

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 12 June 2012]

p3391i-3414a

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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**APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) RECURRENT 2012–13 BILL 2012**  
**APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) CAPITAL 2012–13 BILL 2012**

*Estimates Committees A and B Reports and Minutes — Presentation*

**MR M.W. SUTHERLAND (Mount Lawley — Deputy Speaker)** [3.50 pm]: I present to the Legislative Assembly the reports and minutes of Estimates Committees A and B.

[See papers 4891 and 4892.]

*Estimates Committee A Report — Adoption*

**Mr M.W. SUTHERLAND:** I move —

That the report of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

The estimates committees were held on Tuesday, 29 May to Thursday, 31 May. As we all know, the estimates hearings necessitate long sitting days from 9.00 in the morning until 10.00 at night. I would like to thank the Clerk and his office and staff for their administrative preparation and running of the committees on a daily basis. Likewise, I would like to thank Acting Speakers Peter Watson, Joe Francis, Tony O’Gorman, Andrea Mitchell and Lisa Baker for chairing the two committees. I have spoken to a number of Acting Speakers who have informed me that the proceedings usually ran smoothly with little, if any, disruption. The vast majority of supplementary questions have been answered. As at 2.00 pm today, 12 remain outstanding for committee A and seven for committee B.

**MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition)** [3.51 pm]: This is the process by which we examine the operation of the estimates committee before the house and the performance of the various ministers. Of course, the estimates committee process is one by which members on both sides of the house get to quiz ministers about their portfolios. It is a demanding process that requires a fair bit of concentration and effort, in particular on the part of the ministers involved and also opposition members who ask questions about specific portfolios. I want to comment on a few things about this process. First of all, I want to comment on the fact that I was unhappy with some of the timetabling issues surrounding the hearings and it would be far better if this matter was fixed in future; that is, I am the Leader of the Opposition and also shadow Minister for Regional Development, and the hearings for both of those portfolios were held at exactly the same time—one in this house and the other in the other place. When the Minister for Regional Development was handling his portfolios in the other place, the Premier was in here. Obviously I was predominately involved in the estimates committee process in this house. I think it would have been a far better arrangement had the process taken account of opposition portfolios in order to avoid that sort of conflict taking place, which essentially meant that I was unable to question the Minister for Regional Development for my second portfolio because his portfolio was going through the estimates process at exactly the same time as I performed my role in asking questions of the Premier in relation to his portfolios. I thought that was an unhappy arrangement. I do not know whether it was deliberately done on the part of the government but it was a very unhappy arrangement for me because I was unable to ask questions that I wanted to ask.

The second point I wanted to raise was about some of the questions asked, particularly of the Premier, in his portfolio in light of the fact that the government had announced expenditure cuts of two per cent in the first year followed by a further one per cent, one per cent and one per cent cut in the following years to every portfolio across government except education, which instead of a two per cent cut up-front was to have a one per cent cut up-front. The first question I asked the Premier, and indeed all ministers, was: how will that process of cutting the budget be managed, how will that efficiency dividend process be managed and what programs will be cut and what revenue measures will be put in place? I thought it was a straightforward question as part of the budget process, but true to form in the secrecy and underhandedness and misleading nature of this government, it refused to answer it on every single occasion. On every single occasion when we asked every minister how they would manage the efficiency dividend, the minister refused to answer it. The Premier was surly about it and refused to even countenance answering that question. He said that I would just have to wait and ask questions on notice in the second half of the year. It is part of the budget process that commences on 1 July this year. Therefore, I would have thought that that information would have been understood and known by agencies; they would know what they will do.

We are already aware of a range of government programs that are to be cut. I would have thought that the government would know that information—I am sure it has that information—but it refused to provide it to the Parliament of this state. That lack of accountability by the government in relation to providing that information to the Parliament was very disappointing. It went further than just the Premier’s portfolio; we got the same answer for every portfolio across government. The ministers refused to answer that most basic question of

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accountability. Of course, the government was able to put out there prior to the budget that there would be efficiency dividend cuts across each of the agencies but it refused to provide information on how the cuts would be managed by the agencies themselves.

I put the government on notice that I have put questions on notice to be answered when Parliament returns in August. Where are these efficiency dividend cuts being made and what revenue measures will be put in place? The Premier himself said, as part of the answers he gave in estimates, that the government would have that information available in the second half of this year. I have put those questions on notice and I would hope that in the interests of some form of accountability the government might actually answer the simple question: where will the efficiency dividend cuts be made and where will the new revenue measures be put in place? We would hope to get answers to those questions in August so that we will know exactly what is going on in relation to programs and projects across Western Australia in every single agency and where those cuts will be made. It is no good the government just saying that there will be an efficiency dividend without actually explaining how that efficiency dividend will be managed.

I will now refer to something that I think is highly unusual and irregular. As part of the estimates process, we had the now former Treasurer sitting here with the Under Treasurer and his advisers answering questions about the Western Australian budget, which is a \$25 billion document that sets out exactly how the expenditure of this state will be managed and the direction of government over the coming year and the next four years. The Treasurer of the state was answering questions in here about that, yet today, as part of the third reading process of the budget, we do not have the same Treasurer sitting here.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** True.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is true, as the Premier and now Treasurer says. I think that is highly unusual.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** It is.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not think that it is a proper measure of accountability to the state that the person to whom we are making our third reading speeches is a different person from the one with whom we were involved in the estimates committee process and the second reading of the budget. I think it is virtually unprecedented—but for perhaps death or serious illness—that the Treasurer would leave his portfolio in the middle of the budget process. Whilst I have gone up to him and wished him all the best on a federal career, because it is a courageous and difficult move and a difficult life for anyone to take on in the role of a federal member of Parliament from Western Australia, I still find it unacceptable and inexplicable that in the middle of a budget process the Treasurer would leave his portfolio when there was no need to do so. We have the Minister for Education and the Minister for Mines and Petroleum both occupying their portfolios, even though they have announced their resignation or retirement at the next state election. They are both undertaking their roles—or we think they are undertaking their roles—until the next election, but who knows; maybe tomorrow they will announce their retirements? Both of those ministers have said that they intend to undertake their roles up to the next election. There was nothing to prevent the then Treasurer, the member for Bateman, from keeping his role as Treasurer, avoiding instability in that important portfolio, allowing continuity for Parliament and retaining the portfolio until his retirement from this place—absolutely nothing. If anyone says there is some form of conflict of interest, that is an obfuscation and a subterfuge because it does not hold water. If the government wants to run that argument, the conflict of interest is actually greater than if it were to argue that there was no conflict of interest at all. It is far greater than the conflict of interest involved in someone occupying a role in the state Parliament and running for a federal electorate in proximity to their existing electorate. In the example of the member for Merredin, running for what is on paper a Labor seat in which he has control over large amounts of expenditure and use of the government jet, perhaps a case could be made for a greater conflict of interest about that behaviour that would demand a leaving of cabinet than for the case that applies to the member for Bateman, who I cannot see has a conflict of interest in his current role. It is highly unusual and highly irregular and I think it is disrespectful to the Parliament. I do not think the full story has been told —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** It is highly proper and that is what you don't understand.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is rubbish. It is highly irregular. To have the Premier sitting there as Treasurer when he did not put the budget together, did not go through the other stages of this debate and cannot answer questions in question time, as was shown in particular by the member for Victoria Park's questions, is to be showing disrespect to this Parliament in the way that the Premier has conducted himself yet again. What has happened is very unusual. It is very unusual and I do not think the full story has been told as to why the member for Bateman has left his portfolios midstream in the presentation of his budget when there was no need to do so. If we look at the broader picture of the administration of the state, this comes on top of the state having the fourth Treasurer in

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four years in this place—four in four in the most important portfolio in the government. We have had four in four. Is it any wonder that the public finances of this state are a shambles? Is it any wonder that debt has gone out of control under this Premier? Is it any wonder that waste has gone out of control under this Premier and this government when we have had four Treasurers in four years? I recall the arguments that were presented around five or so disability ministers over eight years in the last government. Compare that with four Treasurers in four years. Four Treasurers in four years is a very unenviable record. Casting my mind back, I cannot remember a time when there was that level of instability or that level of turmoil in that important portfolio in this state. I do not think it bodes well for public administration in this state. We now have to go through another jostling process on who will be the Treasurer of Western Australia. We now have to go through another jostling process on who will be the Attorney General of Western Australia amongst the wannabes in the Liberal Party room. Who knows who it will throw up? The last time it happened, it threw up some very unusual people into cabinet, who we can all attest may not be capable of the role they are undertaking.

I therefore do not think it bodes well for public administration in this state. As I said, we have seen turmoil in the Treasury portfolio, and that is reflected by the extraordinary cost-of-living increases on ordinary families, an extraordinary rise in debt and the inability of the current Treasurer to answer the basic questions that were asked of him in question time.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I think I did. You talked about 37 000 public servants when there are over 100 000.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will explain that to the Premier.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Your question was badly worded.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Premier has raised it and, unlike the Premier in the estimates process, I will answer the question.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Answer the question on the carbon tax.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The reason the 37 000 figure was given by the member for Victoria Park is that it is the figure given by the member for Bateman, the former Treasurer, as the number of public servants covered by the freeze. So the member for Victoria Park used the exact figure given by the former Treasurer. That is why there is turmoil: because the Premier does not know that.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Draft a question.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** More muttering from the Premier, Mr Speaker.

This is a disastrous time for public administration in this state with this sort of disrespect of the state Parliament, with this sort of administration of basic government in this state and with four Treasurers in four years and one who jumps ship in the middle of the budget process. But for death or serious illness, it is probably unprecedented in the Westminster system that people would actually do that in the middle of this process. I have the figures here with me from *Hansard* of 30 May when the then Treasurer, the member for Bateman, talked about the 37 763 full-time equivalent positions that are covered by the public sector cap. The figure excludes operational staff in the Departments of Health and Education and in WA Police. We have used the exact same figures as were used by the former Treasurer but, of course, the Premier does not know that; hence that is why this arrangement does not work. That is why we will have a new Treasurer sitting there when we return in August. But who knows who it will be? People move around so much in this government. These positions change over so often that who knows who it will be? I am looking around and I do not see many likely candidates, to be honest with members. But who knows who it will be who will occupy that position? It is a very important position and it deserves more respect than it is being given. I think it is extraordinary that the person who occupied the role during the committee stage process is now not the same person occupying the role today.

**MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [4.07 pm]:** I also rise to make a contribution in response to Estimates Committee A. The Leader of the Opposition has highlighted some important points. Whilst I understand timetabling of estimates is not an easy task because there are a lot of competing demands to be met, that is one that should have certainly been picked up so that the Leader of the Opposition could have attended both those committees separately at separate times.

It has been the tradition that supplementary answers are provided as part of that estimates process. One of the things that characterised this round of budget estimates was that more frequently many ministers were not prepared to make the offer of providing supplementary information. There was a contemptuous and disdainful answer of, "I suggest the member put that on notice." There is the circumstance in which we get back very poor answers in a not too timely way from many of the ministers in the current government. Budget estimates is one of those times when members can often get answers to questions in a more timely fashion. It is generally

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accepted that when Parliament resumes, members will have those answers before the debate has resumed. Today we find ourselves in the extraordinary position in which three ministers of this house who agreed to provide supplementary information within the time frame have not provided that information. The Deputy Premier has one piece of supplementary information outstanding at the moment—that is, supplementary information A23 in division 8. However, the Minister for Transport; Housing and other matters has some 11 pieces of supplementary information outstanding—that is, supplementary information A39 to A49 inclusive, which are variously from divisions 54 to 57 inclusive of the state budget. That is just plainly unacceptable. I do not know why the Minister for Transport has not been able to provide that information. He is getting around to it, apparently. He has obviously been distracted by something—I do not know what—but he has not been accountable to this Parliament and has not provided that supplementary information to us. Further to that, supplementary information remains outstanding from the former Treasurer, the member for Bateman—that is, B19 to B24 inclusive, all from division 24 and supplementary information B25 from division 25.

Perhaps the current Treasurer might like to tell us when we are likely to receive that information.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Very shortly.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Is he saying today? Does he think we will we get it before this debate is concluded?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I said very shortly.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Quite clearly this is an extraordinary situation. I do not recall a situation in my time in Parliament in which the Treasurer has not provided supplementary information as required as part of the estimates round. It has generally been the practice of this house that that information is fully provided to Parliament prior to this committee report debate taking place. I can see that the member for Bateman has absolutely been distracted. He has had something entirely different on his mind. It has not been providing information to this Parliament. It has not been being accountable to this Parliament and to the people of Western Australia as part of the budget process that this Parliament is going through. He has had his mind on preselection matters of the Liberal Party and his career in the federal Parliament. As a result, this Parliament waits here today without the answer to all of those supplementary questions—a total of seven parliamentary questions from two separate divisions that the former Treasurer failed to provide to Parliament before he gave up his commission as Treasurer today. We have a Premier who has taken on that portfolio who says that maybe the information will be with us shortly. It is just not good enough. It is not accountable enough. That is information that we should have at our disposal when framing our response to the budget estimates committee, yet we do not have that information.

The other information that was not readily provided across Estimates Committee A and B—this was consistent among so many ministers that we have to think that it must have been some kind of a staged response maybe out of the government media office—was about how the so-called efficiency dividends are going to be taken out of each budget. I certainly said to the ministers that I questioned, “Is it that you do not know how you’re going to make up the efficiency dividend or is it that you will not say?” It seems that clearly there must be some comprehension within the agencies and departments of how they will make up those efficiency dividends, but the ministers would not share that information with Parliament, would not advise Parliament of, and would not let departmental personnel answer questions about. The Minister for Police, for example, said, “I’m not going to pick out any particular elements that might be cut from the budget. It will be done in one job lot.” Most of the ministers indicated that they were under a requirement to have paperwork lodged with Treasury by 1 July—a submission of how they can make up the money that they need to make up in the dividends. This really makes this a bit of a Clayton’s budget, because, whilst there is money in the budget for programs, we do not know which of those programs are going. We are supposed to take blithe assurances from ministers as part of that process who say, “We won’t cut anything front-line.” The suggestion is they are not going to cut anything worthwhile. If they are doing things that are not worthwhile, why are they doing them now? Without question, the cuts will hit hard, they will cut deeply and they will impact on the community. I think that, as part of the budget, we need to know sooner or later.

By the time 1 July comes and goes, all we know is that there will be this process behind closed doors at Treasury by which ministers will look at departments’ submissions. Presumably some examination of it will take place by government. Then, hopefully, the public will be advised, but I am not aware of any of the ministers actually giving a commitment on when they would announce how they will make up those efficiency dividends. I would have thought that if this was a government that was open and accountable, and if it was being accountable not just to Parliament but to the community, that information should all be part of the budget process and already be in the budget papers. Given that it is not, and given that a process is taking place within government early in July, perhaps by August some announcement should be made about where the cuts have been made right across the

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board, rather than try to make these cuts in secret. These are certainly my principal concerns with the budget process.

I am not aware of any other circumstance in which the Treasurer has not provided his supplementary information, as he is required to do, before we debate the Estimate Committees A and B reports. I think that is extraordinary. He has let down Parliament by not providing that information before he decided to cut and run and take up an opportunity in federal Parliament. I also think that it is poor management by the Premier to allow this to happen. The Premier seemed unaware earlier that the information had not been provided and is now scurrying around seemingly trying to find answers to the supplementary information not provided by the former Treasurer. He cannot give me a definitive time on when it will be provided. I do not know whether it will be in five minutes, an hour or indeed whether it will even be today. It is extraordinary that we cannot have that information back from such an important portfolio. Although I can understand his distraction, I am certainly not sure what it is distracting the Minister for Transport; Minister for Housing at the moment, who has an even larger number of outstanding answers to questions in estimates than the Treasurer. None of that supplementary information has been provided at this stage—as there is an outstanding answer from the Deputy Premier. That is not acceptable. It is also not acceptable that we do not know where these cuts are to be made in terms of the efficiency dividends, what programs will be going or what jobs will be lost. I think the government owes it to Parliament and the people of Western Australia to make that clear at the earliest opportunity

**MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park)** [4.17 pm]: I, too, rise to speak to Estimates Committee A. I emphasise the points already made by the manager of opposition business and the fact that the opposition is speaking about the committee estimates process and about to speak on the third reading of the budget bills, yet outstanding questions are still to be answered by the Minister for Transport and, in particular, the former Treasurer. We have eight questions that the former Treasurer has not provided by way of supplementary information. The current Treasurer—the on again, off again Treasurer, the Premier—made the point, “Well, you’ll get it at some point.” It was the same answer he gave in respect of how long he intends to be Treasurer. It is simply not acceptable that the former Treasurer, who clearly had other things on his mind over the last few weeks, things other than the state budget, other than the finance of the people of Western Australia, was focused solely, it seems, on his own preselection for the federal seat of Pearce. Now, this Premier, who apparently represents accountability, stands here and he has not answered questions that the former Treasurer himself agreed to provide by way of supplementary information. It is just not acceptable. The member for Midland has already made that point.

Another point I want to raise is not lost on all members here and is certainly not lost on the people of Western Australia: we are just about to have our fourth Treasurer in four years. I was just reading the media statement put out by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry—the former employer of the Premier and again temporary Treasurer—calling for a long-term solution. The Premier has for a number of days known about the former Treasurer losing interest in state politics and deciding to abscond even before his budget has passed through the Legislative Assembly, and even before he answered the questions he undertook to answer by way of supplementary information. It is interesting to note his other capacity, certainly not an insignificant capacity, as Attorney General. Section 154(1) of Supreme Court Act 1935 states —

The Attorney General shall be a lawyer, to be appointed from time to time by the Governor, and to hold office during the Governor’s pleasure.

That is why we find ourselves in a unique position. In fact, if I was the Premier, I would say, “Never before in the history of the world has this happened!” Section 154(3) of the Supreme Court Act 1935 states, in part —

During any vacancy in the office of Attorney General and during any period for which the Attorney General is, by reason of his absence from the State, illness, incapacity or other sufficient cause, unable to discharge the functions of his office, the Minister for Justice —

Effectively undertakes those roles.

We know that Hon Norman Moore, who has also lost interest in state politics and is soon to retire —

*Point of Order*

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** We all love to listen to the member for Victoria Park—nobody more so than I—but I like it in short durations. We are considering committee reports; it is not the general third reading debate. I suggest that the comments that the member for Victoria Park is making now can be made during the third reading debate; I do not think they are appropriate at this stage.

*Debate Resumed*

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**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I have been referring to the supplementary questions asked of the former Treasurer, to which he has simply not provided any answers to me or other members of the opposition; he undertook to provide those answers by way of supplementary information. By convention, such information is usually provided to the opposition before we get to this stage of the budget debate, so I think the opposition is entitled to some flexibility if the government of the day will not make good on its undertakings to provide supplementary information.

I do not intend to speak for much longer, but it is worth noting that the former Treasurer and Attorney General has announced his retirement from state politics. To return to section 154 of the Supreme Court Act 1935, I doubt that when Parliament passed this legislation and looked at “other sufficient cause” for the Attorney General’s absence, one such cause might have been that the Attorney General has decided that he is no longer interested in state politics and wants to run for a seat of federal Parliament. I doubt that that is what this place was contemplating when it provided for the justice minister to undertake that role. I thank the Leader of the House; I will indeed pursue this matter further during the third reading debate.

The final point I wish to make is about the performance of this government during the budget estimates hearings, and the grubby little attack made by the Minister for Education on the member for Warnbro. We all recall it; the minister said that the member for Warnbro, as shadow Minister for Education, had a conflict of interest in pursuing an issue regarding a school that his child attends. The Minister for Education generally does not participate in those sorts of grubby little attacks, but this matter is worth noting. The Minister for Education has been in this place for more than 20 years, so she is no doubt aware of a little section at the back of the standing orders entitled “Code of Conduct for Members of the Legislative Assembly”. Paragraph (3) goes into some detail on conflicts of interest, and the point is specifically made at paragraph (3)(f) that a conflict of interest does not exist when a member is affected only as a member of the public or a member of a broad class. The Minister for Education would have known that when she made the grubby little attack; however, away she went, fully aware that a member of Parliament is entitled to pursue issues in which they may have an interest as a member of Parliament, and that if they have an interest as a member of the public or a broad class, there is no conflict of interest. The Minister for Education is a longstanding member of Parliament and has been here for more than 20 years, and that attack demeans her and demeans the process. I may come back to that matter during the third reading debate.

**MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells)** [4.24 pm]: I came to the Estimates Committee A hearings with a degree of optimism. It was not my first round of estimates hearings, but that optimism was soon knocked out of me simply because a steady pattern emerged of shielding ministers from the probing questions of the opposition. I think this is a disturbing pattern that is emerging in the estimates hearings. Government members are asking questions of a scripted nature; they are read to the minister, and the minister responds with a written reply. I could cite several examples, but I think the worst case was when the Minister for Environment; Water responded to questions during the estimates hearings. I was very disappointed that, during that session, government members sought to use up the time that was taken, leaving opposition members with insufficient time to challenge the minister on a number of points. That is an abuse of the estimates process, I believe. Ministers also deflected between ministers; an example was the Minister for Police who, when questioned about the road trauma trust fund allocation for electronic school zone signs, said that I should put my questions to the Minister for Transport, as he was responsible for Main Roads Western Australia.

**Mr R.F. Johnson** interjected.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I am not necessarily blaming the Minister for Police, but the point I am making is that when the questions got down to what the minister described as the more operational level of the budget allocation, I was directed to the Minister for Transport. Then, when I put questions to him about particular electronic school zone signs, he was unable to answer me. I was disappointed initially with the Minister for Police’s response, but I accepted that he did not have the operational information. I then took my questions to the Minister for Transport, and he also failed to satisfactorily answer them. There is a pattern emerging of ministers dodging between one another, using the overlapping responsibilities of certain portfolios —

**Mr R.F. Johnson** interjected.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I accept that, but the point I am making is that the minister’s colleague the Minister for Transport failed to provide me with that operational list and failed even to indicate the priorities. Substantial amounts of money are involved here and it would have been very reasonable to have expected him to anticipate the questions, given that I had already put them to the Minister for Police, and to provide me and other members with decent answers about the priorities.

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There were other issues around the paucity of information presented by government trading enterprises. I know that that is an ongoing issue and that there are certain accounting rules around that, but it is disappointing when a port authority or a major government trading enterprise such as the Water Corporation presents only a few pages of information—in fact, in some cases, just one page of information—upon which to base questions. That is related to capital expenditure rather than anything to do with the operational activities of a given agency. That is unsatisfactory. We have also been directed to look at annual reports; but, bearing in mind the timing of the release of annual reports, it does not mean that we can actually probe an agency on issues relating to the years in question.

I have received much of the supplementary information that I requested and I note that there is some telling information in the statistics that have been provided, particularly in relation to the Department of Fisheries. I note that there is a marked decline in the sum of live weight taken in recent years, and that is a story in itself. The issue of good fisheries management is one that both this Parliament and the federal Parliament will be discussing at length in days to come. The broader issue of the management of the marine environment is the one that is really to be examined here.

To return to the environment portfolio, the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority presented certain statistics showing that it has an accumulation of formally assessed projects that it is required to audit on an ongoing basis, but there was no information presented to demonstrate that that agency had been given increased capacity to take on that increased workload. After many years of the operation of the Environmental Protection Act, more than 1 000 projects require some level of annual auditing and information is required from those projects. It has not been tested by government employees in that auditing process.

Finally, on the issue of environmental auditing, the Department of Mines and Petroleum presented in Estimates Committee A hearings and was challenged on the report that was presented by the Auditor General a few months before and which indicated a serious deficiency in the Department of Mines and Petroleum's capacity to require that environmental performance reports were received—to even check that they were received—and a failure to even read those reports when they were received. That deficiency was challenged and the approach of the Department of Mines and Petroleum was to go into a very defensive frame of mind. It is disappointing that the agency was not prepared to admit that there was a deficiency or to explain how that would be redeemed. Instead, the answer was, "We're taking a risk management approach. So, if we think something is risky, yes, we might look at it, but if we think we can get away with not looking at it, we'll avoid it." There were many disappointments for me in the Estimates Committee A hearings, but the issue of ministers not taking responsibility for their portfolios was the underlying theme.

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [4.33 pm]: I rise to make just a couple of comments or reflections on the estimates process and the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Recurrent 2012–13 Bill 2012 and the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Capital 2012–13 Bill 2012. As someone who has been through this three times, I can see that we are improving the process; I found the estimates hearings this time around to be a much more rewarding and productive exercise. I think one of the keys to that was the consistency between the Chairs; their time in the role of Chair worked much better and, because of that, the discussions were able to flow much more smoothly. I am also indebted to the Minister for Health who, on this occasion as on other occasions, brought in a number of advisers so that we were never stumped for a question. In addition to the director general, executive directors right across the department were available to answer questions. From that point of view, the health estimates went very well. However, we still have a way to go with how the estimate hearings work as a process.

Possibly like a number of people, I came to this place with images of Bronwyn Bishop and John Faulkner grilling ministers and public servants into the wee hours and prising the very intricate details out of the budget process and, in doing so, serving the process of Parliament accountability and democracy very well. It has been somewhat to my frustration that I find the whole process of Assembly estimate hearings to be particularly cumbersome. We do not really get the opportunity to dig as much as we would like.

I note the member for Belmont made some comments in earlier debate today when he said that estimates has much improved following some changes that were made by the previous government. I am not necessarily convinced that we have gone as far as we can to make sure that we provide a full opportunity for members to cross-examine the government on its budget; we still have some way to go with that. In particular, I refer to what can only be described as doroxy dixers from some members of the estimates committee. I understand that they have a role in frustrating those from this side of the house and that is part of the process and sport of Parliament. However, there is a point when that can go too far. I think even the minister on one occasion made reference to

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 12 June 2012]

p3391i-3414a

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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the fact that the debate had been exhausted in the previous week of Parliament and that the question in this particular case was not really doing justice to the process.

I had some cause to observe, albeit briefly, the estimates hearings in the other place. I think there they have a better process for estimates hearings. The lead questioner seems to be allowed greater flexibility to lead. Follow-up questions are much better managed. Perhaps the government members in that place would feel that the opposition members are given too much leeway, but I thought that format seemed to work better. Our hearings are significantly more rigid and less flexible in the way the conversation flows. I do not think we necessarily need to put advisers or public servants under undue stress or, indeed, cross-examination, but the estimates hearings in the other place seems to allow for a better flow of conversation and a better exchange and provision of detail.

As always, health is a quarter of the budget. Obviously, a quarter of the time in estimates is not allowed to be dedicated to one portfolio. However, it is true to say that we on this side had many more questions that we would have liked to have asked and the supplementary questions process simply does not allow for the full exchange of questions and for the full provision of answers. The minister at one point of the hearings insisted that questions be placed on notice. As it is ahead of the winter recess, it makes questions on notice coming out of the estimates process a very lengthy process.

One final point, which relates to the portfolio of mental health, is that many of the mental health services are provided in significant part by the Department of Health and policy discussion on mental health takes place in that department. We have this unusual circumstance in which the opposition tries to ask the Minister for Health for answers to mental health policy questions, but then the minister says he cannot answer that question because that is in the mental health portfolio. When we move to the mental health portfolio, the minister says he cannot answer that question as the adviser is no longer in the chamber. I assume that will remain a problem for some time while the department continues to distinguish the role of the Mental Health Commission from the role of the Department of Health as a deliverer of mental health services. This needs to be clarified in the context of the budget so that we can put that budget under examination properly.

**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cunnington)** [4.38 pm]: I want to make a couple of remarks about the operation of Estimates Committee A and the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Recurrent 2012–13 Bill 2012 and the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Capital 2012–13 Bill 2012. I draw members' attention to the statement made by the Chair on each occasion the committee convenes, which reads —

It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point.

I raise that because often ministers would not provide answers that were to the point of the questions asked. I do not understand why the Chairs do not do what they say they will do at the start of these committees and ask the ministers to answer the questions put to them. It seems a pointless process to have members come in here on behalf of the community and ask detailed questions of ministers who then simply will not answer or will not deal with the issues that are raised with them. That is clearly a deficiency in the process that the committee goes through. We need to ensure that the committees operate in a better way so that the Chairs require ministers to answer the questions put to them. I will give members an example. In Estimates Committee A I asked the Minister for State Development —

This is a nice technical one that will be nice and easy for the minister to start with. I refer to the 2012–13 budget target figure of 182 full-time employees in the table on page 118. Can the minister please provide a breakdown of these full-time equivalents by public service level, division and geographic location?

I make the point that there is no political content in that. That is simply a technical question that any person might want to know about a bureaucracy that they are shadowing. What is the response from the minister? The minister said —

I am not inclined to do that. I think that is a very odd question.

Quite frankly, who cares? Nobody cares what the minister's opinion is. I do not understand why the minister is incapable of answering a simple question that is put to him, that simply asks for detailed information that the people of this state have a right to know. What ended up happening is that we had to rephrase the question about 10 times, and, eventually, most of the information was dragged out of the minister. But it would be really helpful if the chairs of these committees did their job better and ensured that ministers actually addressed the answers to these questions. That would be very helpful to the operation of these committees.

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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I would also like to point to some of the information that has come back to us in the form of supplementary information. Supplementary information A6 was as follows —

*Mr Wyatt asked regarding further information on the payouts to staff — Mr Larsson and Mr Smith.*

The answer was —

The Government has a long standing practice of not relating —

I think they mean releasing —

personal financial details ...

That is very interesting, because of course we have seen many occasions—for example, on 27 May 2010—when the Premier has in fact done exactly that. Usually when the Premier is trying to attack a member on this side of the chamber, he is happy to provide the information; but, somehow or another, when it is about staff in his own office, suddenly he becomes coy and he is not prepared to provide that information. That is quite extraordinary. I will go on. I will take only another moment —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Whose payout are you referring to?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** The Premier has frequently mentioned the member for West Swan.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member for West Swan is a public figure.

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** You did not say public figure. You said public service.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Yes, public service.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** A public figure should be accountable for the payout—should be totally publicly accountable.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Just like the Minister for Water, who got a payout when he left the employ of the Court government. People when they leave employment get the payout that they are entitled to, based on the contract of employment that they have. That is why the member got the payout. The Premier has made that information —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I would be very happy to debate any payout to the member for West Swan.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I am holding in my hand the information released by the Premier regarding Deidre Willmott. It is a despicable double standard that the committee is not provided with the proper information. The government must be accountable to the people of this state, and the process through which it is accountable to the people of this state is the committees. The committee process is failing when ministers do not treat the process of the committees with respect. There is a clear demonstration in the information provided by the government to the committee, which I have just referred to in A6, of how the government has clearly not told the truth. That should not be allowed to occur. The chairs of these committees have an obligation to ensure that the government is accountable.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** When was it that you were not told the truth?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Well, I am the only person in this Parliament, Premier, who has been proved to tell the truth. If the Premier wants to go down that track again, I would be happy to do it. The information that was provided in A6 was dishonest. It continues to be dishonest. The government should be accountable to the committees. The committee chairmen have a job to do, and, quite frankly, on a number of occasions the committee chairmen failed to do that job.

*Point of Order*

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Mr Acting Speaker, I do not think it is appropriate for members to criticise the chairs of committees. I think that is highly inappropriate.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** What standing order? Tell me your standing order!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member for Cannington is reflecting on the Chair in doing that.

**Mr M. McGowan:** What is the standing order?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member for Cannington is reflecting on the Chair. The member for Cannington is apparently the prophet who has brought his wisdom to this house. I want to place on record, Mr Acting Speaker, that I think it is quite inappropriate to be reflecting on the Chair in that respect.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis):** I am inclined to support the Premier's point of order, but I am not going to rule the member for Cannington's comments out of order.

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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*Debate Resumed*

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan)** [4.44 pm]: So here we are debating Estimates Committee A and we still do not have all the answers in relation to committee A. Throughout this debate, we have had people going around and giving us some answers. But there are still three outstanding answers in relation to committee A. As I understand it, answers A23, A48 and A49 are still outstanding. That is absolutely ridiculous.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** For which portfolios?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** For Fire and Emergency Services, and for the Minister for Health.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Can I just interrupt? All the Treasury answers have been provided.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I know that; we have just got them now. Given that we are about to talk about Estimates Committee B in seven minutes, it is an absolute disgrace. The arrogance and contempt that the government shows the members of this house in this chamber is absolutely ridiculous. Supplementary information is always provided before we go into this process. The fact is that today, we have had the answers coming in in bits and pieces. We are trying to figure out exactly what the answers are. It is absolutely ridiculous. Again in the process we saw some ministers roll up with their extensive list of dorothy dixers. The member for Vasse is always a good one with his dorothy dixers. I think his staff prepare more dorothy dixers and dirt files than they work on delivering outcomes for Western Australians. Again and again, that has been demonstrated. Again, we have a situation in which the Treasurer who presented the budget to this Parliament is no longer the Treasurer. As someone has said, it would be the first time in the history of this state, possibly the nation, that that has happened—that the Treasurer who presented the budget is no longer able to participate in this part of the process because he is no longer the Treasurer. That is absolutely incredible and unheard of. We have a Premier who has taken on the role of Treasurer, and who does not understand some of the simple concepts that as a member of the Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee he would have been part of. For example, how many public servants are subject to the cap? The Premier is saying that there is going to be a cap on the number of nurses and police officers. That is what the Premier and now Treasurer has said today. Implied in his answer is that there is going to be a cap on the number of police and nurses.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** No. I said the exact opposite. I said there would not be a cap.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** No. The Premier and Treasurer said that the cap would apply to 110 000 public servants. That is what he said. That includes the front-line service deliverers, who are actually exempt from the cap as told by the former Treasurer. He said that \$1 billion is going to be spent, when the budget papers show that that money is actually not going to be spent; it is parked in the forward estimates and not allocated to expenditure. There are two simple concepts. One is about the cap on the entire public service. The second is about the over \$1 billion, possibly \$2 billion, of money that is parked in the forward estimates. That money has a significant impact on the government's debt figures. So, again, this is absolutely incredible. Never before in this Parliament—any Parliament, I think —

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Ever, in the history of Australia!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** — in the history of Western Australia, and in the history of Australia —

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** In the world!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** — have we seen the arrogance and contempt that is shown today.

Several members interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Mr Acting Speaker, I seek your protection.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Okay, members!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Never in the history of this Parliament and of this state have we seen such arrogance and contempt shown both to the members in this place and to the public of Western Australia.

**MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Treasurer)** [4.48 pm]: I would simply thank the chairs of the committees and I thank members for participating in the estimates. It is an important part of the parliamentary process—and, look, you use it as you will. The fact is that while members opposite complain today, in session after session they ran out of questions.

Several members interjected.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** They did. Members opposite did not have good, detailed questions. In the session that I was responding to, members opposite ran out of questions—as simple as that.

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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Question put and passed.

*Estimates Committee B Report — Adoption*

**THE ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis):** The question is —

That the report of Estimates Committee B be adopted.

**MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition)** [4.49 pm]: I want to comment briefly on Estimates Committee B, and I am sure a number of other members will want to do so also. I refer to the situation that existed and that we had to confront on the Tuesday of estimates, whereby Estimates Committee A had the Premier appearing before it, and Estimates Committee B had the Minister for Regional Development appearing before it, at exactly the same time.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** You just made that speech!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Premier did not seem to hear it—well, he did not answer. I will make the points again, because I would like the Premier to actually answer some of these questions that are put to him. The Premier's response a moment ago to Estimates Committee A was disrespectful and short and did not answer any of the questions that were asked.

I asked the question: why was the Minister for Regional Development's estimates process on at exactly the same time as that of the Premier? As we all know, the estimates process is a good opportunity for members of the opposition, above members of the government, to ask questions of ministers. That is what it is about. It is about scrutiny of the budget to find out what it contains, and the principal people who undertake that scrutiny are the opposition. That is why there is an opposition—to scrutinise the government. That is one of the important reasons for an opposition. When the estimates process is structured to ensure that one of the shadow ministers in an important portfolio is unable to actually ask questions of the minister they shadow, that is a denial of the process we are engaged in. It makes me angry that that is the way the government structured that process.

Furthermore, it makes me angry that ministers were very keen to avoid answering the most basic questions of opposition members. It makes me even angrier that we have learned that all sorts of supplementary information that was agreed to be provided by ministers has now been provided, but the required information is not contained therein. So, answers to important questions of note that were raised, for instance, by the member for Cannington—important information sought by members of the public about important public issues—do not actually get provided in the supplementary information process after the ministers themselves have agreed to provide it. Ministers agreed to provide it in answers to the house, but the information has not been subsequently provided in supplementary information. I have never heard of that happening before. I go back some time in this place, and, ordinarily, supplementary information is expansive and gives answers to the questions asked. It is expansive. I go back to the Court government, which provided expansive information in the supplementary information provided. I remember as a minister providing extensive information to questions. There was no vetting of it; it was provided by the departments and was forwarded to the members on the committee. There was no vetting of any information so as to deny what the minister agreed to provide as part of the supplementary process.

But I come back to my first point. I wanted to question the Minister for Regional Development, and I think an interesting question would have been: if it is improper to run for a seat that is not a member's own and then remain a minister in the government, why is it allowed for the Minister for Regional Development but not permitted for the former Treasurer, now just member for Bateman?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** That is not accurate; that is just not accurate.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I think the Premier needs to answer some serious questions.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Ask them in question time.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Some serious questions need to be answered by the Premier. Did the Premier force the Treasurer; Attorney General out of his positions?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Ask me that question —

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I am asking the Premier the question now!

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I am not going to answer it now.

Several members interjected.

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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**Mr C.J. Barnett:** No, because you made such a mess of question time; ask me the question tomorrow in question time. But I will tell you this: the decision made by the former Attorney General was entirely his decision. He made it; I didn't. I think he made the right decision, I add that, and it was entirely proper; it was his decision.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** And he was the Treasurer as well.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Yes.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** He was the Treasurer.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** It was his decision, and I think it was the right decision.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Did the Premier advise him that he was not welcome to be the Treasurer or Attorney General anymore?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I am not answering you; ask me in question time. This is not to do with estimates.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Premier answered one part of the question; why does he not answer the second part?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Yes, only to stop you running up there and telling a mistruth to the media, as you have already done today.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis):** Premier! Leader of the Opposition, stay on your feet, as I am not going to stand up. I am giving you a long bow; I am struggling to see the relevance to estimates.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I am just raising the point that Estimates Committee B had the member for Central Wheatbelt, the Minister for Regional Development, appearing before it. He is also running for an electorate 1 500 kilometres from where he lives—in fact, more than 1 500 kilometres from his existing electorate. I am just wondering how he was permitted, if it is not proper for that to be done, to be in that estimates committee answering those questions. If it is improper for the former Treasurer and former Attorney General, why is it permitted for the member for Central Wheatbelt, the Minister for Regional Development? Why is that not improper?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** You're incapable of telling the truth, aren't you? When did I say it would be improper? I said what the former Attorney General did was highly proper, and it is.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** So could he have stayed on?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Could he have stayed on in his position?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** No, I am not answering questions; you ask the questions in question time.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Premier said —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** You absolutely muffed question time because you did not even have the brains to ask the right questions!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Premier and Leader of the Opposition! I am not accepting your case; I am going to ask you to come back to the procedure of Estimates Committee B.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Premier is a very rude person.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** You were making accusations today about a feud—it is absurd.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** About what?

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you, Premier. Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. Both of you, I am going to make it crystal clear that I need you to deal with the procedure of Estimates Committee B. I do not want to hear about anything else.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Mr Acting Speaker, I thank you for your guidance.

I, of course, only got half an hour with the Minister for Regional Development, but had I known that it was inappropriate or improper —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** No.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Premier said it is highly proper for the former Attorney General to resign his portfolio; so, by implication, it would have been improper for him not to.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** No; that is not a logical argument.

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Therefore, had I known that was the standard the Premier sets, I would have loved to have asked the question of the Minister for Regional Development as to why he is still in his portfolio when the former Attorney General is not. The Premier needs to be a little clearer on exactly what he said to the former Treasurer and Attorney General —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Ask me a question in question time and I will answer it.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** — about whether he was permitted to stay in his portfolios.

*Point of Order*

**Mr P.T. MILES:** Mr Acting Speaker, you made it quite clear that you have asked the Leader of the Opposition to come back to the relevance of the debate before us now. Could I please ask you to bring him back to the relevant matter?

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I am sure the Leader of the Opposition is moving on past this point now.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I always appreciate an interjection from the next Attorney General or Treasurer of the state!

I also want to come back to the issue of ministers receiving questions, and those ministers who attempt to obfuscate and stonewall in the estimates committee process. I note that the Premier said today that there have been only two cases of ministers moving on. When I look around me, I look at the member for Eyre, and I recall that he was removed from his portfolio by the Premier.

*Point of Order*

**Mr P.T. MILES:** On relevance again, Mr Acting Speaker; the Leader of the Opposition is going way off where he is supposed to be, and I ask you again to call him to order.

**Mr P.C. Tinley** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis):** Good interjection, member for Willagee! Members, before I give the call back to the Leader of the Opposition, I will repeat myself again. Members, this is your opportunity to discuss the procedure of Estimates Committee B, not to delve into the careers of other members of this house. Leader of the Opposition, I ask you to get back to the issue we are debating.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will have the opportunity as part of the other debate around this bill to delve into the truthfulness of the Premier's claim that there have been only two ministerial changes, and we will look around at various ministers who have changed portfolios and been removed from cabinet and the like as part of that process.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Two changes in personnel in cabinet.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Premier will find that it is far more than two changes of personnel, my friend, because there have been so many more.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Tell us about your five sacked ministers and your role; tell us about your meetings with Crichton-Browne and the devious dealings of the Labor government.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The five ministers sacked—okay!

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** If you want to go down this path, I will get out and I will go right around your benches, one by one, if that is the way you want to go.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Let us start, if we want to go down that course of action—okay!

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** We will be happy to do it. If you want to go to the gutter, we will leave you in it.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The member for Kalgoorlie was of course sacked by the former Premier, but he is now an integral part of this Premier's government. My friend the Premier has no standards!

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** How is your mate Noel?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Premier should look around his cabinet.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 12 June 2012]

p3391i-3414a

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kalgoorlie has absolutely no relevance to what happened in Estimates Committee B; he has zero relevance whatsoever! Leader of the Opposition, this is the fourth time I have directed you to come back to this matter. I give the call to the member for Midland.

**MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland)** [5.00 pm]: I rise to make reference to the Estimates Committee B process, and the police estimates in particular. One of the issues I raised in the previous debate was that we did not know where the budget cuts would be made. Significant budget cuts are to be made to WA Police under the euphemistically so-called “efficiency dividend”. I pointed out to the Minister for Police that on page 489 of the budget papers for the 2012–13 financial year there is to be a cut of some \$21.2 million from the police budget. The police budget is already under strain and there are not sufficient officers at the front-line and at the coalface, particularly during the afternoon and evening shifts. That is becoming a real problem in many parts of the metropolitan area and also some country regions, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights when dealing with out-of-control parties. Just this weekend, one of those parties was for a 16-year-old girl’s birthday. I find it very concerning that although the party was registered with police, an awful amount of damage seemed to have been done to vehicles in the street and the family was terrorised. I am wondering how long it took police to respond on that occasion.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis):** Sorry to interrupt you, member for Midland, but I require you to direct your comments to the processes of Estimates Committee B.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** I will join the dots for you, Mr Acting Speaker. I raised the efficiency dividend during the committee hearing and sought an answer from the minister to find out whether the cuts would be made to front-line services when the dividend efficiency would be put in place. The response I got from the Minister for Police was, “I thought the member would ask me that question tonight.” If he thought I would ask him that question, I would have thought he would have had a better answer. He said —

The simple answer is that I cannot at this stage identify what savings we are looking for. We are at present looking to see where some savings can be made. We are making every effort, but we will not know the full amount until 1 July. I think it is 1 July we are informed we have to deliver those savings by. I am not going to announce piecemeal savings—a little bit today and a little bit tomorrow. I will inform —

I asked the minister whether he would table that in Parliament on 1 July or soon thereafter, and he responded, “I would not think so.” The point I am getting at is the accountability of the estimates process. The estimates process is supposed to be for us to properly examine the budget, which in this particular circumstance is the police budget. As part of the estimates process, we are trying to drill down and get answers to questions about what funding will be available for the police budget over the course of the coming 12 months. It is our job as members of Parliament to try to assure ourselves that the police will have sufficient money to work the shifts that are required and to fulfil their duties.

To get back to my other point, I have very large concerns that there are not sufficient officers on the afternoon and evening shifts to be able to respond appropriately on the ground in the suburbs when incidents arise. I am also concerned that there are many other areas of policing for which funding must not be cut. For example, the motor squad was disbanded and as a result we have seen a 46 per cent increase in the rebirthing of cars and in the number of cars stolen. The RAC made some comments about that in recent days. We have seen an alarming number of home invasions whereby people are smashing their way into people’s homes to get car keys. The car immobiliser scheme has been quite successful but that means that to steal cars offenders are now trying to get hold of people’s car keys, and one way to do that is by bashing into people’s homes. We need to ensure that police have appropriate funding to be able to respond to that.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Midland, I really do not want to interrupt you, but you are drawing a very long bow. This debate is not the third reading debate; it is a debate purely about the proceedings and process of Estimates Committee B. It is not an opportunity for you to make a third reading speech.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** I thank you for your guidance, Mr Acting Speaker; I will attempt to fit within the guidelines.

I believe that in Estimates Committee B we should have been provided with information to inform us where that \$21.2 million worth of cuts would take place. I also pointed out that for the following year there is to be a \$33.5 million cut as part of the efficiency dividend. Progressively, until 2015–16, there is nearly \$60 million worth of cuts to the police budget. This is about honesty and accountability when it comes to the estimates process and the information available to members as part of that committee process when we ask questions. I think it is more than reasonable for us to ask the minister questions about how the cuts will be made. As part of that process, the police minister should have been able to give us at least some indication about the areas he

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 12 June 2012]

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Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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would be cutting. I believe I am speaking to the process in terms of what the minister was and was not prepared to answer during Estimates Committee B. I asked whether the minister would give us that information sometime after July, and, of course, got the most unsatisfactory of answers. As part of the process I, along with other members of the committee, asked the Minister for Police numerous questions that he would not answer. He would not give us an answer to questions that previous ministers would have answered or, at the very least, agreed to provide supplementary information. The Minister for Police was one of the ministers who steadfastly refused time and again to provide supplementary information. I note that I have received some supplementary information from the Minister for Police and at least it was provided on time. That is probably the best that I can say about the information that has been provided to me. However, other committee members and I asked numerous other questions as part of the Estimates Committee B process when examining the police estimates that simply were not answered. The minister quite contemptuously told us to put the questions on notice and that he would think about answering them. In other words, this minister is not interested in being accountable.

When we ask about budget matters, these are the things that the government should be open and accountable about. The government should provide that information to the committee because that is what the process is about. This government—it is not the first time it has done it—has used the ruse of the so-called efficiency dividend. Basically, the government has not completed the budget process; there is a whole other stage to go in which the ministers must find where they will make massive cuts. The Minister for Police says to wait and see where he will find the \$20 million worth of cuts. I asked him whether he would give a commitment to make them public in the future and he said that he expected that at some time in the future they would be made public. At the rate this minister is going, I suspect they will not be made public until the next budget estimates hearing sometime after the next election. I do not think that is what the estimates should be about. I think the minister has an obligation to provide that information and I think this is a deliberate strategy on behalf of the government. Its whole approach to estimates is to not provide the bad, hard news on where it will make cuts to core service areas of police, education and health. The government does that because it knows that those cuts will be unpopular. It is trying to hide those truths from the public. It wants to promote a few positives from its budget—mainly capital works that are on the never-never—but when it comes to the core service areas such as policing, I think the government has an obligation to say where those efficiency dividends, otherwise known as “budget cuts”, will be made so that Parliament and the community can make a proper assessment about whether or not the cuts will affect the service delivery of areas such as policing, health and education.

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan)** [5.10 pm]: I rise to speak on the operation of Estimates Committee B. Part of committee B was the education estimates, and I want to speak briefly about the process that was undertaken there. Again we heard the Minister for Education, who is always shocked when she is asked questions about numbers during the budget estimates process. When we asked whether she could give us a breakdown of \$49 million allocated to the Country High School Hostels Authority, it took about 10 minutes to get that information. We always see a shocked and surprised look on the minister’s face when we ask, “These are the numbers in your budget. Can you tell us what they actually represent?” It is as though we are not meant to ask. If we are not meant to ask about numbers during a budget process, what are we meant to ask about? It was very difficult once again through the education budget process to get the real numbers and what they actually mean. As I said, it took us 10 minutes to get an answer on the breakdown of \$49 million in the section on the asset investment program and what that amount actually represents—10 minutes and we finally got it. One of the reasons given for not providing the answer was that \$4 million or \$5 million was allocated to a City Beach hostel from the royalties for regions program. The minister did not want to give us that information up-front; it took us 10 or 15 minutes to get it. There was a look of shocked horror on the minister’s face when we asked, “There’s \$49 million; what does that represent?” She kept asking, “What do you mean? What is it?” Again the education minister was unable and unwilling to give us information about numbers in the budget process. It is okay if she does not know, but to have that look of shock and disbelief that we were actually asking was absolutely incredible. Of course we are going to ask about budget numbers.

I was sitting next to the member for Warnbro through that committee process in what was a most outrageous and extraordinary attack in this chamber on a member’s family. It was absolutely out of order that the member —

**Mr P.T. Miles** interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Does the member for Wanneroo support what the Minister for Education said?

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** He is refusing to support his minister.

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** He is refusing to support his minister, and I can understand why. The Minister for Education's allegation regarding the motive of the member for Warnbro in respect of his son was absolutely outrageous and extraordinary. I am surprised the Premier has not asked the Minister for Education to resign.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Resign!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** To apologise—to at least apologise.

**Mr F.A. Alban** interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I am looking forward to the contribution of the member for Swan Hills.

I am surprised that the Premier has not asked the Minister for Education to apologise. It was an extraordinary attack on a family member of the member for Warnbro.

**Mr M.W. Sutherland** interjected

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis):** Member for Mount Lawley!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Let us just go back. We all know the history of the 2001 election. We all know the history of what the Premier found to be out of order when it applied to his family, but he allowed that attack to happen to the member for Warnbro and he has not asked the Minister for Education to apologise.

Later on in the estimates hearings we clarified the issue. I asked the Minister for Education, "How did you know? How do you know which schools sons and daughters of members of this place go to?" I find it extraordinary that the minister had the information just like that! She knew just like that which school the member for Warnbro's son may or may not attend. I found that extraordinary, so I asked, "How do you know where the member's son goes?" She said, "I just know." So then I asked, "Was it someone from the Premier's office who told you?" She said, "No." I asked, "But how do you know?" She said, "I cannot recall. I don't know. I don't know. I just know." It was an attack on a family member of the member for Warnbro in relation to an issue that was of quite public significance. The suggestion that the member for Warnbro should not have followed up that issue is absolutely ridiculous. The intimidation and bullying that the minister tried on the member for Warnbro is absolutely wrong, and I cannot believe that the Premier has not asked the minister to apologise.

We had the Premier then hit—I emphasise "hit"—the then shadow education minister in 2001.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Hit?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes, you did.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** With a piece of paper on a tap of the shoulder.

**Mrs M.H. Roberts:** Member, he can't ask her to apologise because she might get upset and resign and then he'll have no-one left in his ministry!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes. The Premier hit him; it is there on TV. He hit him with a piece of paper. He hit him.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Hit him with a piece of paper! A lot can be said about Alan Carpenter but he is not such a wimp that he would be worried about being hit by a piece of paper.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Does the Premier support what the Minister for Education did?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I'm not commenting on it. I wasn't even here to hear the debate.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** He won't defend the minister.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The Premier was not here to hear the debate.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** What I will say is there were vast differences in the two circumstances.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Explain them.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Vast differences.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Explain them.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** No, I'm not going back to something over 10 years ago.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Explain them. Explain the differences.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I'm not going back to an issue in my family over 10 years ago.

Several members interjected.

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members, I am on my feet! Member for Warnbro!

**Mr P. Papalia:** You're a hypocrite!

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, I am going to call you to order for the first time today, and I am going to ask you to stand up and withdraw that comment.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Come on, apologise—up and apologise.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I withdraw.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you. Before I give the call back to the member for West Swan, I make the observation that I have given her a long bow.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the second time. I am giving the member for West Swan a long bow; 2001 had nothing to do with the process of this year's Estimates Committee B. I am going to ask her to move on.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Sure.

*Debate Resumed*

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I go back to the education estimates where the Minister for Education did not want to answer any question in relation to numbers and made an extraordinary attack on the member for Warnbro's family. It was outrageous. I felt for the member for Warnbro because it is very difficult when an attack like that is made on a member. I was sitting next to the member for Warnbro and I could understand what that attack meant, so I felt for him. Frankly, it was an extraordinary attack that the Premier does not believe was wrong. The contrast between what happened in 2001—this is the last time I will mention it—and this time is that the first time it applied to the Premier's family and this time it applied to the member for Warnbro's family, and on this side of the house it does not matter. Time and time again we have heard and seen the Premier make allegations and throw things at people on this side and we are just meant to cop it because somehow we are not worthy. But the Premier can come in and do whatever he likes and say whatever he likes time and time again; and that was the example. The Premier's favourite minister made an attack on the member for Warnbro's family and no-one on that side of the house had the decency to apologise.

I gave the opportunity to the Minister for Education to apologise at that time. I said, "How did you know?" I expected her to take that opportunity and say, "Look; I want to say first of all I apologise—it was out of order", but she did not. So it was just left there, the Premier's attack on the member for Warnbro's family, and no apology.

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Mr Acting Speaker, I have never attacked the member for Warnbro's family. The member just said, "The Premier's attack". It may be a mistake but I think she should withdraw that.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** It was a mistake—the Minister for Education's attack.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Thank you.

*Debate Resumed*

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** But the Premier supported that attack.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** In what way?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** In not asking her to apologise.

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** What a stupid comment.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Ask me a question in question time.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Does the Premier think it was wrong? He has the opportunity. Does he think it was wrong?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I'm not answering questions from you.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We will give the Premier five minutes at the end of this debate and he can tell us if he thought it was wrong.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** If you think it's a big issue, ask me a question in question time tomorrow.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 12 June 2012]

p3391i-3414a

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The Premier has time at the end of this debate. We will give you at least five minutes. That is our offer. You tell us if you think it was wrong. You will have the opportunity.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for West Swan, I am going to ask you to direct your comments to the Chair.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I am sorry, Mr Acting Speaker, we will give the Premier five minutes at the end of this debate to tell us whether he supports or rejects what the Minister for Education did.

**Dr M.D. Nahan:** You are wasting Parliament's time.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** This is a waste of Parliament time, said the member for Riverton.

**Dr M.D. Nahan:** Why don't you prepare rather than just ranting there?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Prepare?

**Dr M.D. Nahan:** Yes.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The member for Riverton obviously again supports attacks on a member's family. This happened during Estimates Committee B. I do not know where you guys were, but I was there and it happened. I saw it and I thought it was a disgrace. I want to give my colleague some time to speak as well.

**Dr M.D. Nahan** interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** As I said, it was a disgraceful attack on a member of Parliament's family member—his son. The Premier has not had the wherewithal or ability to ask the Minister for Education to apologise. We all know what that says about the standards of this Premier. He can say what he likes about us because we are the Labor side. Time and again, he has said outrageous things about people on this side of the place. Again and again, he has done it, but somehow he holds himself in high esteem. The reality is that he has issues, he has problems and he has a minister that went way out of line. We all know it. It is up to his side to get that minister to apologise to the member for Warnbro.

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro)** [5.21 pm]: I rise to address this debate on Estimates Committee B, because I, too, was there, as opposed to clowns in the back row over there on the government side who are making comment without having any reference to the reality of the situation. Let me say that there is only one person who can determine whether what was said was offensive to my family. There is only one person who can determine whether it was appropriate in my eyes for a member of the government to raise my son's school in this place as a political attack. There is only one person in here who can do that, and it is me; it is not you idiots over there.

I am deeply disappointed in the Premier's response to this issue. What happened on that night in 2001 is very applicable to this debate. I know the Premier was not there in the estimates hearing—I appreciate that—but the Premier knows full well that the vision was available and it was on ABC and Channel 9. He saw both of them. Do not tell me, Premier, that you did not hear about it. The Premier was approached by the ABC for comment and he told them that he was not available. The reality is that it was subsequently in *The West Australian* and it was online on a number of websites as well.

The situation was this: I was asking the Minister for Education about the situation at John Curtin high school, where the principal of an independent public school, in a letter to parents that I had received from three other people even before I received it as a parent, had raised health and safety issues of the children and staff at that school. I was pursuing the matter with the Minister for Education in the estimates committee, as appropriate. Rather than respond, and rather than give answers to appropriate questions at the time in estimates, where she is supposed to answer that type of material, the minister chose to bring my son into the debate. Why is this relevant? It is because the Premier has set the standard. He has set the bar when it comes to introducing families into public debate. His response is on the public record as to his attitude and the standards of public figures that he demands in relation to other people's children. I am going to quote it. I will put it in *Hansard*, because the clowns over there have not even bothered to investigate what they are talking about.

I will educate them a little about how the Premier responded in 2001. He was not confronted with the shadow minister stating where the Premier's son went to school. What he was actually asked was whether his son went to a public school. The shadow minister did not put on the public record where his son went to school. As quoted from this report in *The West Australian* online —

Mr Barnett, as education minister in the Court Government, famously berated Labor's education spokesman Alan Carpenter for raising the issue of where Mr Barnett's son attended school ...

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He did not say, “Your son goes to this school. It’s not a state school” or whatever. What he said was, “You claim that you support public education. Do you send your son to a public school?” This is a quote from the current Premier, who was then the education minister —

I won’t discuss my little boy on radio. He is not a public figure and I take great offence at you raising my child.

It’s the dirtiest, lowest thing I’ve seen in this campaign.

I am a product of government schools, I am a public figure, I will accept any criticism, any attack on me personally. You bring my family into it Alan, and ...

The Premier stepped over the line. I will tell you what, Premier: I am also a product of the public school system, and the Premier has no right to introduce my son into public debate. My son’s privacy is just as worthy of being protected as is his little boy’s. The Premier believed it was okay to berate at that time the shadow education minister and demand that he not bring the Premier’s son into the debate. The shadow education minister had not even said where his son went to school. He asked him whether he went to a public school. The Premier’s minister came into this place and told the world where my son goes to school.

I do try to protect my son from public scrutiny. We do not allow our sons to watch much in the way of news on television and public reports. But that evening when I went home, I said to my wife, “This is what happened during the day. What do you think we should do?” After a discussion, we determined that we would get him to watch the news that night so that he would be aware if he went to school the next day and was confronted with some sort of comment, some sort of observation by anybody, of where it was coming from. We sat down and watched the ABC news that night. I admire my son. He is a robust individual, but he is also pretty sensitive. In the course of watching the report, he saw the contribution from the minister in response to the member for West Swan questioning where she got the information from. The Premier’s minister shook her head and said, “I do not know.” When she was asked, “Was it from the Premier’s office?”, she said, “Oh, no; definitely not, but I do not know where it came from. I can’t recall.” My son looked at her, and do you know what he said? He said, “She’s lying, Dad.” That was his observation.

When he went to school the next day, we were concerned about how he was going to go. He came back and he was fine. But when he was going off, it is the first time we have actually had to wonder about whether he was going to be okay going off to school. It is not appropriate—Premier, you have said that—for anyone of us to introduce our families into public debate in an effort to politicise it or use it as a political weapon, and that is what your minister did. She was shamelessly introducing that. It is not a matter of a conflict of interest—the Premier knows that.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I didn’t say it was.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** She did! I might just go back a little and say what she said to me. I raised the issue of the letter home from the principal to parents. Dr Constable said —

Can I just ask you? Do you have a, as well as an interest of being the shadow minister in this area, do you have a child at the school —

Then she went on to name the school. I said “Yeah”, because I was a little bit taken aback, wondering where this might be going. She said —

Because I think that’s an interest that should be declared.

I said, “In what way?” Her response was —

Well, as a parent you have an extra interest as well.

We all know that that is not true. There is no conflict of interest from being a member of a parent body. The relevant standing order is in the blue part at the back, which the member for Victoria Park quoted earlier. Under the code of conduct, “Disclosure of conflict of interest”, paragraph (3)(f) states —

A conflict of interest does not exist where the member is only affected as a member of the public or a member of a broad class.

I say to the Premier that he knows full well that being a member of a parent body is being a member of a broad class. His minister was wrong. She was far more wrong than Alan Carpenter was in 2001. The Premier should make her apologise; he should demand that she apologise, and not just out there in the media—she should come in here and stand on her feet, face me and put on record that she was wrong. She should apologise.

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington)** [5.30 pm]: I just want to make a couple of references to things that occurred in Estimates Committee B. I draw member's attention to a question from the member for Carine to the Treasurer. He said —

My question relates to the heading Strategic Projects on page 303.

He goes on about the Perth Arena, and then he says —

Why has the cost blown out by so much?

Very importantly, he then says —

What measures has the Treasurer taken to ensure that these sorts of blow-outs do not happen in future projects?

We can very clearly see that the member for Carine was asking a question in a number of parts, and one part was about the measures the Treasurer had taken to ensure that these blow-outs do not happen in future projects. Later on, one of the Treasury officials answered and the Treasurer made a comment. The member for West Swan then asked a question about the management of cost blow-outs in future projects, and the chairman ruled her question out of order. That was clearly an incorrect decision by the chairman. The member for West Swan was following up on an answer from the Treasurer to a question about the measures the Treasurer was going to take to ensure that blow-outs would not happen in future. There followed some detailed exchanges back and forth between a number of members of the committee. That was clearly ineffectual chairmanship.

*Point of Order*

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** I am sure that the member for Cannington knows better than to reflect on decisions of the chairman. There are ways of addressing such matters, and they are certainly not being reflected in the way the member is doing so.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** On the point of order, I am trying to understand which point of order is being referred to by the Leader of the House.

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** Reflections on the chairman of the committee.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Which standing order is the Leader of the House referring to?

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** To adversely reflect on the chairman. I will give the member the number if he wants me to.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I do!

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis):** Thank you, members. Member for Cannington, before I give you the call again, I advise all members that it is not appropriate to reflect upon the Speaker or the chairman, whether in the Parliament or in the estimates committees. I ask the member for Cannington to continue, but I caution him on that.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** We can see that there was a real question that still needs to be dealt with. It should be clear in the operation of Estimates Committee B, just as with Estimates Committee A, that opposition members should be entitled to follow up on the dorothy dixers asked by government members. Government members are given pieces of paper, and they sit there and read them out and sometimes, as in this case, it is actually embarrassing to the government, because the government has stuffed up. It has actually left itself open to ridicule. The opposition needs to be able to go in and follow up on those stuff-ups to ensure that the people of Western Australia understand the way that the government is trying to hide the truth.

I turn now to another issue that was raised in Estimates Committee B with the Minister for Local Government. I asked the following question in relation to budget paper No 2 —

How many times has the Minister for Energy written to the Minister for Local Government regarding the underground power project and the system of issuing special rates notices to people who are paying for the underground power project? What issues led the Minister for Energy to seek the Minister for Local Government's assistance and what effect does that have on the funding of the underground power project?

The minister replied that he could not answer the question off the top of his head, and then made some other comments. He then suggested that maybe Mr Jolly could answer the question—Mr Jolly being one of the officials of the Department of Local Government. Mr Jolly then gave a detailed answer. The government knew that councils had been unlawfully issuing rates notices for the underground power project for a number of years and brought legislation into the chamber to change the law to retrospectively authorise the unlawful activities of

Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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the councils. The government never told anybody about this, and it took the operation of Estimates Committee B to discover this subterfuge. I do not understand how a government that prides itself on being open and accountable could have allowed such clear subterfuge to take place. The minister never told the people of Western Australia that one of the purposes of amending the Local Government Act was to retrospectively authorise unlawful behaviour by councils. That is extraordinary; it is good that we have been able to mostly get to the bottom of that issue through Estimates Committee B, but it reflects on what is happening with this government. Members have raised a number of issues about the operation of these committees and the fact that the government is not doing its job to ensure that information is being provided to the opposition. Members can see very clearly, through this example, why we need to make sure that these committees operate in a strong and very solid manner, to ensure that the people of Western Australia are able to find out this very vital information.

**MR J.C. KOBELKE (Balcatta)** [5.36 pm]: I wish to comment on matters that unfolded in Estimates Committee B, particularly in relation to Treasury but also, if I have time, in relation to the Department of Education. As members have indicated, we want to leave time for the Premier to respond and to see if he is going to offer an apology.

I turn first of all to the Treasury portfolio. I have a great deal of respect for the former Treasurer, the member for Bateman. Obviously, he answered Treasury questions in Estimates Committee B. I do not always agree with his answers, and I sometimes think he obfuscates and avoids answering questions; but because he is so competent, he generally tends to try to answer questions. I had a particular interest in a number of Treasury issues during the Estimates Committee B hearings; but I am very concerned that the Treasurer, in answering questions in Estimates Committee B, perhaps ran into issues with the Premier that caused him to resign so that he could not be here for this debate and the third reading debate. It means that we cannot follow up on some of the things that he said. It may be that some of the things he said sowed the seeds of his falling out with the Premier, and he decided that he could no longer work with the Premier and had to resign.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** That's not true.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** It clearly has nothing to do with preselection; that is a smokescreen. I will go through a few things in a moment, but either the Treasurer said something during estimates that put him offside with the Premier and led to the bust-up between the two of them or something happened after the estimates hearings, which they obviously cannot talk about here.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Balcatta, I am going to give you the same direction I have given about six times in the last hour about the opportunity to deal with the process and procedures of Estimates Committee B. That is all I want to hear, member for Balcatta.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I thank the Acting Speaker for his guidance; that is what I am doing. Let us take an example of what I was talking about in general. The then Treasurer was asked about the public sector cap approved for 2012–13. He answered, in part —

It is 37 763 full-time equivalent positions. That figure excludes operational staff in the Department of Health, Department of Education and WA Police, which are agencies to which this rule will not be applied. Excluding that number, which is a very large number, the 2011–12 cap for FTEs for all the other agencies is 37 763.

Today during question time, when the Premier was asked about that, he said that he disagreed.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I didn't say that at all.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** Again, this Premier says one thing and then, five minutes later, he says, "I didn't say it". There is no honesty with this Premier, and that might be why the former Treasurer fell out with him. The former Treasurer is a competent man who could not go on with the deceit created by this Premier. I would like to give the former Treasurer the benefit of the doubt; it might have been because he had things to say that were honest and true in answering these questions that led him to a bust-up with the Premier, which meant that he had to resign and has stepped down using this subterfuge of wishing to nominate for preselection with the federal Liberal Party.

This problem of the competent ex-Treasurer was driven home in another area.

**Mr C.J. Barnett** interjected.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** Why did he resign?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** He resigned because he's going to seek preselection for the Liberal Party in the seat of Pearce in the federal election.

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**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** Why is he leaving halfway through a budget when there is egg all over the Premier's face and the government is in disarray? He could have simply put in his nomination and remained as Treasurer for two weeks until the budget process was finished.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Because he is a highly proper person and he has made the right decision.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** There is nothing improper in finishing off the budget he introduced in this house. The proper thing for the ex-Treasurer is to carry through the budget, see it through Parliament and put in his nomination. That is the proper thing to do —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members! Member for Balcatta, the proper thing for you to do is to direct your comments about the process and procedure for Estimates Committee B, not about anything that has happened subsequently.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I was doing that, but you have to understand that in debate, if the Premier interjects on me, I should be given some leeway to respond to the interjection; that is all I was doing.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** If you do not tell the truth, you will get an interjection.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** What did I say that was not true?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** About some sort of split or disagreement between the former Treasurer and me—absolutely untrue.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** Why would he resign and leave the government in disarray —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Balcatta, I will not repeat myself, but if you do not come back to the topic, I will sit you down.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** The other issue I have followed for some time is the Oakajee project. The Premier has made a very good effort to mess it up so that it is put off further. In Estimates Committee B the then Treasurer had to answer questions regarding the \$339 million for Oakajee that, again, the Premier wants to play tricks with, and the then Treasurer was dragged along. Mr Porter said —

The Oakajee special purpose account improved the debt situation by about \$339 million inside the four years of debt ...

This Premier has said that we have this special Oakajee account; it has no money in it and it does not exist, but we will talk about it. We will create this false image. This is a Premier who does not believe in forward estimates, but he believes beyond the forward estimates. We cannot have an account in the forward estimates because this Premier has gone, "That's too hard", but the Premier says that we will have this bogus Oakajee special account with \$339 million written in smoke in the sky beyond the forward estimates, and the people of Geraldton are asked to believe him. This is a con. It might have been that the last Treasurer in answering it realised that he could not tell the fibs this Premier wanted him to tell. That might have been the reason they split up. Mr Speaker, this is directly in Estimates Committee B; the former Treasurer had to try to defend this indefensible pie in the sky Oakajee special account, which does not exist—no money—and is not in the forward estimates. He had to try to protect the Premier who stuffed it up in a big way by interfering in private companies that were really gung-ho to do Oakajee. Because he has dictated to them and pushed them around, we have seen the whole time line slip back and back, to his embarrassment. He talks about this pie in the sky \$339 million, which is not even in the forward estimates. It is a joke. Only this Premier would have the arrogance to think that something that is absolutely meaningless could be sold to the people of this state. It is absolutely meaningless nonsense. The former Treasurer, in answering questions in Estimates Committee B, had to be honest about it.

Again, we see that the former Treasurer, in being a competent and, I believe, basically honest person, could not go along with this fabrication that the Premier has put together. I suggest that out of Estimates Committee B we have seen the seeds of why we have this bust-up in the government and a government in total disarray.

I turn to education —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** No, you do not. I am going to sit you down, member for Balcatta. You know I have given you fair warning about talking about the particular issue of the process and the procedures of Estimates Committee B. I am going to give someone else the call.

**MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn)** [5.45 pm]: I thank the member for Balcatta for the time that he has given me in the house tonight. I rise to speak on Estimates Committee B and the incidents that have occurred there, because I am certainly disappointed with what went on. I will refer to two things. Firstly, in every division of both budget

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Estimates Committee B and Estimates Committee A, members of the opposition asked the ministers about the cuts that would be made to their portfolios as a result of the efficiency dividend drive announced by the Treasurer. Similar responses were given by every single minister to the questions that were put forward by the shadow ministers in both committee A and committee B. The identical response was, “Well, we haven’t exactly worked out what the impacts of those efficiency dividends will be for each portfolio and, therefore, we cannot give you any detailed information on the impact of those cuts.” From Estimates Committee B, I can tell members that in the Department of Corrective Services, division 65, significant cuts to prisons will take place in Western Australia. This is a prison system that is already groaning at the seams with more prisoners held than ever before. Nearly 5 000 prisoners are being held in conditions that have been built for 3 500 prisoners. That is not through an attitude of “You can jam more prisoners into a cell by putting in another bed”; the prison was built for only that many prisoners. The workshops, the canteens, the gyms and everything that is in there were built for 3 500 prisoners and the government has put 5 000 people in there.

The government is undermining the fabric of the buildings and putting a massive strain on the resources that the poor superintendents and all the prison officers are trying to use. On top of that, massive cuts will be made to the prison system as a result of the efficiency dividends, and the minister would not or could not respond. The last time efficiency dividend cuts similar to the ones in this budget were made, the ministers in those budget estimates in 2009 knew exactly how those efficiency dividends would impact on their portfolios; they had answers to provide to Parliament. For example, the Minister for Water knew that the \$700 million cut to his own portfolio would result in \$100 million being taken out for infill sewerage; he came and told us. But for some unknown reason, this year, with the 2.5 per cent efficiency dividend cuts, none of the ministers knew exactly how those cuts would be applied. I found that an outrageous abuse of budget estimate hearings. We were there as the opposition trying to find out exactly how the next financial year’s budget will impact on the people of Western Australia and the ministers of this government were literally refusing to answer those questions. They gave a standard answer across all portfolios. I found that a complete abuse of the process.

The other abuse of the process is that despite the directions given by the Speaker to the committee chairs that really the opposition should be given a little more leeway in asking questions in the committee process, during the session for the Department of Corrective Services, division 65, the government members present continued to ask dorothy dixers. The minister responsible, the Minister for Corrective Services, continued to rabbit on at length to use up that time as much as he possibly could to avoid answering questions from the opposition.

That is an abuse of the parliamentary process, and I will be raising this matter once again with the Speaker, because neither the committee chairs of that particular division nor the minister carried out the wishes of the Speaker of the house.

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [5.50 pm]: I will not detain the chamber any longer than necessary, but obviously this has been a robust debate this evening, and managed well by you, Mr Acting Speaker, and some serious issues have been raised. The issue that has been of greatest note in this particular debate is the issue that was raised by the member for Warnbro, and other members, around the conduct of Estimates Committee B and the issues that arose out of that debate. We note that the member for Warnbro has invited the Premier to make comment about the allegations surrounding that particular debate, and in the spirit of this particular debate, and to provide the Premier with an opportunity to address this particular issue, and to offer an apology on behalf of the Barnett government to the member for Warnbro —

*Point of Order*

**Mr P.T. MILES:** Mr Acting Speaker, just on relevance, we covered this earlier this afternoon, and I am just asking you if you could rule on whether this is relevant to the debate that we are having.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis):** I am going to allow the member for Kwinana to continue.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, and it is relevant—it goes specifically to the proceedings of committee A and the manner in which that committee was conducted.

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** We are talking about committee B! Wake up, Roger!

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Sorry; committee B. So on that point, we will sit down and we will allow the Premier the rest of the time to provide an explanation to this chamber.

**MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Treasurer)** [5.53 pm]: I am not going to respond to all the issues that members opposite might raise. There was question time today. If this is such a burning issue, members, whether

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it be the member for Warnbro or anyone else, had the opportunity to ask me a question. They decided not to do so.

**Ms R. Saffioti:** Why not say sorry?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Sorry. Members opposite gave me three minutes. If the member for Warnbro is so offended—I doubt that he is—then I would suggest that the member for Warnbro ask me a question in question time tomorrow.

**Mr P. Papalia:** You are an absolute hypocrite!

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** No, I do not need a point of order. Member for Warnbro, I am going to ask you to stand and withdraw that comment.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I withdraw.

*Debate Resumed*

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members, I am going to put the question.

**Mr T.G. Stephens:** Why? Has he closed the debate on this?

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** No, there are three minutes left on the clock. Member for Pilbara, are you seeking the call?

**Mr T.G. Stephens:** Yes, I will seek the call.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The member for Pilbara.

**MR T.G. STEPHENS (Pilbara)** [5.54 pm]: Thank you very much, Mr Acting Speaker. What an unfortunate development in this debate that the Premier should respond in that way to points that are legitimately raised by members in the consideration of this report of Estimates Committee B. The member for Warnbro, and other members, have quite legitimately pointed out the way these issues arose during the consideration of the budget, and the offence that is caused. The hypocrisy of members opposite in reference to this point is absolutely apparent to anyone watching the debate. Why the Premier should think it is incumbent upon people to have to ask the question in question time, where there is a perfectly legitimate alternative forum, and that is this debate at this time, which gives the Premier the moment to respond —

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** No, it does not! This is not a question about the Premier's particular time in the committee. You are talking about another minister.

**Mr T.G. STEPHENS:** The Premier has the opportunity to respond. It is his government, his minister. He can insist, if he wishes —

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** You are just pulling a stunt again!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member, what I am going to advise you is that this is the opportunity not to talk about another member's contribution, but to talk about the procedure in committee B.

**Mr T.G. STEPHENS:** In the consideration of committee B before this house, we have had contributions by a number of members, including the Premier and now the Acting Treasurer—or is it the interim Treasurer, or the part-time Treasurer? I do not know what his current title is.

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** The fly in, fly out Treasurer!

**Mr R.H. Cook:** It is called plan D!

**Mr T.G. STEPHENS:** The passing parade of Treasurers that he is part of.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** The passing parade through the CCC that was the hallmark of your government! You were sacked, remember!

Several members interjected.

**Mr T.G. STEPHENS:** You just lied to the house, by the way, Premier, when you —

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis):** Leader of the House, I do not require your point of order. Member for Pilbara, I am going to direct you to withdraw that comment.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 12 June 2012]

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Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Colin Barnett; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Tom Stephens

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**Mr T.G. STEPHENS:** I withdraw and say that the Premier —

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** No, you will not; you will withdraw and sit down, or get kicked out!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Leader of the House, I do not need your assistance on this.

I need you to withdraw without interjection from anyone and without qualification.

**Mr T.G. STEPHENS:** I withdraw without qualification and say that the Premier —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** No, member!

**Mr T.G. STEPHENS:** I withdraw, and then I am going on to make —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** No. “I withdraw—full stop” is what I want to hear.

**Mr T.G. STEPHENS:** I withdraw full stop.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member, I am going to call you to order for the first time.

**Mr T.G. STEPHENS:** That is what you just asked me to do!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Do not get smart with me! You know the point I am going to make. I am going to direct you for the last time to stand and withdraw, and to stop commenting.

**Mr T.G. STEPHENS:** I will just get my composure! I withdraw.

*Debate Resumed*

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members, that concludes the debate. The question is that the report of Estimates Committee B be adopted.

Question put and passed.