

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 15 June on the following motion moved by Hon Dr Sally Talbot —

That the following address be presented to Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

HON MICHAEL MISCHIN (North Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.10 pm]: It is with pleasure that I rise to deliver my Address-in-Reply to that of Her Excellency the Governor on the commencement of this fortieth Parliament. Before entering into it proper, I take the opportunity to offer my congratulations to you, Madam President, on your accession to the role of President of the house after so many years of service to this institution and to the public in the body of the chamber, and I offer my best wishes in that demanding and important role. It is one central not only to the traditions of the house but also to its functions. It is challenging because it recognises the political nature of this institution but requires one of its number to rise above the turmoils, tensions and imperatives of the day in order to maintain its dignity and to adjudicate the disputes within it, without fear or favour.

I also offer my congratulations to Hon Simon O'Brien on his election as Chairman of Committees, and so as Deputy President of the Council. I am sure that from a personal perspective he may be very disappointed in not being able to take up the presidency himself, something understandable given his service to this place and to the institution, but that position aside I can think of no worthier person to assume the role of lieutenant to the most senior position in Parliament, and I am confident his experience, wisdom and judgement will prove to be invaluable as this Parliament proceeds.

I also offer my congratulations to all the new members of this chamber, as well as to those who continue from the recently expired thirty-ninth Parliament. Apart from any sense of disappointment arising out of the result of the recent election, I am sad to have seen go many colleagues on both sides of the chamber with whom I have worked and socialised over the past four years or, in some instances, for much longer than that. We are in an odd occupation where one's job application is made at regular intervals to people we may never have met, who may never meet us, and who judge us, not on our personal merits necessarily but on their perceptions of the performance of others with whom we have a professional allegiance. There is no job interview as such. There are no firm and objective key performance indicators against which one is measured and assessed, and there is no appeal. It is fair to say that many who have lost their seats at the most recent election, in both houses and on different sides of politics, are people who could not have done more for their electorates and were swept aside for no failing on their part; it is the nature of the job and the political system that we serve.

So far as the Liberal Party is concerned, it plainly needs to consider what went wrong for it. Everyone will have their opinion, and it is in the nature of the media that it will be interested in reporting opinions that will grab a headline, and it is in the nature of politics that everyone is an expert and has the insight to do the job better than anyone else, especially better than those who actually occupy the seats in Parliament. I will not go into the exercise of trying to do a post-mortem on the election; I think it is a bit too early to do that and I will await a more objective and sober analysis. Suffice it to say that no government is perfect. Every government will make mistakes. Every government will leave a mixed legacy. The time to judge that legacy is not now, when there is nothing to judge it against; it will be in the future, when we see what has followed it and there can be some perspective, and recent emotion can be balanced against the evidence. As an example, the Hillarys Boat Harbour complex was protested against. The belltower was a source of controversy in the Court government. It was asked, "Who needed it? How much did it cost? Should we not have spent money on social housing or myriad other so-called priorities?" The Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre was alleged to have been ugly and out of place and would be a white elephant and unnecessary. Now the Hillarys marina is a major infrastructure asset in the North Metropolitan Region. The belltower is part of our landscape, and our state's history and heritage; it would be inconceivable now that it be simply demolished and removed. The convention centre, for all its faults, has done greater service and brought more benefits to the state than the car park that it replaced. I am confident that in years to come we will see that the Barnett legacy will be duly recognised and appreciated.

One reason for our victory in 2008 was that people could not name three things that had been done over eight years under the preceding Gallop-Carpenter Labor government. The eight years of Barnett administration made up for that. That could not be a criticism of our performance. The Labor Party, for its part, continually

bangs on about what a great set of books it left when it lost office in 2008. Yes, at times of rising revenues in a mining boom that was so pronounced that we had a shortage of workers in this state and were losing tradespeople and even professionals such as teachers and police to the temptation of high salaries in the mines, they were good times. Of course it could not last and one of the big lies for which the Labor Party is famous is that somehow the downturn was not anticipated. But, of course, Premier Barnett knew that it would not last and so, contrary to the other big lie, we did not squander the boom; on the contrary, it was used for public infrastructure that had been neglected. It was used for new projects, for properly rewarding our experienced public servants to encourage them to remain, rather than seek fleeting opportunities in private enterprise, and for providing assistance in areas that had been neglected by the Labor government in favour of its pet projects or for its pet interest groups.

During the period of the Barnett government, the Liberals rebuilt the state with infrastructure that will serve the community for perhaps the next 50 years. Although one cannot expect any gratitude from left-wing groups and unions, we have had the best paid public servants in the country and we took the opportunity to lift the social capital of this state. It is often forgotten that we gave an unprecedented \$600 million towards supporting non-government organisations, community groups, charities and volunteer organisations that are a backbone of the sort of public amenity that we have come to take for granted—something that no Labor government ever contemplated, let alone did. That was not squandering the boom. We did not merely hand out \$900 to anyone in the phonebook, like the Rudd government did; we invested it in community organisations.

I refer to the “great set of books”. The Howard government left a great set of books, but I did not hear any Labor politician, then or now, complain that the Rudd–Gillard–Rudd–Greens–Shorten government squandered it, let alone obsess, that there is a debt in the hundreds of billions of dollars as a legacy that we are going to have to deal with. It is why there is little money for, amongst other things, community legal centres from the commonwealth, legal aid, and why our family courts are at subsistence level and why the commonwealth is trying to balance the books. There is no doubt that there are problems—serious problems—in Western Australia and I am sure the Australian Labor Party will make hay while it can to blame its inability to do anything worthwhile on the alleged financial catastrophe that it inherited. Of course, they were not interested in the GST issue while the Labor Party was in federal government. They and the media were bored with hearing about the reduced revenue from GST as a contributor to our problems when we were talking about it. Now the papers and the ALP grizzle constantly. It is amazing how times change when one has to sit in the hot seat.

Of course, as far as Western Australia’s great set of books is concerned—the ones that we inherited, supposedly, from the ALP in 2008—it came at a cost of the ALP squirrelling away money so as to fritter it on pet causes and to bribe its interest groups at elections. The previous Labor government was so prudent—or, as some might say, got its priorities so wrong and was so parsimoniously irresponsible—that it failed even to maintain a prison fleet, which led to the death of one Mr Ward under very tragic circumstances. The Labor government now claims there was a lack of prison capacity. It did not build any and it did not invest in any; it took strategies to try to empty prisons instead. The Labor government was so prudent a financial manager that one of the only infrastructure projects it attempted—Perth Arena—was budgeted for \$150 million in 2005, when it was announced. It was due to be completed in 2009, but due to the gross mismanagement of that contract and project by Labor ministers who are now back in this government, it could not be finished until 2012 and ended up costing \$550 million.

Hon Jim Chown interjected.

Hon M ICHAEL MISCHIN: Perhaps we should have an inquiry into that and see where the money went!

It ended up being more than three and a half times more expensive than it was budgeted for and should have been.

Another pet project and example of public sector reform was the Office of Shared Services. That idea was hatched in 2003, commenced in 2005 and was inherited by the Barnett government, in a shambolic state, in 2008. The Gallop government confidently announced when it commenced that it would cost \$82 million, and we were told that it was a sound investment because it would save \$54 million every year. By the time the Barnett government inherited it and could not make it work and finally had to put it out of its misery, it had cost the taxpayers almost \$360 million and then had to be dismantled, all due to poor initial planning and Labor’s incompetent execution of the project.

I turn to one further example, as it serves several purposes, which will become apparent. That example is Western Power, which was created under the last Labor government under the responsibility of Hon Fran Logan as then Minister for Energy. We heard the big lie campaign before the last election about how it is a valuable source of revenue for the state and a great asset that should not be sold off, even in part. We also heard that even partial privatisation would result in compromising safety and that Western Power remaining in public hands is the only guarantee of that. What happened? Some \$8.6 billion of our state debt is Western Power debt. As revealed by a parliamentary committee report, the infrastructure under Labor governance was so neglected that

the Barnett government had to spend \$660 million out of consolidated revenue to bring it up to standard. I should add that the initial estimate was that it would cost \$1.2 billion to bring it up to standard. Apart from any other arguments, public ownership is not a guarantee of safety standards; Western Power is not a great asset to the state, but a depreciating one, for a variety of reasons, and Hon Fran Logan was derelict in his duties for failing to ensure it was properly maintained to a safe standard for the public. Labor left what looked like a great set of books at the expense of public safety and prudent public expenditure, and it was saved from embarrassment because it had been consigned to the dustbin of history and the lid of the bin closed before the carrion birds had come home to roost. Undoubtedly, the Barnett government has made mistakes, but it has also left a legacy of infrastructure and honest governance. I will have more to say at the appropriate time over the next three and a half years about other elements of our legacy.

Let us look at some of the legacies of the new McGowan government. We have the ill-thought out Perth Modern School relocation. There was no business plan and no cost–benefit analysis. It was an idea—a thought bubble, as it were—that sounded innovative and progressive but had no substance. It did not even appear in Labor’s “200 Fresh Ideas” scribble sheet that was put out before the election. Nevertheless, the government was determined to push on with it. There was no consultation and the government claimed it was an election commitment for which the Labor Party had a mandate to pursue, even if it turned out to be a dumb idea. It is one thing to resile from promises as circumstances change but it is quite another when, for the sake of ideology and sheer pig-headedness, a government pushes on with a proposal that it has not costed, has not consulted on and has not planned, simply because it can. I note with satisfaction that the community along with the opposition has put an end to that idea. I note with no satisfaction that that dumb idea has been exchanged for another unplanned and uncosted idea—the repurposing of Kitchener Park in Subiaco. To my mind, that is equally silly, but that will be entertainment for another day.

When we get back into government, perhaps we should also have an inquiry into where the money went and examine the decision-making processes of projects such as these and the contractual arrangements et cetera, to ensure that it never happens again. The McGowan government has shown the way by ordering one for the last term of government. Perhaps we can learn from those sorts of things. Of course, that is not really what the McGowan inquiry is all about. At a time of financial stringency, the government is squandering \$1.5 million on a distraction. Nothing will be learnt that is relevant to or could be applied by the McGowan government. If there were to be, projects such as Perth Modern School—that debacle and its substitute idea—would never have been attempted, pending the findings; nor the public sector reform idea about abolishing 41 departments and restructuring the public sector; nor the Metronet idea. But they will not be held up because that is not what the inquiry is for; it is merely to deflect attention from the McGowan government and to blame the previous government. If it were a genuine analysis into government decision-making best practice, it would include the Perth Arena scandal, the Office of Shared Services scandal, and the Western Power scandal alone. Our government did not undertake such an exercise, not because it had nothing to find that might have been scandalous, but simply because we are not so petty and prefer to look forward than back. But, as I say, perhaps we should learn from this experience. I will be advocating such an inquiry into the McGowan years. There will be much to explore.

Although I congratulate the ALP on its victory, to my mind it has bought its way into power with counterfeit currency. It has made promises that it cannot keep and probably had no intention of keeping. It has raised expectations that it knows cannot be met. I use the word “power” advisedly, because that is what it is about for the Labor Party and the unions whose political wing it is. We are already seeing uncomfortable evidence of the sort of arrogance and attitudes that led to the Burke years, WA Inc, and the investigation of several ministers by the Corruption and Crime Commission the last time Labor was in government.

It is early days for this government and this Parliament. Its commencement was, of course, delayed for some two months, presumably so that any scrutiny could be likewise delayed, and since then we have seen none of the transparency, openness and accountability we were promised. We have not seen plans from the man who kept telling us that, in the course of his six years before the mast as a navy lawyer, he had learnt the importance of plans. We have had ideas, platitudes and excuses. We have had the groundwork laid for bad behaviour that will inevitably lead to corruption if it continues and is condoned. We have had the influence of unions, in demanding their due, in influencing their choice of cabinet members, and in threatening breaches of laws with which they do not agree.

I say none of this lightly. More evidence will emerge, and it is up to us as an opposition to expose it as best we can. It will not be easy with a supine media, many of whom campaigned against our government and got their reward through jobs in ministerial offices, or were candidates themselves, or have allegiances with those who are now a part of government. Nowhere near the scrutiny took place of Labor Party polices that was devoted to ours; if there had been, half of the risible “200 Fresh Ideas” document would not have survived examination.

That is not to say the Liberal Party would not have lost the election anyway. I feel there were other reasons for significant sections of the public turning against us, and Greens preferences to Labor played their part, too. Plainly, the public did not like us, and the ALP was not a sufficiently worrying alternative. Those voting for the first time, for example, had never known the dangers of a Labor government, because they have never had to live through one as adults. They were 10 years old when the last corrupt and incompetent union-led Carpenter government, of which our current Premier was one of the failed ministers, was consigned by their parents to well-deserved oblivion, and so had they no experience to compare against. Certainly, the public did not get the high-level and forensic scrutiny that the media claims it provides in the public interest—at least not of any ALP policies, let alone shifts in policy and general dissembling. I will give some examples of that lack of scrutiny shortly. What will be revealed, and what has been revealed to date, is that this government is incapable of always acting in the public interest. It is compromised, and it was compromised before it was elected, and that was confirmed immediately afterwards and since. It is incompetent, union-run, arrogantly secretive and dishonest, and tending towards the corrupt. The signs are all there for anyone to see, and the media could and should have made more of it, but they too wanted a change of government, and so be it. Anything that signalled a corrupt use of power was simply passed over.

I do not say that lightly, because one aperture into the thinking of the current government was given shortly before the election, when the member for Cockburn told the public about the consequences to those whose contracts with the state would be repudiated by a McGowan government—in short, what to expect if you rely on your rights, but cross a McGowan government. It was in relation to the Roe 8 project, and the concerns that contractors and workers who had entered into contracts in good faith with the state government might be left disadvantaged by the change of government policy on that project. What would happen, they wondered, should there be a repudiation? It is notable that the Premier-to-be at the time was not even suggesting a renegotiation of Roe 8 contracts. No, the language was that of tearing up contracts, and that is quite a model to imagine and work with—a government taking advantage of its bargaining power by tearing up contracts of a commercial nature with people who do not have that bargaining power. Better yet, what if a party to such a contract felt aggrieved by this breach of faith? As Hon Fran Logan pointed out —

“If they want to be compensated for the loss of the long-term contract, I am sure that Mark ... will say ‘See you in court. That’s a long process’,” ...

“There’s lots of other projects coming up and we will remember your name when you put your tender in. If that’s the game you want to play.”

The game referred to is seeking compensation for rights that have been repudiated by the government. Hon Fran Logan continues —

“If that’s the game you want to play. If you want to take us to court, no worries—we’ll see you in court over the next four or five years and when you book your tenders in, we will look very carefully at the tenders.”

Let us reflect on that comment for a moment. That was exactly the sort of attitude to criticism and challenge in the Burke years. Members of Parliament and others questioning government conduct were sued for defamation. Dissent, challenge and political debate were stifled and silenced. Now we have that attitude again, and we are potentially destined to relive those days. Hardly anything has been said by the media. For them, it is just another embarrassing moment, but not important enough to get on the front page. It was quickly passed over, and overlooked by the derelict media sector that prides itself on being a watchdog, but in this instance has proved to be a toy poodle.

Hon Fran Logan’s comment was evidence of a corrupt mindset, and an intention to corruptly abuse power. If a senior public servant had said anything like that, he or she would likely be looking for a new job. Can anyone imagine a public servant with regulatory powers making a comment like that—if anyone crosses this government department, we will know where they live, and we will bear that in mind for the future? If any minister in the Barnett administration had made a comment like that, they would have lost their portfolio. In fact, several ministers were sent to the back benches for less than that. However, a McGowan crony, especially from the correct side of the union movement, gets a job; he gets made a minister of the Crown. When he actually gets to misuse his power, perhaps he will become Premier, Agent General or Governor; who knows? The sky is the limit. To pass over those sorts of observations by someone in a position of authority in this state is a disgrace, and to reward that person with a ministerial position is nothing short of dishonest.

After such a public threat by someone later rewarded with a ministerial position, what confidence can members of the public have that a McGowan Labor government will not abuse the power of the state to intimidate its citizens? We do not know what other projects have gone the way of contractors disadvantaged by the McGowan government’s tearing up of contracts. The self-professed open, accountable transparent and honest government has not revealed anything. And is anyone unhappy or worse off because of the tearing up of those contracts?

How can we know? They have heard the threat. Well done, Fran! The years as a union bullyboy have served him well and he has learned the lesson of how to wield power. But I am sure that he will be more discreet in the future. Of course, now Premier McGowan took firm action. He seriously counselled his prospective minister for bullying. Note, he did not go so far as to admonish or reprimand him or disavow those comments. He only “seriously counselled” him, whatever that means. The Premier could and can tell us what that involved. He was asked, but he has not said. From that one draws the only and obvious conclusions—that the counselling took the form of “Fran, mate! You don’t say things like that—at least not publicly during an election. You just do it, or make it known that we might do it. Didn’t the union teach you anything about standover tactics and how to get what you want without really asking, with just a nod and a wink?”

Now the government wants to dominate the parliamentary oversight committee for the Corruption and Crime Commission by not having two members appointed from the party of opposition and two members from the government, but by appointing two members of the government and another member with sympathies to its own policies. Of course, that ties in comfortably with the Premier’s new parliament secretary, the member for Perth, John Carey, former Mayor of Vincent, who enjoyed his council office until shortly before the election, threatened people with legal action for defamation, and was made parliamentary secretary while the subject of unresolved complaints before the CCC and the Fair Work Commission. I do not know the truth of the complaints, nor at what stage they are now; that is irrelevant. The message is clear from Premier McGowan: “John is my mate; he is my parliamentary secretary, my proxy, and if you take him on, you are taking on the Premier.” Potential witnesses are meant to realise that, as Fran says, if anyone takes on the McGowan government, it can make life pretty uncomfortable for them—drag things out, learn where they live, and remember them in the future. They need not bother tendering for work or applying for a job. This is ironic when one considers the Premier’s self-righteousness about the City of Perth. He wants the power to sack councillors if he does not have confidence in them, but he is happy to appoint Labor councillors as parliamentary secretaries without waiting to see whether they are guilty of any misconduct.

The McGowan government is not alone in government—it has the unions to govern with it. Recall that immediately the election outcome became plain, the unions were announcing that Premier McGowan owed them. They declared that they had won the election for him. They were not embarrassed to demand their due reward. They had been helping for some time. They had accommodation provided for their volunteers at taxpayer expense in Hay Street. They provided booth workers and helped the ALP campaign outspend the Liberals by five or six to one. No doubt, they have been rewarded—for example, in the composition of cabinet, our executive government. Immediately after the election, in response to what influence the unions would have over the choice of members of cabinet, our Premier assured the public that he would have “a big say”. What sort of “big say” exactly did his union backers let him have? I suppose that is something that he learned in the Navy too, along with the importance of having a plan. The captain of a ship has a big say in how it is run. The captain of the ship of state—the Premier—has a big say in who he will recommend to the Governor to be a minister of the Crown. The question arises whether he had as big a say as Chris Cain, the secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, who lost no time in pointing out that the union movement won the election and that Mark McGowan “really owes the unions”; or as big a say as Electrical Trades Union of Western Australia secretary Les McLaughlan, who advocates breaking what he declares to be unjust laws—presumably defined as those that the union does not like—and reminds us that “you’re either with the union or you’re against the union”. One can only imagine the reaction if a senior executive of a commercial enterprise or an executive of the Liberal Party, let alone a donor, were to say something like, “We won the election for you. You owe us. You’re either with us or against us.” There would be outrage. Yet, it is par for the course for the Labor government. That is a sample of the people who are not even shy or embarrassed about saying that they run the state—or ought to. They are met with by our Premier who says that he has a “big say” in how the state is run.

I come back to the unions running the state. The examples are legion, but just to show that I am not targeting the Premier, let us see how far it goes. I refer to the energy policy. It is plain that the unions led the agenda there. Notwithstanding the unequivocal merits of divesting the state of the burden of maintaining Western Power and writing off its debt of some \$8.6 billion, jobs for Western Power union members are more important than the interests of Western Australians. Are there any other energy reforms? On Synergy, for example, Treasurer Wyatt has been wise enough to finally realise, although perhaps foolish enough to publicly say, that introducing competition into our energy retail market will be good for Western Australians. But that is not necessarily good for union members, so it has been made quite plain that it will not happen; at least not without some deal to win support. It would have to be a good deal because the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, the Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Services Union have made it plain that what the unions say goes on this subject. An article on page 16 of *The West Australian* of 15 June 2017, “Unions urge MPs to kill power plan”, stated —

Labor and the union movement went to the March election promising lower power prices through the retention of Western Power, and it was up to caucus to ensure election promises were not broken.

So, Western Power stays a burden on the public purse, power prices will be lower because it stays a burden on the public purse, and caucus just needs to make it happen. Good luck—the union has spoken!

All this is par for the course in politics, particularly with a Labor government. I would not be so concerned if the Parliament were treated with respect, but it is not. The current Treasurer personally abused the former Premier. Premier McGowan, instead of deploring such abuse and seriously counselling against it, condoned it and entered into it. The Attorney General is another who likes to abuse and call fellow members of Parliament names. Last year he went to town personally attacking me and a public servant. He continues to do so; it is in his character and always has been. An old legal adage states that if you are arguing a case and the law is against you, argue the facts; if you have a case and the facts are against you, argue the law; and if the law and the facts are against you, call the other side names. He has been doing that for something like six and a half years. I do not propose to lower myself to his level. He will come undone in due course. The point I make is if that is the best the Labor Party can do, knowing his history as the man who publicly claimed at one stage that he was offered a frontbench position in a Liberal government if only he would defect—but did not bother to tell his own leader about that offer, such was its veracity and cogency—it has some problems. If that is the best Labor can do and that is an example of the high standards of a Labor government, then the people of Western Australia are looking to a return to the Burke days of abuse of power, lack of respect for institutions and people, and corrupt behaviour. The Premier claimed that the caucus was brim full of talent. Something has floated to the brim, but I do not know if people outside the Labor Party would call it talent.

I give credit where it is due, though, for the job creation scheme. The Premier committed to creating 50 000 jobs during the course of the televised debate before the election. He looked a little uncomfortable, but even said that it would be achievable within the first year, as I recall. That is not bad, given that around that time the unemployment level was hovering around 93 000 people in Western Australia; and 50 000 jobs was what he reckoned he would create. He is off to a good start and I am sure that he has started as he intends to continue. One of his first new jobs was to dust off the position of Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet. It is a position that has the additional advantage of being a throwback to the Burke days, with which he is so familiar. The Commission on Government was established in the 1990s to analyse what was necessary for proper government and to ensure that the Burke era did not recur. It urged the abolition of the position of Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet and its replacement with a Cabinet Secretary who should be “a senior level public servant appointed on the basis of merit with extensive experience in government, parliamentary and cabinet matters”. I asked several specific questions about this but I got nothing sensible in response. Parliamentary Secretary Sanderson gets paid an additional \$42 600 for something that was once done by a public servant who had other duties as well. That could be done by a staffer at the Premier’s office in addition to other functions that that staffer performs. This is simply a “job for the girl”. Indeed, she does not even have to take notes as part of her duty. Someone else is employed to do that—the sort of independent public servant who the Commission on Government recommended do the job, and had been doing the job until the McGowan government. That is one job that has been created out of the 50 000 jobs. Well done!

There are a couple more. Parliamentary secretaries are, of course, of considerable value if they are the right people and are committed to their tasks, but having a task to perform other than represent ministers at social functions is a good start. One such task is to represent them in the other chamber. Others include managing legislation, answering questions and dealing with debate; things of that nature. That does not happen under a McGowan government. When he needs to reward chums with an extra \$22 600-odd a year at a time when he is preaching financial stringency and showing leadership in opposing pay rises for MPs, he makes them a parliamentary secretary and puts them in the same chamber as the minister! It may be that the ministers concerned are not up to the job and need that assistance in the same chamber, although I note with interest that Hon Peter Collier managed to handle education and other portfolios on his own in this chamber. Still, Hon Samantha Rowe represents a minister in this chamber, Hon Darren West represents a minister in this chamber, Reece Whitby represents a minister in the other place, and Chris Tallentire represents a minister in the other place —

Hon Stephen Dawson: He represents me too! That’s a bit of a flaw in your argument.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: It is good to know that he is doing something else.

Hon Stephen Dawson: He’s very busy. He is an extremely competent parliamentary secretary as, I might add, they all are.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I look forward to Hon Samantha Rowe and Hon Darren West managing legislation in the education and regional development portfolios here, and the former helping out Hon Sue Ellery when she cannot cut it.

Hon Sue Ellery: You’re so unkind; you were so nice to me before.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Let me put it this way: I think it is a terrible thing that Hon Sue Ellery's leader has such a lack of confidence in her that he thinks she needs help in the chamber in which she is the leader. I would have thought that she could do the job on her own, and I would have thought that even Hon Alannah MacTiernan, notwithstanding all the confusion of having jumped from job to job over the last several years, would have been able to manage a portfolio by herself without having an offsider in the same place. As I say, I look forward to it being shown that they are more than just jobs for the comrades. That old joke comes to mind: how many social workers does it take to change a lightbulb? Only one, but the lightbulb has to want to change! In this case, how many Labor MPs are needed to do the job of a minister? It is as many as can be employed at the public expense. At least that is a good start. There are now half a dozen fewer jobs that the Premier needs to go for to reach the target of 50 000, and they have been created in this very place. That is terrific.

But there are other jobs. There has been a commitment to 300 education support workers in a few years. Never mind any analysis about whether they are really required or whether there are better ways of doing things; it was an election commitment.

Hon Sue Ellery: Do you want to stand at the gate and tell them they do not need those EAs?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Does the minister have evidence that they are required in those schools or have they simply been allocated to the schools she thinks they ought go to on the basis of their electorates?

Hon Sue Ellery: This is why you should do some research and where it tells that you do not have research, because it is based on low ICSEA; it is based on the socioeconomic status of the school.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Martin Aldridge): Order, members! Hon Michael Mischin has the call and he will direct his remarks through the Chair.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Thank you, very much.

Hon Sue Ellery: Will you take an interjection?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Not at the moment—I thank the minister—because the point I have to make is that creating more public service jobs is not what I think the public elected the Labor Party for. I do not think that the public thought that the government would give jobs to Labor colleagues and to further public servants at a time when the public service is increasingly one of the greatest burdens of recurrent expenditure in this state, which has been criticised by the government's Treasurer. As recently as this morning the Premier said on the radio that recurrent expenditure needs to be constrained. Employing more public servants without an analysis of whether they are required in those particular schools—not just simply on socioeconomic bases, but actual student need—is the important question. If there is some evidence that it was based on the number of students in those particular schools that need these numbers of people, I would be happy to see it, but I doubt it.

There has also been another job-creation scheme. For example, a company called Ingham's has decided to move some operations to Western Australia, and Hon Alannah MacTiernan was not slow in taking credit for that. I asked what the McGowan government had done—what WA Labor had done—to earn credit for any jobs that arose out of that decision, and I was given some vague ramble suggesting that WA Labor had contacted Ingham's and asked, "How about opening up in WA?" and that it said it would remove impediments to Ingham's doing so. There were no specifics. If anything concrete had been done to assist, one would have thought that one would have been told about it, but we have not been told about it. The only conclusion I can draw is that WA Labor did nothing, or if it did something, it was nothing laudable. I asked a question about that to get the opportunity to be given some information, but I got nothing. It is the same with a variety of other questions that have been asked in this place that have been met with vague and dismissive responses. In one case, a question to the Premier asking about his government policy was simply deflected to the Minister for Commerce and Industrial Relations. I understand that the experience in the other place is no different. That is a risk to this parliamentary system and inspires no confidence that this government is going into its function, its responsibilities, with any sense of humility or responsibility to the people it is now entrusted to govern. On page 10 of *The West Australian* of 17 March this year, the Premier year is quoted as saying that he had "warned that there would be high standards" in his government. He said —

"I want to make sure everyone behaves appropriately and properly at all times."

...

"Inevitably, issues come up and you can't just sack people for minor mistakes, indiscretions or the like," he said.

...

"I want to make sure we have high standards. I've made that quite plain to the cabinet-elect yesterday and we'll enforce high standards."

Those were his comments. If what we have seen to date is an example of these standards, our state is in dire peril and as difficult a job as it will be, I, and I am sure my colleagues, will be proud to do our bit to hold this incompetent, union-run, secretive and dishonest government to account.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I see that Hon Alannah MacTiernan has woken up!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members! One member at a time.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I welcome Hon Alannah MacTiernan's contribution. It is good to see her in this chamber. I have never had the experience myself, but I understand she started off here some time ago and then sought more possibilities in the Assembly, and then in the last election loss she sought—what was it?—local government.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I was going to congratulate Hon Alannah MacTiernan.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I was going to congratulate Hon Alannah MacTiernan. Having jumped from one political life raft to another in the last seven years, she has finally found one to bear the weight of her ego. Given the performance of Hon Sue Ellery with that wonderful example of incompetence, the Perth Modern School debacle, I suggest —

Hon Sue Ellery: You don't think I did the right thing last week?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Stopping it? Absolutely. The Labor Party should never have started it. I remind Hon Sue Ellery of the warning sign at some underground stations in the UK—"Mind the Gap". There is not much of a gap there to meet the ambition of Hon Alannah MacTiernan.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: What a load of nonsense.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I note that she is very vocal now, but I would appreciate it if Hon Alannah MacTiernan, in her capacity as minister, would answer questions rather than simply using vague platitudes as a substitute. We will see whether she is capable of doing that.

I want to congratulate Her Excellency the Governor for her service in office. She has been an exemplary Governor and has filled that office with grace and dignity. She has been very aware of her responsibilities and has exercised them and discharged them in an exemplary fashion. I repeat my congratulations to Hon Kate Doust for her ascension to the office of President—a proper recognition of her experience in this chamber—and I am comforted that there was a place for her, given the cynical nature in which she was treated by the Premier-elect when choosing his team. I am sure she will give great service to this chamber. I thank the Governor for her comments and support the motion expressing our loyalty and our thanks for the speech that she delivered.

Question put and passed; the Address-in-Reply thus adopted.

Presentation to Governor

On motion without notice by **Hon Sue Ellery (Leader of the House)**, resolved —

That the Address-in-Reply be presented to Her Excellency the Governor by the President and such members as may desire to accompany her.