

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

890. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Treasurer:

I refer the Treasurer to the Liberal Party's pre-election commitment to cut back on Labor's excessive and politicised government advertising program. Can the Treasurer update the house on the government's strategy for refining and reining in the significant growth rate in expenditure inherited from the previous government; in particular, how we are delivering on the election commitment to cut back that huge bill in government advertising?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

I thank the member for his question and for his interest in the government's efforts to wind back what we in opposition came to refer to as the great Labor spin machine—more spin, Mr Speaker, than that delivered by the Indian great Bishan Bedi off the short run; more spin, as I understand, than that generated by the member for Wagin last Friday at City Beach in his efforts to impersonate a spin bowler!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members! By my reckoning we have about 15 minutes left, although I might be more considerate than that. We have achieved four questions at this point. That is incredibly rapid progress! Treasurer, I hope that you are going to make rapid progress through this answer and that other people in this place might stop interjecting.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I will cut to the chase.

I just happen to have a graph ready here. At the peak of Labor gorging on the spin machine in 2007-08, by our estimates it spent \$36.6 million on its very political advertising in one year. Last year we started to crank this sort of spending back down to \$28.1 million. This year we are now estimating a spend of \$17.5 million. For members opposite whose maths may be a bit poor, that is only \$19.1 million a year less being spent on self-promotion and spin!

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Does the member for Girrawheen know what can be done with \$19.1 million? A school can be built, heaven forbid! The member for Girrawheen might be interested to know that for \$19.1 million a police station can be built! They are the sorts of things that can be done with \$19.1 million. We are not stopping there; we are rolling on. Last week members would have heard discussion about our value-for-money audits. It is a great initiative—to go into agencies on a line-by-line basis to drive savings and efficiencies through government.

I was interested to notice some comments last week from the Leader of the Opposition in relation to these value-for-money audits—a very important tool. He said last week that the private sector should not be doing the job of Treasury. He also said that this is a political management exercise; it is not about accountants going in. I was interested to have a look back to 2006, when the Leader of the Opposition delivered his budget speech. He had a thing called functional reviews. They were designed to deliver a very similar outcome to our value-for-money audits. In 2006 the Leader of the Opposition got up here and said, "We've been in power for five years and we've done two of them. We did one on the Sports Centre Trust and one on the Department of Indigenous Affairs. Don't worry, this year we're going to do six." He had great political will—he did one! The irony is that the one he did into the Department of Industry and Resources, as I recollect, was never released. The one review into DOIR was conducted by—members might be surprised to understand this—a private sector representative, Mr Terry Budge, who he employed as a consultant on, I do not know, \$70 000, \$130 000, whatever he paid him. Is it not funny how, when a member changes sides in Parliament, the things that are acceptable to him when he tries to control expenses change. I do not know, but perhaps daring to get someone with private sector expertise to come and give a hand to drive efficiencies through the public service was acceptable in government, but when one is in opposition, it is not. When the Leader of the Opposition was in government it was a test of his political will; which he failed to find. We are rolling out these reviews. They will be incorporated into next year's budgets. This will become part of an ongoing program to manage expenses.