facing estimates questions.

So we went on. The member for Mandurah stole my thunder and jumped in and asked a series of questions to which the minister responded. Then the minister was given the opportunity by the chair to take a dorothy dix question. That is fine, but the question related to one line item in the budget for \$40 000—the Choose Respect program in Bunbury. That is fine, and I am sure the people of Bunbury are thankful for the \$40 000 Choose Respect program that was part of the budget. I know they were probably already fully aware of it because the minister had made an announcement in Bunbury, and it has been reported in the media there. There was nothing that the minister was revealing in the estimates process that was not already on the public record and in the public domain. He was not revealing anything in answering that dorothy dix. However, his response took up two pages of *Hansard*.

Mr T.R. Buswell: It is a complicated program.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is fine for the Treasurer to say that, but this is a serious business. As I said, the line item was \$40 000, and this minister is responsible for managing the \$400 million country local government fund. He was talking about a line item worth one-thousandth the value of that \$400 million country local government fund. How much time does the Treasurer think the Minister for Local Government dedicated to the \$400 million country local government fund? How many answers does the Treasurer think the minister provided to me on that subject?

Mr T.R. Buswell: I wasn't there.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I thought the Treasurer might be interested, because he is only the Treasurer, and the Minister for Local Government is handling that \$400 million country local government fund. I thought the Treasurer might take some interest. How many answers does the Treasurer think the minister responded to?

Mr T.R. Buswell: I don't know. I wasn't there.

Mr P. PAPALIA: In response to one question on the subject, of which some notice had been given, the minister answered two of the four components. I then asked whether he would answer the other two components by way of supplementary information, because we were running out of time and we wanted to get on to heritage, multicultural interests and citizenship. He said no, and told me to put the question on notice. He knew full well at the time that the next opportunity for him to answer that question on notice would be in August. He took the opportunity to prevent the taxpayers of Western Australia from getting answers specifically about the management of the country local government fund. Why would that be important? Since the minister first made the announcement of the fund at the Local Government Managers Association meeting at the Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle on October 2008, to much fanfare and witnessed by hundreds of people, he has not once provided any detail of how management will be applied to the provision of that money; how the funding formula was determined; what influence the Minister for Regional Development or the Minister for Local Government would have on the resolution of that formula; and what advice they took from relevant peak bodies like the Western Australian Local Government Association or the LGMA.

Mr T.R. Buswell: WALGA?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes, WALGA. The point is that he has not provided any detail to the taxpayers of Western Australia, nor any reassurance that the \$400 million flowing into 110 country local governments over the next four years will be managed in an appropriate fashion. This was an opportunity for him to do so, and he failed. This demonstrates that serious questions need to be asked about the minister's capability. Far from having achieved his objective of hiding from scrutiny and preventing the opposition from highlighting his weaknesses, he has done the complete opposite. I contrast the minister—as the people of Western Australia could easily contrast him—with a minister who provided competent responses to the estimates process. We now have a minister who is willing to answer very few questions and takes every opportunity to shield himself from scrutiny through the use of dorothy dixers, and he refuses to answer supplementary questions or provide answers to questions for which he has been given notice of at least a week. Contrast that with another minister who had massive responsibilities and was faced with incredible problems as a result of a huge increase in the prison population, but was completely willing to answer every question he received, and to take on notice and as read into *Hansard* every question of which he was given some notice. The facts speak for themselves; this estimates process was a failure in this regard, firstly, because the taxpayers of Western Australia did not receive the information they deserve and are due, and, secondly, because the Minister for Local Government failed to hide from the scrutiny of the opposition.

Mr Michael Sutherland; Acting Speaker; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr John McGrath; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr John Hyde; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Troy Buswell

MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.12 pm]: I rise to comment on the member for Kwinana's remarks about ministerial —

Mr P. Papalia: Warnbro.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Warnbro; sorry. No, it was the member for Rockingham!

Mr P. Papalia: Sorry. It's all about me, member!

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes. I rise to comment on the member for Rockingham's remarks about ministerial advisers. As a parliamentary secretary, I found it most useful to have an adviser from the minister's office sitting next to me. In fact, I chose for him to sit next to me so that I could provide more useful answers to policy questions from the opposition. I thought that the objective of the estimates process was to try to deliver the best answers, and I thought it was important for me to have direct access to someone from the minister's office to better answer questions. I put on record that there are benefits, particularly for parliamentary secretaries, in having someone from the minister's office providing advice on policy during the estimates process.

MR J.N. HYDE (Perth) [12.13 pm]: I would also like to comment on a number of points. The first point concerns the chairing of committees. We need a little consistency. My understanding is that under the standing orders, the preamble about what members can and cannot do need only be read once before the first estimates committee division of the day. However, some of the chairs, in all seriousness, read out the three-minute preamble every time there was a change of division, even though the same minister had carriage of the following division. That was not needed. We need a bit of consistency from the chairs. That swallowed an awful lot of time. I use that example in the context of the Minister for Local Government; Heritage; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests. It is good that a specific Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests has been created, but somehow it has been administratively put within the Department of Local Government. As the shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, I had the opportunity to ask the minister just one question concerning that very important portfolio. Another of that minister's portfolios is Heritage. Within that portfolio are two key agencies—the Heritage Council and the National Trust. Again, in terms of time management five or six advisers were brought in and, under the rules regarding *Hansard*, the names of the minister's advisors must be read. In one case, five of the advisors were not asked a question, yet the minister was required to name them all. That chews up an incredible amount of time and I could ask only a couple of questions on heritage matters. It is the responsibility of government to ensure transparency. It was deficient to allocate just one hour for the minister to answer questions on those very important portfolios. We need to ensure transparency.

I also back up the member for Warnbro's comments about the provision of supplementary questions. The Minister for Culture and the Arts and the Attorney General allowed answers to be deemed to have been read when I requested it. I have not seen those responses yet. I understand that the responses are supposed to be provided quite promptly and I will chase that up with the Legislative Assembly Office to see what happened to them. I do not know whether the member for Warnbro has received a response from the Attorney General.

Mr P. Papalia: I have.

Mr J.N. HYDE: The system has worked in that case. The responses from the Minister for Culture and the Arts must be in the system somewhere. The Attorney General did the right thing by providing that information.

I am concerned also about the changes to the budget papers. A particular line item was referred to in question time yesterday. I asked for supplementary information on the allocation of \$64 million for books for the State Library of Western Australia up to 30 June 2009. This year's allocation is just \$7 million. Anyone who read the other line items in the budget that provide expenditure up to 30 June 2009 would assume that the expenditure was for one year. That was the case for every other line item in the budget for the arts, except one. I have received an answer as supplementary information that the line item for the expenditure of \$64 million on library books is for eight years. I cannot understand how, within the line items for expenditure up to 30 June 2009, at the whim of different agencies, the expenditure may be for 12 months or, in one line item in one ministry, for eight years' expenditure. I will pursue that matter further. The budget documents must be transparent and there must be consistency throughout all ministries and agencies.

I take great umbrage at the member for Kwinana, who said that the member for Collie-Preston asked the most difficult questions.

Mr M. McGowan: It was the member for Rockingham.

Mr J.N. HYDE: I still take great umbrage! In 2001, the then Treasurer banned me from asking questions in the estimates hearings during my first year in Parliament. A few other ministers decided to do that, too. I do not

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think that the member for Rockingham asked the most difficult questions; I think I was right up there and I ask the member to correct the record at some point!

The Premier has taken on an awful lot of portfolios. He has ministers assisting him who do not assist him. I am concerned in particular with the Corruption and Crime Commission. The CCC responsibilities come under the Premier, yet he seems to have farmed out the CCC legislation to the Attorney General. That was not done transparently. As I have said, in estimates all the CCC questions were directed to the Premier, when in fact the Attorney General may be dealing with those matters. I have some difficulties about the legality of that, because the activities of the Corruption and Crime Commission can be reported only to the responsible minister, who in the case of this government is the Premier, or to the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission. So that is a matter that needs to be addressed as well.

Another issue is that trade offices seem to have been put into the Premier's department, whereas the very over-worked, but coping, Treasurer and Minister for Commerce seems to be dealing with a lot of the day-to-day activities of the trade offices. That includes the new trade office for Cape Town. Actually, will that office be in Cape Town or Johannesburg? There is nil comment from the Treasurer on that. Silence is as good as affirmation, I think.

Mr T.R. Buswell: I do not have responsibility for trade offices.

Mr J.N. HYDE: But the Treasurer has a keen interest, and he is funding them—or de-funding them.

Mr T.R. Buswell: I have a keen interest in funding every government activity, but I do not have responsibility for trade offices.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Except for library books in the 236 local government libraries. How many books are they short in Busselton?

Mr T.R. Buswell: They are not funded through the Department of Local Government.

Mr J.N. HYDE: No. They are funded through the Department of Culture and the Arts. If the Treasurer had asked me, I could have told him that. If I do get the correct supplementary information from the Minister for Culture and the Arts, I will be able to tell the Treasurer more about the 35 per cent of books that are not being —

Mr T.R. Buswell: Do you still want to take up my offer to come to the AC/DC concert with me?

Mr J.N. HYDE: I am considering the Treasurer's very kind arts-inclusive offer.

Ms J.M. Freeman: My son would!

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Are there tickets going around?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, members! Can we get back to the member for Perth, please?

Mr T.R. Buswell: I would like to see the member for Kalamunda at an AC/DC concert! He would be right up at the front! He would probably wear a schoolboy outfit, like Angus!

Mr J.N. HYDE: He is mistaken for Angry Anderson on the odd occasion—the very odd occasion!

With those short comments, I also thank the Deputy Speaker and the Acting Speakers, and the parliamentary staff, for the way they operated during the estimates. The estimates week is one of the most important weeks in this Parliament.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Preston) [12.22 pm]: I want to speak briefly about the estimates procedure. What concerns me—it has been mentioned briefly today—is the so-called budget that was put forward by the Forest Products Commission. No detail was provided in the budget papers about the general workings and the incomings and outgoings of the Forest Products Commission. When I questioned that, I was told to read the annual report. If it is the case that I will find that detail only in the annual report, I would like the Treasurer to take that up and say that, for the sake of expediency and also for the benefit of the general public, the annual report will be attached to the budget papers. The only item that is included in the budget papers for the Forest Products Commission is office equipment that is used in its day-to-day operations. When I questioned the minister about that, he said that is because the Forest Products Commission is an off-budget agency, like Western Power and other agencies. However, although not a great amount of information about Western Power is provided in the budget papers, it certainly does include the incomings and outgoings and the expenditure for the year. This is a matter that the Treasurer really should have a look at. I do not think it is appropriate that in the budget papers there is only a quarter of a page to deal with an agency that has, off the top of my head, a \$7 million turnover, and that two officers from the department had to sit in the chamber for a full day but then were not able to answer any question about this agency because no details about it are included in the budget

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papers. That is an anomaly. The Forest Products Commission is the only agency for which so little detail has been provided in the budget papers. I therefore ask the Treasurer to take up this matter with the department to see whether we can at least get some basic information in the budget papers about this agency. While the Forest Products Commission is considered to be at short arm's length from government, it does not give the agency the right to not include a breakdown of its expenditure in the budget. I ask the Treasurer to look at that before next year's budget is presented to ensure that the agency is accountable.

Like other members I have concerns about the direction in which the estimates hearings are heading. Certain agencies are not being considered because of the grouping of agencies. In dealing with a group of agencies, if a member continues to filibuster during consideration of the first agency a very short time could be left for consideration of the other agencies. That was certainly the case with the South West Development Commission and the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor. I am not pointing my finger at a particular side of the Parliament, but members on both sides wanted to make their points early in the session, which reduced the time available for other members to ask detailed questions on the budget. If each agency was allocated its own time—15 minutes, 20 minutes or an hour—it would give members the opportunity to ask their questions and have the answers in *Hansard*. The alternative is for members to go through the longwinded process of putting their questions on notice. It is a time-consuming process. It takes up a lot of time of ministerial staff to chase up the answers when the answers could have been provided by the advisers when they were in the chamber.

I beg the Treasurer to look at the process and impose time limits on agencies so that members know exactly what time is available. We know that politics will be played with dorothy dixers being asked and filibustering being engaged in. There is no member in this house better at filibustering than the Treasurer. Let us have a proper and well thought out estimates process so that members can get the answers to questions referred to them by their constituents. Let us get the job done properly.

MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse — Treasurer) [12.28 pm]: A lot of the comments today have been directed at me. I do not know why. I enjoyed my first budget estimates experience as a minister. I had 10 hours —

Mr M.P. Murray: You missed half of it.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: What does the member for Collie-Preston mean?

Ms M.M. Quirk: You might want to make it longer next year.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I started at 12 midday and finished at 10.00 pm and had two one-hour breaks. I was there for eight hours. I enjoyed the questioning, particularly from the member for Victoria Park and the member for West Swan. I thought the process was okay. I can understand some of the concerns opposition members raised. We had exactly the same concerns when we were in opposition. It is almost as though the opposition has had a mass Damascene conversion on the suitability of the estimates process. That is a reflection of the way it is at the moment. I support the Procedure and Privileges Committee being asked to reconsider the estimates process. There probably is a better way to conduct it. I was happy to take questions. I tried to answer them to the best of my capacity or my advisers' capacity, as I am sure all ministers did.

Mr P. Papalia: That is not true.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is a matter of opinion.

I recall that this time last year we were on the other side of the house making exactly the same comments as opposition members have made in this debate. It was an incredibly frustrating process.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Now is the chance to change it.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It may well happen.

I support the provision of information. Ministers must be subject to scrutiny in this place and estimates is an opportunity to provide information for that level of scrutiny. I look forward to that process being played out.

I took the view in my areas of responsibility that the opposition could set the agenda. We had a formal agreement around a time line. Unfortunately, the time line fell away. Some of my colleagues asked me questions, but perhaps not as many as I would have liked. I think the issue in my committee was that a number of opposition members came into the committee process who had not been there for the whole day, and they asked all sorts of very interesting questions on a range of tangents, not necessarily in line with the broad thrust that the three core members of the committee had been following. I found that quite interesting. Without naming anyone, I think that those three core members of the committee found that a little frustrating, because all of a sudden we disappeared off on all these tangents. Of course, I felt compelled to answer those questions. Yes, we can improve the estimates processes.

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We had the same problem when we were in opposition. Some opposition members who had almost no interest in the matter on the table would come in and take us off on all sorts of weird tangents. We had some frank discussions about that afterwards, because it is our time to manage, and we attempted to do that. These issues arise every year. This was my fifth set of estimates hearings. When I was in opposition, I sat in estimates hearings four times, and I had the same frustrations that I know the current opposition has. If we can make the process better, we all need to look at how we can do that.

From my point of view, in Estimates Committee B, where I sat for those eight hours, I thought that the chairpersons, who represented both sides of the house, did a good job. They were impartial and tried to keep the committee moving forward. If on one or two occasions I may have gone on for a bit too long, they certainly —

Mr B.S. Wyatt: One or two?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: One or two. Eight hours is a long time, and towards the end of the day I was getting a bit weary. I want to acknowledge the member for Forrestfield, who just came into the chamber. He made a very good contribution about the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission. It was a bit long, and we were getting towards the end of the day, so it meant that we missed out on housing. However, when Mr Spurling came in, he said to me that the member used to work for him. I said, “Did you part in good company?” He said, “Yes, I think we parted in good company.” As the member kept asking those very probing —

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Probably not at the end of the day!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I thought that the member’s line of questioning was exactly on the money. We need to do something in that space, and we will. I said to Mr Spurling, “Are you sure you parted in good company, because every question he’s asking is making it harder for you to justify the amount of money you have in the budget?” I thought it was a good line of questioning, and I look forward to discussing with the member some reforms we may have lined up in that process.

For my first estimates as a minister, I enjoyed the process, and I enjoyed the challenge of the questions, as I am sure did all ministers of the government with various degrees of enthusiasm.

Question put and passed.