

Hon Michael Mischin; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon James Chown; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Colin Holt; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Simon O'Brien

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT — McGOWAN GOVERNMENT

Motion

HON MICHAEL MISCHIN (North Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [10.19 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house expresses its disquiet and disappointment at the McGowan Labor government's misuse of public funds for projects calculated to favour specific electorates and interest groups for political advantage.

The breadth of this motion will take into account a number of elements of the McGowan government's conduct to date. I want to focus on the contrast between the purported high standards that Premier McGowan claimed not only before the election but also post-election that his government would meet and the conduct of the government since that time in meeting those standards. During the election campaign, the Labor Party compromised on those high standards when it made false, vague and reckless promises in order to appeal to the electorate. That was supplemented by the behaviour of members who are now ministers. One example is the now Hon Fran Logan, who threatened litigants with consequences should they have the impertinence to sue a Labor government and exercise their rights according to law. I will set that aside and look at some recent examples of how public funds have been used by the McGowan government to gain electoral advantage and win votes from specific interest groups.

It is a fact that members of Parliament are frequently called upon to make donations and the like to interest groups in their community. The electorate allowance of members of Parliament facilitates that sort of donation. We are all familiar with that. We might be asked to donate a certain sum of money to a needy cause or a community group, and of course we will make that donation, and perhaps hold up a mock cheque showing that we have made that donation and obtain some publicity from that. That is the part of the bread and butter of being a politician and a representative of our community.

I will postulate another example. Let us assume that a member of Parliament were to say to a local citizen or business, "I am supporting the local netball team and I am trying to get donations for that team. Can I get some money from you towards that worthy cause?", and the citizen says yes and donates a sum of money. The member of Parliament then goes to that community group and holds up a mock cheque that does not show the source of those funds but shows the member's name and advertises the member as having assisted that community group, with no visual acknowledgement of the source of those funds. I suggest that any right-minded member of this place would consider that type of behaviour improper, deceitful and dishonest and, if that were done by a member of Parliament, potentially corrupt. If one's child were to take credit for another person's efforts or donation in that fashion, I would have thought a responsible parent would admonish that child and say that is not the right way to do it. However, representatives of the McGowan Labor government have a history of engaging in that type of behaviour. I hasten to add it is not entirely clear from the examples I will give whether public funds were involved, but I suspect that was the case given the amount of money involved and the advertising around those funds.

The starting point for my interest in this matter was an article at page 15 of the *Joondalup Times* of 29 August this year headed "\$20,000 for young mums". The article states —

A Youth Futures program helping struggling young mums has received a \$20,000 state government grant.

That is the only reference in the article to the source of those funds. The article does not say from which government department or grants program these funds have come. We certainly could not know from the photograph that accompanies the article, which shows Joondalup MLA, Emily Hamilton, holding a mock cheque. The cheque has on it the words "Emily Hamilton, member for Joondalup" in red—Labor Party colours—on a white background, and it is purported to have been signed by her. There is no government badge on that cheque to indicate that it is state government money—public money—let alone which government department has contributed to this largesse. The article actually does not report anything about an election commitment, but it talks about how generous she was to make that donation.

The next example is Jessica Stojkovski, the member for Kingsley, on 22 August 2017. Her Facebook post shows her holding a mock cheque for \$50 000 for Friends of Yellagonga, which is a regional park in the northern suburbs. There is not the slightest indication on that cheque of whether those funds have come from her electorate allowance—if they did, it is a pretty extravagant use of her allowance. If that donation has come from public funds, there is not the slightest acknowledgement on the cheque, let alone any indication of the government department from which those funds have come.

I turn now to Mr Simon Millman, MLA, the member for Mount Lawley. His Facebook post shows him proudly holding a cheque, coloured red and white, purported to have been signed by Simon Millman, MLA, for \$5 000 for the Mt Lawley Toy Library. The post states —

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So pleased to be fulfilling another election promise! \$5,000 will go a long way in helping Mt. Lawley Toy Library expand and maintain their wonderful collection of toys. They're open every Saturday from 10am to 12pm at 26 Blythe Avenue in Yokine so go check them out!

Again, there is not the slightest indication of whether that is government money, a personal donation, or from local businesses or contributors. If it is public money, it is a disgrace that there is no acknowledgement on the cheque of the source of those funds. That is deceitful, but perhaps we will find out.

Another example is Yaz Mubarakai, MLA, the member for Jandakot, on 21 August 2017, who said on his Facebook post —

I had an absolute ball this morning at Piara Waters Junior Football Club, with Minister for Sport and Recreation Mick Murray, presenting a \$20,000 cheque for fencing along Nicholson Road, to help keep young players safe on the field.

Yaz Mubarakai did not, to his credit, purport to have signed that cheque, but his photograph is on that cheque. The Minister for Sport and Recreation is shown standing alongside the cheque and is complicit in this. If this is public money, why has the state government not acknowledged that it is public money?

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Sorry, member, but where was this one?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: At Piara Waters Junior Football Club in Jandakot. In this case, a minister is complicit in this fraud.

The next one is another cheque from Jessica Stojkovski, on 10 July 2017, for Woodvale Primary School. Again, the cheque is purported to have been signed by her, with no indication of any government badging or any departmental grant as being the source of the funds. Her Facebook post states —

At the Woodvale Primary School assembly this morning with Principal Neil McCallum (as you can tell it was freezing) to present a cheque for the new nature play-space.

That would be very generous if it had come from her electorate funds. That would be very, very generous if it was public funds, yet, if that was the case, the source has not been acknowledged as being the Western Australian taxpayers.

The next example is Robin Clarke, MLA, the member for Murray–Wellington, on 17 July, for the Preston Beach community hall. Her Facebook post states —

In tight-knit communities like Preston Beach, community halls are an important centre of activity. Over the weekend I was very happy to fulfil an election commitment of \$50,000 towards the upgrade of the Preston Beach Community Hall.

The member sure was! Again, if that was government money, there is no indication on the cheque the member was holding that she was handing out public funds. All that is on the cheque is her own advertising.

The next example is Barry Urban, MLA, the member for Darling Range. I cannot make out the date of the cheque, but it is obviously post-election. His Facebook post states —

I've had a great day at the Darling Range Wildlife Shelter with Jen and Jack. I am proud to have presented the Darling Range Wildlife Shelter with \$1,500.00 as part of my election commitments.

Again, that is presumably public money from some grant program established in the past and administered by a government department. However, we would never know that from the mock cheque presented by Barry Urban. There is not the slightest acknowledgment of the source of those funds on either his Facebook post or the mock cheque that he is using to advertise his largesse.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Did it come out of his own pocket, perhaps?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Maybe it did, and I am keen to learn in due course.

Hon Simon O'Brien: We get that impression, so perhaps he ought to top it up.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: The ones who have signed their names on these cheques need to be worried because someone might cash them.

Another one of unknown date is \$10 000 for the Friends of Brixton Street Wetlands, signed by Stephen Price, MLA, member for Forrestfield. He wrote —

I made an election commitment of \$10,000 to Friends of Brixton Street Wetlands to help fund material to combat erosion and improve fencing. I was pleased to be able to honour that commitment, presenting them with a cheque on Saturday.

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We know that most of these funds are not provided by cheque. They are electronically transferred into the account of the relevant organisation. The only purpose of this sort of stuff is to get some publicity for the local member, and that is quite a legitimate way of doing it if they acknowledge the source of the funds, rather than make out that somehow the member has gifted public moneys without giving due credit to the taxpayers of Western Australia. Here is an example of a cheque for the Friends of Brixton Street Wetlands for \$10 000 signed by Stephen Price. Once again, it is a small photo, but if we blow it up, we will not find the slightest evidence of government badging or acknowledgement of which department or whatever was the source.

On 3 August 2017, Amber-Jade Sanderson posted about the Nollamara Autumn Club. The member for Morley gave \$50 000. This is priceless. The post states she —

Dropped by the Nollamara Autumn Centre with Mayor Giovanni Italiano —

Presumably they happened to be there at the same time —

to present \$50,000 to Members of the Nollamara Autumn Club to upgrade facilities.

She signed this cheque, but again there is no evidence of any government badging or government department or any acknowledgement of the source of the funds and which particular grant program it came from, or whether it was extra-budget. She is now the parliamentary secretary to the cabinet and is supposed to be part of the group who uphold the high standards purported by the McGowan government.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Did I see a picture on that?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: It is of her.

Hon Simon O'Brien: It was not her personal cheque then. You might be doing the wrong thing by her.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: It could well be a personal cheque but we will find out.

The PRESIDENT: Member, you are meant to be talking to me and there should not be any interruptions from other people.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I am sorry, Madam President. I will be more careful. This is interesting given the position that this member occupies in the state cabinet.

On 1 August 2017, a post from Chris Tallentire, MLA, member for Thornlie, states —

Grant cheque presentation to Liddlelow Scouts Group.

Chris Tallentire MLA delivered his election promise a \$1,896 grant to the Liddlelow Scouts Group ...

That suggests it is a grant of government money—public money. Once again, there is his photograph and his signature on it and there is no indication that it is public funds or the source of those funds. He is a parliamentary secretary. Another undated example from Chris Tallentire, MLA, the member for Thornlie, states —

The Lions Club Gosnells were thrilled to receive a \$2000 grant from the Department of Local Government and Communities.

That is getting a little closer. The cheque for \$2 000 is signed by Chris Tallentire but has no government badging on it for advertising it to the community. It is pretty thin stuff. I suspect that if the same had been done by our members, we would never have heard the end of it, but these are the high-standard McGowan government members. Here we have a beauty. This is an undated cheque for \$50 000 for the Caralee nature play area. It is not signed. It is from Hon Peter Tinley, MLA, the member for Willagee. The post states —

Great morning at Caralee Community School's assembly today donating some fantastic books to their library for Book Week 2017. I also had the pleasure of presenting the school with a cheque for \$50,000 towards building a nature play area—a great initiative!

That is very generous of the minister, but if it was funds from his department or public funds from a grant program administered by the McGowan government, we would not know it from the cheque. It does not even say from where that money came in his Facebook post. That mock cheque was for \$50 000.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Did you say it was unsigned? It might bounce. You better warn them!

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: He was careful enough not to do that. This is from a minister. This is not some local member getting it into their head through naivety that this is an appropriate way to deal with public funds and to attract attention to government largesse. This is the Minister for Housing; Veterans Issues; Youth. Did the money come from one of his portfolios; and, if so, why was it not acknowledged? Why is he the only acknowledgement as to the source of the funds?

Finally, Dr Tony Buti, the member for Armadale, presented a cheque. An article states —

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A new exercise dog park could open in Armadale by Christmas after Member for Armadale Tony Buti donated \$40,000 toward its development.

Once again, he is holding a cheque with his picture on it but no acknowledgement that it is government funds. He is an Attorney General in waiting. As I indicated, these may be personal donations. If so, that is very generous of them and good luck to them. Well done. However, if it was public funds and state government money administered through a department as part of a grants program, they should be badged accordingly. If it was Lotterywest money, would the cheques be missing a Lotterywest badge? I think not. It is deceitful and dishonest. It misleads about the source to get publicity to favour specific electorates and interest groups for political advantage without the decency, the honesty and the minimum standards of propriety to acknowledge where the funds have come from so that it is not simply them pork-barrelling their own electorates.

These are only the ones that I have come across. I heard Hon Sally Talbot ridiculing and criticising the Liberal Party whistleblower website. This is the sort of stuff that we are hoping to find out.

Hon Dr Sally Talbot interjected.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I do not expect her to hang her head in shame. I think she is probably very proud of the deviousness involved in this; she considers this typical political play once Labor is in power. This is how it uses public funds. I would not pretend to think that she would think that there is anything wrong with this but I think right-thinking people would. If it had been a child doing this through ignorance, naivety or lack of understanding of proprieties, their parents would pull them up on it. But this seems to be the standard with this government. These are only the ones we know about. They total \$293 896 of grants of what appear to be public funds being handed out as though they are donations by the local member, with the publicity attracting that. Even if it is legal—I will explore that further—it is unethical, deceitful and sneaky. From the nature of the cheques being displayed, there appears to be a consistency in approach. Some of them were in the same format. If someone in government is responsible for this behaviour, they need to be identified and held to account. I will be pursuing the matter.

I assume that the Premier is unaware of this practice. I assume that the Premier would frown upon it too, having regard to his statements about high standards. I will be taking it up with the Premier and asking him to investigate this matter further. I would be very, very disappointed in this house and this Parliament would be justifiably very concerned if this has been endorsed by his office as a practice to be engaged in by ministers and members who are distributing public funds in the community. It is important that this house understands what is going on and is vigilant for it. If these are the high standards, we can expect the low standards to come very, very quickly.

I seek leave to table copies of the documents that I displayed.

Leave granted. [See paper 571.]

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [10.39 am]: Labor did not go into this last election as a small target. We made very specific commitments as part of our election campaign. Indeed, we made no secret of the fact that we had a Local Projects, Local Jobs grants scheme. Each of the grants members opposite have complained about today were grants that we declared would be made through state government provision in this scheme if we were elected. It was not as though there was any secret. All of those projects that members opposite have commented on today were projects that, in the lead-up to the election, we said very, very clearly were going to be funded through a state government grants scheme. There is nothing unusual or improper about that. What we have seen in the examples that have been cited is that we have moved from the point of having made a very clear commitment to those community groups prior to the election—there was no secret or pretence about it or any idea that this was going to be sneakily done or that there was any lack of clarity about what the purpose of those grants —

Hon Simon O'Brien: You wouldn't admit to that up-front!

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: Each of these was listed in local campaign documentation and, indeed, in the plans for each of the seats we were contesting across the state. There was no secret made that these were projects that were going to be funded through a state government grants scheme.

Hon Tjorn Sibma: Which grants were you using?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: We made it very clear, and it is included in the budget. Members opposite will note that yesterday I handed to their side of the house a list of all of those projects that, up until 17 September, had been processed, approved and distributed. Opposition members have a complete list of those projects. I make this point again: these were all projects that we spoke about and made commitments to prior to the last election. Hon Michael Mischin quoted from a number of press articles. What he has not done is to go back and look at the media releases that supported that documentation. In one case, when talking about a grant announced by Chris Tallentire, the member for Gosnells—is it Gosnells?

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Hon Stephen Dawson: Thornlie.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: The member for Thornlie had clearly acknowledged the source of the grant.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Is this your speech or someone else's?

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: What is Hon Simon O'Brien's problem?

Hon Simon O'Brien: Is this your speech or someone else's?

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I was just checking the title of Chris Tallentire's electorate! I was checking the current name of the electorate, because the name of his electorate has changed from time to time. I do not know why Hon Simon O'Brien is getting so aggrieved. I can tell him that no-one else writes my speeches. I am responding to a series of allegations that have been made. I am trying to take this matter reasonably seriously.

As I said, there was no secret. Going into the election, each and every one of those projects that have been mentioned today was part of our election commitment. Very, very publicly we stated that these were going to be funded through a Local Projects, Local Jobs fund. We included the costings for that in our budget documentation that we submitted to the public prior to the election. Very clearly there was transparency and acknowledgment in the lead-up to the election that we were going to have a grants scheme called Local Projects, Local Jobs. That was then included in the proposed budget that we put out for scrutiny, so that people could see that all of the election commitments we had made were taken into account. The big flaw that I believe has been made by Hon Michael Mischin is that he has read the media articles but he has not read the press releases that have gone out from members to determine whether those members had in fact included a reference to that. I know in the case of one of these grants, for which I was involved in its announcement with Hon Darren West up in the midwest, we made it clear that the grant was part of the Local Projects, Local Jobs program, which is supporting a range of projects across the state. The degree to which the local media decides to include that reference is not something we can determine. As members know, members put out media releases but journalists determine which aspects of those media releases they include in their reportage.

I say again: there has been absolutely nothing secret about this. We made it very clear, before the election and after the election, that we had a Local Projects, Local Jobs program. We were overwhelmingly supported by the community at the last election. The community expects us to honour those commitments to those local communities. I do not see that the allegation that somehow or other we have been pretending that these funds, all of which we listed and made provision for prior to the last election and on which we have made several announcements in terms of the general way in which we will be proceeding with this program, can in any way be said to be some unethical misrepresentation. This is not something that has been done behind closed doors. This has been very up-front and very much —

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! You will all get an opportunity to speak later.

Hon Jim Chown interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, Hon Jim Chown; it is not question and answer time! The minister is on her feet responding to this motion. If you want to seek the call at a later stage, feel free to do so.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I would have been happy to take the interjection, but anyhow. The point I am making is that this entire program was very much part of our election campaign. Each of those projects about which a complaint has been made this morning was announced in the lead-up to the election as being a project we would fund under our Local Projects, Local Jobs program. If the member went through and looked at the media releases that have been put out, he would find a reference to it in each of them. Indeed, I have one here. A complaint was made about Robyn Clarke, the very excellent member for Murray–Wellington.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Accidental member.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: She is an exceptional member, who I think will take that marginal seat and make it a very safe seat because she is such a great advocate for her community. On the pre-election commitments that she was making, she stated very clearly in her press release —

The funding is provided through the State Government's Local Projects Local Jobs fund.

Indeed, as I said, Chris Tallentire's announcement, on the member's own admission in the recording of the article, acknowledges that the member referenced the source of this funding. I again say that the fact that local media chooses to report things in a particular way is an issue for local media. We have never suggested that these funds

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would come from anything other than this particular project and all the announcements that have been made must be seen within that particular frame. There is certainly nothing unusual about local members announcing funding in their electorates. I know of many instances in which that was done under the previous government. Our members, all of whom fought very hard during the last election campaign, made those commitments on behalf of the McGowan Labor team that they would deliver these particular important community projects if they were elected. The fact is that members, even under the opposition's reporting, have said that these things are honouring an election commitment. An election commitment is a commitment made by a political party that if elected, it will fund a particular project. The very notion that the words that were used—that this was honouring an election commitment—in itself makes it clear that members have been open about the source of this funding.

I understand that there is a lot of disappointment on the other side of the house that our members did so well and that we won 41 seats in the lower house and that there might be a sense of being aggrieved about that and a desire to get angry when local members are given the ability to go into their electorates and deliver on the promises that they very clearly and openly made at the last election, but this is not a case of impropriety. I urge members opposite to not just rely on the reportage in the local paper, but to look at the entire context. The fact is that these projects were very clearly announced prior to the election as fully costed, fully funded commitments and the media releases used terms such as “the funding is provided through the state government's Local Projects, Local Jobs fund” and “the grants are part of the Local Projects, Local Jobs program supporting a range of programs across Western Australia”. This is absolutely a storm in a teacup. These were election commitments and we have quite properly delivered those election commitments. We are very proud of the profound connection that our local members have made in their communities and that they want to be involved in the delivery of the projects they undertook to deliver.

The opposition is always free to raise these issues, but it should look at the context; each of these commitments was clearly announced before the election. We are now delivering them. The language of meeting election commitments in itself inherently makes it clear that this is something that has been done by virtue of a government grant. I also urge members to look at these local members' media releases. We are very proud of these local members and we want them to continue.

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural) [10.54 am]: I stand here today to commend the motion put forward by Hon Michael Mischin, a most learned person who has demonstrated more than adequately that some of the standards in the distribution of public money throughout Western Australia, particularly in the metropolitan area, need some work. Before I get into that, I refer to a newsletter from the Shire of Lake Grace dated 17 August, which is headed “Road Funding—Direct Grants Cut by 42%”. An excerpt reads —

Since receiving the good news that Local Government was successful in having our vehicle licensing concessions reinstated, we have now been informed that the government has reduced our road funding.

The Government has now made the decision to reduce the Direct Grants pool of the state Road Funds to Local Government Program by the values of \$10.3 million in 2017/2018 and \$9.8 million in subsequent years. This will result in a near 42 per cent reduction to each Local Government's previous 2017/2018 Direct Grant indicative allocation.

This has a direct impact of reducing our road funding from \$296,514 to \$170,765 a direct loss of \$125,749.

I now refer to an article in which the Minister for Transport, Minister Saffioti, was quoted as saying —

“Councils were expecting to [pay], but now will not be paying, their motor vehicle registration ...

Now they can use that money to fund roads. The alternate is that taxpayers have to borrow more, that was our choice.”

As Minister MacTiernan more than adequately demonstrated, it can be argued without a doubt that the current state government grants scheme is being reallocated and the \$10 million that has been taken away from the state road fund scheme for local governments could be reallocated to the metro area to fulfil the government's election promises. Of course, the decision was made by this house on Tuesday, 27 June. The decision was not made by local governments, but it seems that the government is taking out its vengeance about the disallowance being upheld by this place on local government road funds.

Most of the road fund grants are used wholly and solely for road maintenance. At the time, Hon Robin Chapple said that he was rather alarmed that there has been some implication that if the disallowance motion passed, the government would look at other options to pass it on. We have seen in the budget what that other option is. At the time, Hon Sue Ellery, the Leader of the House, said, “We have to.” The government did not have to, yet it has done so. It has spent millions of dollars upholding election commitments at the expense of every person who drives in regional Western Australia.

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Hon Darren West: That's nonsense.

Hon JIM CHOWN: It is not a nonsense. I will not take an interjection from Hon Darren West. As a member for the Agricultural Region, Hon Darren West would be fully aware of the state of local government roads. To inform Hon Darren West and to bring his knowledge to a level that he can comprehend, there are 125 500 kilometres of local government roads in Western Australia. They make up 88 per cent of the total state road network, which is a massive amount, yet Hon Darren West's government has removed \$10.5 million of local government funding to uphold its election commitments in the metro area. Hon Darren West sits there as a member for the Agricultural Region and interjects on what I am saying because he does not believe it is true. Let me provide him with some statistics about how important road funding is in regional Western Australia, especially the maintenance requirements of local governments to upkeep their roads to a standard that makes them safe.

In 2016, there were 195 road fatalities in this state—a rate of one life taken nearly every two days. Sixty-one per cent of those fatalities occurred in regional Western Australia. In total, 120 people died on regional roads in WA, yet this government has taken away road funding to maintain the roads that everybody out there drives on. To put it in perspective, having made the assumption that there are 2.7 million people in this state, 21 per cent, or 567 000, live in regional Western Australia while the rest, 79 per cent or between 2.1 million and 2.2 million, live in the metro area. The total state fatalities were 195 people last year; that is one person dying every two days. There were 120 regional fatalities; that is one person dying every three days. The total number of metro fatalities was 75; that is one person dying every five days. In effect, on a per capita basis, one in every 4 725 people die on our roads in regional WA. On the other hand, one in every 28 400 people in the metro area die. Proportionally, the chance of dying on a road in regional Western Australia is exponentially greater than in the metro area. Yet this government, through a decision made in this house on a disallowance motion about an exemption for local government vehicles, has decided to take its retribution out on the shires and every motorist who drives in regional Western Australia. It is outrageous! I have never seen anything like this happen. It is like the old union thing when they came into the workplace and said, "If you don't do what we want you to do, we are going to slow down. We're going to go on strike. It's actually going to cost you money." That is the action that has been taken by this government in this budget.

Hon Tjorn Sibma: Vindictive!

Hon JIM CHOWN: Absolutely—for \$10.5 million.

I will demonstrate something to members about what has taken place. People assume that the exemption on local government vehicles, especially in regional Western Australia, is applied to motor vehicles such as cars for office workers driving to and from home et cetera. That was not the case. The Shire of Moora has 95 concessions. Of those concessions, 89 apply to maintenance vehicles that are used to maintain the local roads, such as tray-top utes, tractors, graders and trucks. Only six vehicles of the 95 are sedans or station wagons. In the Shire of Bruce Rock, concessions were applied to 75 vehicles. Only five of those were sedans. These concessions that we approved in this place for road maintenance requirements in regional Western Australia were absolutely essential. Now local governments have to increase rates at a time when regional Western Australia, especially my electorate and Hon Darren West's electorate, is suffering considerably from chronic deprivations in the grain growing and sheep husbandry industries, for example. Members opposite sit there and take \$10.5 million out of the road grant scheme. I ask the government, in a very reasonable manner, for the safety of every person who drives in regional Western Australia, to revisit what it has taken away from the regional grants scheme and to look at the statistics and the risks involved in driving on local government roads. As I have said, 88 per cent of roads in WA are local government roads. In fact, they need more money. An RAC report identified that those roads are at least \$800 million behind in the maintenance required to make them safe. Between \$800 million and \$1 billion of maintenance is required for our roads in regional Western Australia. This is a real issue. If the government is going to be irresponsible and reallocate these funds to the metro area, as has been demonstrated by Hon Michael Mischin here today and as has been explained by Hon Alannah MacTiernan, it needs to rethink it. Regional Western Australia is a very important part of our economy. As I have already said, it is one of the most dangerous places in the world to drive.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon JIM CHOWN: I will not take interjections from Hon Darren West because, in reality, he has nothing reasonable to say in this place. As a member for the Agricultural Region, surely he agrees with the statements that I am making.

I ask the government to revisit this as soon as possible. I am sure that National Party and One Nation members—anybody who represents regional WA—will be more than happy to meet the Minister for Transport and get those funds reallocated.

HON ADELE FARINA (South West) [11.04 am]: The sheer hypocrisy of this motion is absolutely breathtaking. For eight and a half years the Liberal–National government directed the bulk of royalties for regions funding into

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Hon Michael Mischin; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon James Chown; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Colin Holt; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Simon O'Brien

Liberal and National-held seats, while their non-held seats were left begging. Page 222 of the 2013–14 budget paper No 3 states that over \$1 billion had been committed across the forward estimates for the Pilbara Cities initiative. The same budget papers indicate that \$200 million was directed to goldfields–Esperance, \$200 million was committed to the Gascoyne and \$200 million was committed to the midwest area. It is only reasonable that with a change of government would come a new focus on directing funding to those seats and areas that have been left begging for such a long time. If members opposite want to talk about the misuse of public funds for political advantage, let us turn to the highly questionable conduct, abuse of office and pork-barrelling at its most obscene by the Liberals and Nationals ahead of the last state election. In the month before the last state election, the Liberal–National government went on a \$624 million spending spree out of the royalties for regions program targeting Liberal and National seats. Some of the projects that were targeted with that spending spree were the Goldfields Art Centre, the Leonora Ageing-in-Place project, the Esperance Indoor Sports Stadium, the Brunswick River Cottages development, the Wheatbelt South Aged Housing Alliance, the Avon Well Aged housing alliance, Carnarvon Community College, the Margaret River Heart project, Pilbara health partnerships—the list goes on and on. Funding for these projects in the month before the election was allocated to the budget out years—that is, years 2, 3 and 4. That was just ahead of a state election. We are all well aware of the caretaker provisions. I have a copy here if anybody wants to read them. The caretaker provisions state —

- 1.1 By convention, the Government assumes a ‘caretaker’ role in the period immediately before a State General Election as it is recognised that every general election carries the possibility of a change of government.
- ...
- 1.3 In the caretaker period, efforts are made to ensure that decisions are not taken that would bind an incoming government and/or limit its freedom of action. Guidelines are applicable to all decisions made during the caretaker period, not just politically contentious issues.
- 1.4 The practices associated with the caretaker role are also directed at protecting the apolitical nature of the public sector and avoiding the use of government resources in a manner to advantage a particular party.

I have a copy of one of the letters that went out about that \$624 million spending spree from royalties for regions in the month ahead of the election. It confirms that funding has been committed for the Brunswick River Cottages development in 2018–19. This is a political party using its position in office just before an election to seek political advantage by making promises to a community group that in 2018–19 it would deliver funding for this project. The government knew that all the polling showed that it had no hope of being re-elected. It held out false hope to a community group just for political advantage. Worse than that, it got the Department of Regional Development to send out a letter on its letterhead to confirm the funding commitment. The letter that I have is dated 23 February, 2017. That is a couple of weeks ahead of the state election. If members opposite want to talk about abuse of office, abuse of public money, abusing community groups and seeking to take political advantage, I suggest members opposite take a good hard look in the mirror. I have here in black and white—in colour, actually—a letter from the Department of Regional Development indicating what was effectively an election commitment. The Liberal–National government knew that it had no chance of honouring that election commitment because it was not going to be around in 2018–19. They got the department to send out the letter, in clear breach of the caretaker provisions. If members opposite want to talk about abuse and taking political advantage, they should take a good, hard look in the mirror. As if that was not bad enough, an article in the *Busselton Dunsborough Times* of 17 February headed “Nod for Busselton Water takeover” stated —

Busselton Water is expected to take over the Dunsborough–Yallingup Water Supply Scheme in the coming months, Colin Barnett has confirmed.

In a visit to the region last week, the Premier confirmed to the Times the proposal put forward by Busselton Water two years ago had been approved by Cabinet.

There had been no cabinet announcement after that decision, and no announcement by the Minister for Water of the cabinet decision. The article continues —

“Cabinet has approved that to happen, so you can expect it to roll out over the next few months,” he said.

“There are just some technical details to be worked out. It’s being signed off on.”

The truth was that there had been a commitment in principle. All the funding costs associated with this proposal had not been worked out, and there were serious issues with it. The government and the cabinet had not committed to implementing their Busselton Water takeover of the Dunsborough–Yallingup scheme. Again, this was a clear abuse of office, seeking to take political advantage in a seat in which, by then, even the sitting member was saying that she was concerned about the outcome of the election. This was clearly intended to take political advantage of the people of Busselton and Dunsborough, particularly Dunsborough, and to let them think that their water issues had been taken care of by the government, and that cabinet had signed off on them, when all cabinet had done was

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given a commitment in principle. All the detail had yet to be worked out. This was just weeks before the election. Compare this sort of conduct with what were clearly identified as election commitments. Every single media release by Hon Michael Mischin about those commitments —

Several members interjected.

Hon ADELE FARINA: The media releases that went out in relation to the cheques that he referred to clearly stated that the initiative forms part of the McGowan government's Local Projects, Local Jobs election commitment to local communities. It is very clearly an election commitment. We did not use public service letterheads. We did not abuse public servants and get them to send out letters to community groups saying that, on the off-chance that the government is re-elected, it is letting them know that it had committed money that will deliver on their projects. The then government did not mention the fact it may not be around after March 2017, but gave the false impression that the projects had been committed to, and that the then government could bind a future government, which it knows damn well it cannot. It was dishonest, and a lot of community groups are feeling the pain of that dishonesty because, on the basis of the letters that went out, they made further commitments and progressed their projects. Those that did not get their funding committed are pretty disgruntled.

Immediately after the election, I was inundated with requests from people in exactly this situation, asking for support. I pushed my friendship with Hon Alannah MacTiernan to its limits, pushing for funding to be protected for a number of projects. I am pleased to say that we are able to confirm the funding commitment for the Margaret River Hub of Entertainment, Arts and Regional Tourism project stage 2, despite the fact that it was made in the run-up to a state election, when it should not have been made. No funding agreements had been signed. We recognised that this was an important community project, so we went ahead and committed funding to it, even though the previous government had just done so by way of a letter. It had not really committed the funding because there were no signed agreements. This happened for a number of other projects. Please, do not come to this place pointing the finger in this direction. Take a good, hard look in the mirror.

HON COLIN HOLT (South West) [11.15 am]: This is a good debate. This is what happens when a government is elected—it defends its promises, and the opposition gets to scrutinise them. It is no different; it happened last time. That is the beauty of why we bring this debate.

Several members interjected.

Hon COLIN HOLT: Madam President, I think earlier in the debate you made a ruling about talking to you without any interruptions; so I will keep to that too.

The PRESIDENT: I encourage you to do so.

Hon COLIN HOLT: I am glad that Hon Adele Farina talked about Brunswick River Cottages. She would know as well as I do that a process lasting up to a year and a half led to the decision for that funding through the Department of Regional Development and the South West Development Commission. Months and months of support was given to get to a point at which the business case stacked up for funding. It went on for many months, and the approval for that came well before any caretaker period. I do not know about the letter, but a very strict process was followed to make sure that they got to the point of being eligible for funding. It was a very strict regime and process to give them an opportunity to develop a business case to get funding for Brunswick River Cottages.

We have asked many questions in this place about future funding for many of those royalties for regions projects that were funded into the out years, including things like the Busselton–Margaret River Regional Airport, which has been subject, since this government came into it, to an efficiency dividend, or whatever they wanted to call it, to claw back \$10 million out of a project that had been developed for five years. It was built on a solid business case that went through every process the government could put it through to ensure that that project got its funding. This has put at risk, potentially, money coming from the federal government. At the same time as we are asking questions about those royalties for regions projects, the minister kept answering that the government was reviewing every project and scrutinising every business case to make sure we got the best bang for our buck, and our taxpayer dollar. I do not have a problem with that either. Those projects that have a good business case would float through the process and be funded, we hope. However, at the same time as that was occurring, the minister came out and committed \$65 million to the Bunbury foreshore stage 3. When I asked the minister to submit the business case for that \$65 million, the answer was, “Sorry, we haven't got it; there is no business case.” The government has committed \$65 million to the Bunbury foreshore stage 3 without a business case. I thought: hang on a minute, the Busselton–Margaret River airport has been through a process for many years, and suddenly we have a \$65 million commitment to the Bunbury foreshore based on no business case. That is what the government must hold up for scrutiny, just like we held up for scrutiny the business cases that went before us.

Hon Michael Mischin; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon James Chown; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Colin Holt; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Simon O'Brien

I will now turn to some of these Local Projects, Local Jobs initiatives. We must wonder what business cases or application processes sit behind those projects. We have a list of them, and I would like to know how they all came about. Were they just lucky enough to walk into Hon Darren West's office in Geraldton and say, "Hey, brother, can you fund something for me in Geraldton?" and he replies, "Of course I can, mate; we'll make an election commitment." I have no problem with that, if it stands up to scrutiny. The government should show us the application process it went through before it got into government, and after it got into government, to ensure that these are really worthwhile projects that create local jobs. I would be very interested to see the business cases or application processes, or the review of those, to see how many jobs were created by those Local Projects, Local Jobs initiatives. The statement that came out a week ago, headed "Local Projects, Local Jobs delivers for communities across the State", contains comments attributed to Premier Mark McGowan —

"The Local Projects, Local Jobs program is about supporting local, grassroots initiatives that can make a big difference to our communities across the State.

"A small amount of government funding and support can go a long way and the program will enable countless organisations to continue their important work in their communities."

I agree—absolutely I agree—because that is what we used to do with the regional grants scheme and the community chest fund. That has been slashed by this government —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: It has not! You spent two years in one! You put two years' funding —

Hon COLIN HOLT: There was a process behind the regional grants scheme and the community chest fund. The applications processes went through the development commissions, and they sorted it out at that level. At least we had a process to deliver local projects and grassroots initiatives, and support the communities. At least there was a process through the regional grants scheme and the community chest fund. Again, I am not sure there is any process in the Local Projects, Local Jobs program unless someone actually walks through a member's or candidate's office and says, "I've got a great local project for you." I would really like to see those applications or the process of ensuring that the taxpayer-funded dollar is going the furthest it can.

I thank the Minister for Regional Development for tabling yesterday the paper on the 211 regional local projects and local jobs. Unfortunately, only 175 are listed. I wonder whether the minister could provide the other 36. I am not sure where or what they are. It would also be really good to see a business case tabled, but I know there will not be a business case.

Hon Adele Farina: We cannot table it. You guys set that precedent, didn't you? You cannot touch a business case. No-one can see one. God forbid that we should have a business case!

Hon COLIN HOLT: If the government were open and accountable, like it wants to be, it could. I have said that I have no problem with the government defending its commitments—no problem at all—but let us see the business case and applications for those funds so we can ensure that we are doing the job of scrutinising, as an opposition has to, that the dollars are going the right way and that the government is getting the most out of the taxpayer-funded dollar.

Something else strikes me as a bit unusual. There has been quite a lot of commentary from the new government around royalties for regions saddling small shires with huge upkeep costs. We have heard that a lot, especially around Port Hedland and those projects up there.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: That's what the Port Hedland shire is telling us. They're saying they can't afford it.

The PRESIDENT: Order, minister. We already agreed there would be no interjections.

Hon COLIN HOLT: I am happy for the Minister for Regional Development to say that. I wonder how the Collie shire will cope with a \$2 million commitment from this government to build an indoor pool, although an indoor pool is not in any of its growth plans or the plans for the Collie futures fund. It has never been identified, that I can see, as a project that the Collie shire led. We suddenly have \$2 million worth of election commitments for an indoor pool in Collie that has never been asked for, except maybe someone walked through their local member of Parliament's office and said, "We'd like an indoor pool." The government is going to saddle Collie shire with the ongoing costs of an indoor pool. Maybe there is a business case for a \$2 million pool—I do not know.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon COLIN HOLT: Table it and let us see, and let us ask the Collie shire if it wants to contribute to it.

Hon Peter Collier: I can't hear, Madam President.

The PRESIDENT: It is about consistency. If the member wants to continue speaking to me, and other members stay quiet, we will get through this and you will be able to hear it.

Hon Michael Mischin; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon James Chown; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Colin Holt; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Simon O'Brien

Hon COLIN HOLT: I have said that I have no problem with the new government defending its election commitments and us asking to scrutinise what it will do. If the government wants to table the business case for the Collie indoor pool and how it will be afforded into the future, that would be a great thing. It would also be a great thing to know the process of how all the local projects and local jobs were funded and whether it was through a business case or an application process, because it is certainly not transparent.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [11.23 am]: I appreciate that this is a time-limited debate, so I will keep my contribution brief to enable members who want to speak to have that opportunity.

I think we need to focus on what is real and what is a prop in a photo. What is real is an election commitment made by the local candidates and the then Leader of the Opposition in the lead-up to the last election. When we announced the Local Projects, Local Jobs initiative, candidates announced that they had identified within their electorates community organisations that had identified projects, or schools that had identified projects, or whatever the range of local jobs and projects were. We announced that before the election and the individual candidates announced that before the election. There is an allocation in the budget papers post the election that members will be able to tease out in estimates. Off the top of my head I think it is \$39 million, but there is an allocation in the budget. Post the election, we have honoured those election commitments and the local candidates have issued media releases that refer to the Local Projects, Local Jobs initiative of the McGowan government. There is an allocation in the budget, which members will be able to interrogate, and local members have issued a media release referring to that program. They have then stood with a prop—newsflash, it is not a real cheque!—and had their photo taken. The media release is us talking about the program; the photo is of the member holding a prop.

The issue is whether members will get the opportunity to interrogate the Local Projects, Local Jobs program. Yes, members will because it is listed in the budget and members have the estimates process to interrogate that. Members should proceed to do that—I am sure they will —

Several members interjected.

Hon SUE ELLERY: This is a time-limited debate and I am trying to say what I need to so that others can speak.

Hon Simon O'Brien: We are trying to get some useful information: who is the responsible minister?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will keep talking about the things I want to talk about—

Hon Simon O'Brien: Who are we meant to ask?

The PRESIDENT: You are not meant to yell across the chamber, member. The minister is on her feet. If you want a turn, seek the call when she is done.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I suggest that the honourable member look at the budget papers, and that is where he will interrogate the relevant minister —

Hon Tjorn Sibma: Who is?

Hon SUE ELLERY: — when we have estimates. I do not have the budget papers in front of me —

Hon Tjorn Sibma: You don't know! You don't know! Incompetent!

Hon SUE ELLERY: Oh, for heaven's sake!

The PRESIDENT: Order! Order! There is no need to yell across the chamber. I have already said to you that if you want to seek the call, do so at the end of the Leader of the House's speech.

Hon SUE ELLERY: What an excitable young man!

There is an opportunity for members to interrogate this in the budget, and I invite them to do that. This was an election commitment, we are honouring it; it is a program that is delivering, and I invite members to identify which of the local projects or local jobs they do not want us to proceed with. Opposition members can identify which of the ones they want us to go to the community group and say, "No, you don't deserve this new playground equipment; you don't deserve this new sporting facility in your community." Members opposite can identify the ones they think we should go to and say, "Well, we can't give you the money now because the opposition is not happy about this program"; not even having tested it through the estimates process. I would think that six months in we could have a more sophisticated debate than the notion of one of the major parties standing and saying the other major party is playing politics. I reckon we could have a bit more of a sophisticated debate than this.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Robin Scott has the call, and he will be heard in silence.

Hon Michael Mischin; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon James Chown; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Colin Holt; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Simon O'Brien

HON ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral) [11.28 am]: I am very happy to comment on the motion moved by Hon Michael Mischin. Having been a spectator for the last 30 years observing Labor and Liberal governments, it is no surprise that the ALP government in Western Australia is attempting to apply public funds to favour certain electorates and interest groups. Unfortunately, it has forgotten one very important candidate—its Mining and Pastoral candidate, Hon Kyle McGinn. It has done nothing at all to help his electorate.

Hon Jacqui Boydell: And Hon Stephen Dawson.

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: And Hon Stephen Dawson, yes.

Hon Kyle McGinn's electorate includes the Kimberley, the Pilbara, North West Central and Kalgoorlie.

Hon Simon O'Brien: They love North West Central.

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: Yes.

The Shires of Leonora, Laverton and Menzies, the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder and Shires of Coolgardie and Dundas are collectively described as the goldfields. The goldfields have been given nothing in this budget. The fundamental economics of repaying the debt that this government has inherited have not been looked at properly. As a small business person for over 30 years and having the privilege of having to pay payroll tax, the incompetency and irresponsibility of this Labor government is terrible. The Labor Party made a commitment during the election campaign that it would not raise taxes or utility prices, and it has done both. Many goldmines in the goldfields are in care and maintenance. Those goldmining companies are waiting to find out where the increase in the gold tax will take them. The goldmining companies that are producing at the moment will be looking seriously at whether to continue greenfields exploration. That will be the first thing that ceases. No large gold deposits have been discovered in the last 20 years. The only thing that may continue is brownfields exploration, and that is only to enable the goldmines that are functioning at the moment to keep going. We cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach to the goldmining industry. That does not work. We have open cut mines, decline mines and shaft mines. The cost of producing one ounce of gold is completely different depending on the type of mine. I was told by a goldmining company that I spoke to this morning that it costs it \$1 450 to produce one ounce of gold. Any profit that is left over is used for drilling and exploration.

I asked a question in this Parliament about what is happening with Laverton hospital and the Leonora aged-care facility, and I was told that everything would be explained in the budget. Like a 12-year-old schoolboy who had asked his mum and dad whether he would get a new two-wheeler pushbike for Christmas, I was full of hope. After the budget, I was absolutely destroyed. This government has postponed work at the Laverton hospital, it has postponed work at the Leonora aged-care facility, and it has postponed an MRI scanner for Kalgoorlie.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: That has not been postponed, member. Let me explain that to you. That will be delivered in this term of government.

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: The people of Kalgoorlie were told they would get that in the 2017–18 budget.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas): Members!

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: In the remote communities of Kalgoorlie, kidney disease is rampant because of the nitrates and phosphates in the water. No money has been put aside in the budget for filtration systems that would help improve the health of people in these communities. There is no funding in the budget for the Meekatharra–Wiluna Road. People in the goldfields have been waiting more than 40 years to have that road bituminised.

Goldmining companies have to deal with not only the \$20 an ounce increase in the gold tax, but also other costs. Some goldmining companies have to pay native title costs. If goldmining fails in Kalgoorlie, it will affect drilling companies and service industries. It will also affect the community programs that are financed by those mining companies. If we do not get rid of the gold tax, the goldfields will end up being the dole fields. Thank you.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral) [11.32 am]: I thank Hon Robin Scott for his comments on this motion. This government has made commitments in the regions and it is delivering on those commitments. A government cannot deliver everything in its first budget. Hon Robin Scott talked about the Meekatharra–Wiluna Road. How long did the former government have to build that road, and when did it decide that it would do that? The projects that Hon Robin Scott has talked about are projects that were neglected by the Liberal–National government. He is now putting that all down to the Labor government in its first budget. I do not agree with those comments.

This government has made an \$8 million investment for a step up, step down facility in Kalgoorlie. It has made a \$14 million investment for Great Eastern Highway, Anzac Drive and Gattaca Drive in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. What is wrong with that?

Hon Robin Scott interjected.

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Hon KYLE McGINN: Now it is about the gold tax! In my mind, the gold tax is a separate debate. I am talking about what this government is delivering in our region. This government has made an \$8 million investment towards improvements to Coolgardie–Esperance Highway. Is that good for the region?

Hon Robin Scott: That's not a priority.

Hon KYLE McGINN: Roads are not a priority?

Hon Robin Scott: Of course roads are a priority, but that one is not. The priority is getting income for the government to enable it to get rid of the debt that it inherited.

Hon KYLE McGINN: So now it is about the debt! Hon Robin Scott has said to me that my government has let down people in the regions. I am saying that we are delivering in the regions, and the member is saying that they are not priorities. We are committed to our goldfields plan, our Kimberley plan, our Pilbara plan and our north west central plan. We have made commitments and we will deliver on those commitments.

Hon Robin Scott: For the people of Kalgoorlie, it is dependent on one thing and one thing only—gold.

Hon KYLE McGINN: I am talking about our commitments. Hon Robin Scott put me on the spot by saying that our government is not delivering for the regions. We have made our commitments through our plans and we are going to deliver on them.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [11.36 am]: The motion moved by Hon Michael Mischin is substantially about whether this house feels comfortable with the McGowan Labor government's actions as they might relate to the misuse of public funds. We have heard a lot about whether people are allowed to make election commitments and when and how, about whether people should be expected to deliver on those commitments, and about what is in the water down Hon Adele Farina's way, which is an interesting question, I should think —

Hon Adele Farina: I was not talking about what is in the water. You need to listen, member.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: The motion raises a serious question. It relates to the misuse of public funds. In the brief time available to me, I want to point out what the concern is. I do not think members opposite get it. It is not about whether members opposite want to justify anything that the government that they support might do on the basis that the previous mob did something that is similar. That is not a defence.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: The minister should get back to her iPhone.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members, it has been a fairly unruly debate today. I am going to remind members of standing order 50—a member may not interrupt another member speaking unless to call a point of order or identify a quorum. Those are the only exceptions. I would ask the honourable member to address the Chair, and I would ask other honourable members in the chamber to make sure that they give the member the courtesy that is required.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I will have to summarise very quickly. The key issues in this debate, as raised by Hon Michael Mischin, are as follows. First, if a government is to honour its election commitments, it should do so through the judicious application of public funds, and not by using the resources of government as some sort of slush fund. Secondly, the resources of government should not be applied to producing promotional material for private members. Someone produced the materials that are exhibited in the photos that have been tabled. I want to know whether the resources of government were used to do that, because, if they were, that is a misuse of public funds. Time will beat me, but clearly there is more to be done in this space. I thank the government for showing us that it has something to hide.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.