

PUBLIC SECTOR — CORE SERVICES

Motion

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [10.16 am] — without notice: I move —

That this Council condemns the Barnett government for failing to adequately provide core services, including those identified in the Auditor General's "Second Public Sector Performance Report", in favour of big projects around the Perth CBD.

This is a motion about a government that has lost sight of its key and core priorities, led by a Premier who seems to be obsessed with and perhaps bedazzled by wanting to focus on big projects in the Perth inner city area and is losing sight of what is of importance and what matters to people living in the suburbs around Perth.

Most recently we have seen that this Premier is quite happy to spend \$1.5 million of taxpayers' money to talk about his version of what needs to happen in the CBD. Meanwhile, services to people in the suburbs are being left to fall apart and not being delivered properly. The Auditor General's report that was tabled yesterday is a good example, but certainly not the only example, of how this government has lost sight of the priorities that are important to the people of Western Australia. Members will be aware that this government introduced a new system of managing the delivery of day-to-day maintenance for more than 40 000 properties held by the Department of Housing across WA. At the time that announcement was made, we were told that the system was being changed so that, instead of the department managing the contractors directly, three head contractors would be put in place who would then manage the rest of the contracts. We were told at the time that this was about generating "significant savings"—the words used by the minister of the day in his media release—it would introduce significant savings and provide a more efficient service to the tenants of public housing. Years on from the announcement nothing could be further from the truth. Not only has it not saved any money, but also it has cost money. We still do not know the final cost of how much has to be spent to put the system back in place. It has certainly not resulted in a more efficient service to tenants. I have some examples from my electorate, and I am sure other members have examples from their electorates.

In May 2010, the messages started coming through to electorate offices. One of my colleagues, the member for Collie–Preston, raised this in the other place at that time.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: When he wasn't pinching marron.

Hon SUE ELLERY: The funny thing about that is that the minister thinks that is a criticism that works against the member for Collie–Preston, but the more she talks about what he did with the marron, the higher the regard he is held in by the constituents of Collie. Keep having a go but it does not work against the member for Collie–Preston.

Hon Ken Travers: Let's talk about the drink-driving offences of Liberal Party members of Parliament if you want to go through that sort of detail.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Mr President, let us just concentrate on the real issues; but if Hon Robyn McSweeney thinks that having a go at the member for Collie–Preston like that in any way loses him votes, she should keep going because I can tell her that it does the opposite.

Back in May 2010 the member for Collie–Preston raised the issue in the other place that he was getting messages from local contractors—painters, carpenters and electricians—who were very concerned about the proposal the government was suggesting for managing the contracts for looking after Homeswest properties in the south west. It turns out that the things that those people were telling him back then came to pass. These contractors had been providing those services to the Department of Housing for over 20 years. They were concerned that they would be pushed aside for other contractors, or that they would be making less money out of the project because Transfield would take out of the system its share of any profit available.

Problems emerged very early on, which the Auditor General makes really clear in his report tabled yesterday. No business plan was properly tested; no tests were done on the information technology and communications systems that were to be in place; no trials and no pilots were conducted; and no key performance indicators were put in place until June 2011. No system therefore was put in place to measure whether this system, which we were told was intended to save money and would provide a more efficient service for tenants of public housing, was doing that. No KPIs were put in place to measure whether those things could in fact be achieved. The core business of the Department of Housing is to maintain its stock and to ensure that it is providing safe housing to public tenants. What happened was a new system with no checks and balances and no plan. Tenants ended up having to put up with long delays to get maintenance done to the houses that they and their families live in; work

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was done very late; shonky and unsafe repairs were done; and there was a consequential waste of taxpayers' money.

The Auditor General's report tabled yesterday identifies a litany of overpayments and underpayments. The Auditor General makes the point that \$3.36 million worth of potential overcharges and noncompliance with job orders has been identified so far. But the shocking thing is that the government is still reviewing almost another year's worth of job orders so that amount is likely to grow. The Auditor General makes the point that although steps have been taken to address some of the issues that have been raised in the rollout of this program, others remain to be addressed. KPIs around performance still have not been put in place. KPIs around timeliness have been put in place but not around whether or not the jobs are being done to the quality required. The mess of this program was oversighted by several different ministers. First of all it was Minister for Housing Buswell; then it was Minister for Housing Marmion; then it was back to Minister for Housing Buswell; and now it is Minister for Housing Redman. As a result of all of those changes and the government putting in place a system it did not properly plan for, the public of Western Australia is having to pay more because jobs that were not done properly in the first place have to be fixed; it is having to spend more on consultants such as KPMG to come in and tell the government how to fix the system that it did not put in place properly in the first place; and tenants are still putting up with shonky and late maintenance jobs on their house.

The Auditor General found that in order to clear a backlog of unpaid maintenance invoices, the department, in its wisdom, decided to process \$50 million worth of maintenance orders from November 2010 through to November 2011 without carrying out any inspection prior to authorising the payments. That is a direct breach of the Treasurer's Instructions—the Treasurer who was, during the course of this debacle, the Minister for Housing twice. The Department of Housing, therefore, was not following the Treasurer's Instructions when the Treasurer happened to be also the Minister for Housing for two periods during the four years of that debacle of a project. The department decided that the best way to clear the backlog was to just pay. It decided: let us stop the local contractors and small businesses complaining that they are not getting paid on time—a fair enough complaint from those businesses—but let us not check whether the work ordered, for which invoices were provided, was done in accordance with the instructions given for the work on the house in the first place. The department was, therefore, in direct breach of the Treasurer's Instructions. The Auditor General's report, as I have said, makes the point that some things have been improved and check systems have been put in place, but it remains the case at the end of 2012 that Housing is still reviewing and checking almost another year's worth of job orders.

In respect of housing, the government's core business is its housing tenants who cannot afford to live in the private market. The real picture for these Western Australians is that the government was not in fact watching over them at all. Work was delayed, work was overpaid and shonky work was done on the repair jobs on the houses that they and their families live in. That is the real picture in the suburbs and towns where these people live. I think this government wants WA to be dazzled and seduced by big, expensive projects in the CBD, which explains the allocation of \$1.5 million allegedly in the name of telling us about traffic changes. However, when we look at the website, we cannot see a hell of a lot of information about impending traffic changes. Instead, we are getting \$430 million spent on the East Perth riverside project and the Perth Waterfront project. Meanwhile, the Department of Housing has to find an additional \$1.2 million to take corrective action to fix the problems with the system it put in place without any fore-planning or measure in place to make sure that the system would deliver the things the government claimed it would. The government still has not fixed the system completely. We know that there are potential overcharges worth \$3.36 million, and the Auditor General predicts that that figure will only grow. We have been therefore throwing millions of dollars on shonky and inadequate care of public housing tenants, hundreds of millions of dollars on projects in the CBD—a very city-centric focus—and basically trying to do too many things at the same time. I think the Barnett and Grylls government cannot see what folks —

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! It is distracting for any member on their feet to get another debate raging around the chamber in whatever form it might take. Let the member on their feet, whoever it may be, have the opportunity to make their comments.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Thanks, Mr President. I think that the Barnett and Grylls government cannot see what is happening for folks in the suburbs who want this government to get core service delivery right. I think most Western Australians think that if that means fewer shiny baubles in the inner-city CBD project, so be it.

The Auditor General found that the risk of fraud remains. It needs to be made absolutely clear that the Auditor General did not find any fraud in his reporting on the work. He was looking at the relationship between the Department of Housing and how it managed its relationship with the head contractors. He did not look further

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down the line at how the head contractors managed the probity of their financial arrangements with the contractors delivering the services on the ground. The question still remains: was fraud involved? That question was not answered about the relationship between the head contractors and those they subcontract to. The Auditor General found that there had been no adequate planning for the rollout of the new program, no risk analysis, no communication and that no key systems had been put in place. So, none of those things was driving the introduction of this policy. If the government did not put in place measures to ensure that this new system would work properly, what then drove it to put this in place? If the government had not done the risk analysis or any of the planning and had not put in place basic communication systems between the department and the head contractor and between the head contractor and its subcontractors—if the government did not make sure all of those things were in place—what then drove the government to do this? It seems to me it could only have been some ideological commitment to put government at arm's length from the delivery of services to public housing tenants. That is the only conclusion we can reach, because the government did absolutely no planning to ensure it carried out its key obligation to the people who live in public housing—housing that is owned by the state; that is, to live in safe accommodation. The government put itself at arm's length from its obligations. I can see no reason that a government would do that, if it did not test that the system would work, other than it had some ideological belief that that was the right thing to do; and whether or not there were systems in place to check that was irrelevant to the ideology. I cannot see any other reason why the government would do that. If the government was convinced that the system would save, I think, \$20 million—do not believe me, I will check.

Hon Simon O'Brien: We won't.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will ensure that the minister does not need to rely on my word, and I will rely on the word of the minister of the day, who said that it would save \$20 million over three years. It certainly has not done that. It has cost us a significant amount of money. Meanwhile, the government can find \$1.5 million of taxpayers' money to direct us to a beautiful shiny animated website to tell us how fantastic things are in the CBD.

Hon Simon O'Brien: That is not its purpose and you know it. That is in contrast to the umpteen millions you spent when you were in government!

Hon SUE ELLERY: The contrast that needs to be made is why the government is spending \$1.5 million on that website when it has lost \$3.36 million in a shonky, poorly planned and poorly thought out system to look after those people who live in public housing because they cannot afford to live in the private rental market; these are the people who need our help the most. Why does the government not make sure that those people are looked after properly, instead of spending our money on those kinds of ads?

I am running out of time, but I want to touch on some examples that have been brought to my attention in the South Metropolitan Region for some public housing tenants. The *Fremantle Herald* did a good job of following this story through the debacle that has been the government's new way of protecting public housing tenants. In June 2010 media statement the then Minister for Housing, Minister Marmion, told the people of the South Metropolitan Region that Transfield would be responsible for maintaining state public housing as part of a \$200 million contract. An article in the local paper first brought to our attention what occurred at a block of apartments in Fremantle. It referred to a number of requests for maintenance by this particular lady and her neighbours that were going unattended for weeks. This is work that should have been completed within 14 days. If it was a priority job, it would need to be completed within 48 hours, and if it was an emergency it would need to be done within three hours. Instead, those things that were prioritised as emergencies were taking weeks, and people were living with broken drains that were causing flooding to rise as high as their ankles because there was no run-off. There were mudslides during winter, and security lights near the car park had been broken for more than five months. There were hot water problems, which are supposed to be fixed within 48 hours, but this lady waited 15 days without hot water under this fabulous new system that was designed to provide better service to public housing tenants—or so we were told by the minister. Another example that I have is a disability pensioner who was worried about the security risk to her because her fence was broken. She was told that she would need to wait eight months to get her fence fixed. How is that better service to public housing tenants? It is not; it is appalling.

Another article in the *Fremantle Herald* states that the tradies who were engaged started to tell people that they were being instructed to bump up their prices. One tradie told someone in Fremantle that he had been told he needed to charge an extra 15 per cent. The Department of Housing was taking so long to pay their bills under this new system that he needed to bump up his charge by 15 per cent so that tradies would eventually cover what they had lost. Government members might not think that trying to get something as simple as a functional clothesline is a huge priority, but when someone has to live without one for a while, and they are on a low income, it does make a difference.

I am running out of time, but this motion is about a government that has lost sight of the real priorities. The basic business of government is to provide core services. In the case of the Department of Housing that is ensuring that public housing tenants can live in safe housing. This new way of delivering on the maintenance contract has been a debacle from the beginning. It still remains to be seen how much more money this will cost the taxpayers of Western Australia, and accordingly I think it is only right and proper that the house condemns the government for its failure.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Minister for Education) [10.38 am]: The government certainly will not be supporting this motion. I will refer to a couple of areas in my portfolios that are specific to the core service areas. Then I will refer specifically to housing, which was identified in the Auditor General's report. To suggest, first of all, that the government is failing to adequately provide core services, particularly those identified in the Auditor General's "Second Public Sector Performance Report 2012" in favour of big projects around the Perth CBD is just nonsensical. This government has spent hundreds upon hundreds of millions of dollars in the outer metropolitan area and in regional and remote areas of the state in providing more services than they have ever had before. The government stands proud on that record.

As a government, over the last four years we have provided two areas in particular with a tremendous number of opportunities for all Western Australians; that is, in the portfolio areas of education, and training and workforce development. They are two of the key core service areas of this state. If we cannot provide quality education for our students and quality training opportunities for students and people out of post-compulsory education, we have failed as a government; and we certainly have not done that. Over the last four years there has been a significant increase in the number of people who have been directly involved in training throughout Western Australia. In effect, that is a core service that provides opportunities for people right throughout the state, regardless of whether they are in mainstream training or in groups that are marginalised in the community. We have provided them with training opportunities, therefore, a qualification and then a seamless transition into the workplace. As a result of a number of the initiatives that this government has taken, the figures for training have been extraordinary. For example, in 2008–09 there were 37 249 apprentices and trainees. There are now over 45 000 apprentices and trainees. That is a significant increase in the number of trainees and apprentices. In addition, course enrolments have increased from 130 303 in 2008 to 145 000 by this year. Again, that is a significant increase in the number of trainees and apprentices, or those people directly involved in training.

Hon Ljiljana Ravlich interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I want to remind members not to conduct their own debate across the chamber when somebody else is on their feet.

Hon PETER COLLIER: From 2003 to 2008 there was an increase in student curriculum hours of 8.1 per cent. From 2008 to 2011, over just three years, there was an increase of 26.6 per cent. Those figures in themselves stand as testament to the fact that the initiatives that this government has introduced in training in particular have been overwhelmingly successful. We have provided core service delivery to Western Australians through a number of means. We have given training the status that it so richly deserves and that it has never had before. We have sent an unambiguous message to students in our schools that a career pathway through training is a treasured possession. Someone should not feel diminished or any less significant if they choose a career pathway through training rather than academia. We now have 11 state training providers, not 10, because we have taken on our eleventh state training provider, the Goldfields Institute of Technology, in my hometown of Kalgoorlie. Each of those training organisations is now autonomous in the decisions it makes. They are not generic in the TAFE brand. They now have their own identities. They have been provided with a lot more autonomy than ever before. They are making decisions that impact upon their particular communities and cohorts.

State training providers have been given opportunities to provide training opportunities for Western Australians in a raft of areas. That has been identified through Skilling WA, which identifies a number of pillars to assist those who are marginalised in the community; for example, those with disabilities, mature age members of the community who have no qualifications and, in particular, Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people are one of the most marginalised groups in our community and have been given an overwhelming amount of attention by this government. The "Training together — working together" initiative, which was initiated by this government, provides core service delivery for one of the most marginalised groups in our community. As a result of the "Training together — working together" initiative, we have five dedicated Aboriginal Workforce Development Centres. Never before has that level of attention been delivered to the original inhabitants of this great nation of ours. The Aboriginal Workforce Development Centres are in Murray Street, Perth—that is a wonderful centre and I invite all members to look at it one day—Broome, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Bunbury. Those centres work with Aboriginal people, employers and government groups to make sure that we remove the barriers and assist by providing support mechanisms to Aboriginal people through training and a seamless transition into the

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workplace. As a direct result of those initiatives, including a broad-based mentoring scheme, from 2008 to 2011 we have seen an increase of 24.3 per cent in Aboriginal vocational education and training client numbers as opposed to an increase of 4.43 per cent from 2003 to 2008. That is a significant improvement in providing core service delivery for one of the most marginalised groups in our community. That has been overwhelmingly successful.

To assist new Australians and members in the regions, we now have 14 Workforce Development Centres throughout Western Australia. There are eight in the regions and six in the metropolitan area, including one for culturally and linguistically diverse members of our community and one for ex-offenders. Those centres assist people into the workforce and assist new Australians to integrate into our community. They have been working very, very well indeed and provide a core service for members of our community. People who perhaps have no qualifications, are mature aged, dejected with their employment or unemployed can come in and get information on training and employment opportunities. Then they can be assisted into employment. Our 14 Workforce Development Centres are working extraordinarily well. Those are just a few areas in which this government has been very proactive in providing a very, very key core service delivery for all Western Australians.

Another area in which we have been very proactive has been education. We have made significant improvements in education to ensure that —

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I beg your pardon.

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is exactly the motion. It reads “provide core services, including those identified”.

Hon Ken Travers: In reference to yesterday’s report.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It says “including those identified in the Auditor General’s report”. Read the motion. I am going to talk about it!

Several members interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: The opposition should read its own motion.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I will be the judge of whether it is relevant or not. If you have a really serious question about that, there is a way to go about doing that via a point of order, not via an interjection or a slanging match across the chamber.

Hon PETER COLLIER: If members opposite had been listening, they would know that I am addressing the motion. I am looking at those areas that are specific to core services and I will talk about housing in a moment, as I said in my introduction. We have made significant inroads in education. We have provided probably the greatest revolution in education in this nation—independent public schools. They have empowered local communities to ensure communities are now part of the decision-making process in our schools. They have been overwhelmingly successful. Of our public schools, 255 are now independent public schools. Schools are climbing over each other to ensure that they can be part of this great revolution in education.

We have been extraordinarily proactive in providing support in pastoral care in schools for members of our community who need support. It is part of our key core service delivery. For example, an additional \$3 million is for curriculum and re-engagement in education—CARE—schools for students who are disengaged from the community. We are assisting those members of the community to make sure they are provided with very, very valuable tools for enhancement in education and support mechanisms for pastoral care and training.

In addition to that, we have provided an additional 60 school psychologists in our schools to support teachers and students in the delivery of education and moving into the workplace. The chaplaincy program has been phenomenally successful. More than 600 of our public schools now have access to a chaplain. Again, we are providing support mechanisms in our education system. We have taken education back. It was in a very, very dark place prior to this government coming into office. There were real issues with the curriculum —

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Ljiljana Ravlich interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I beg your pardon.

Withdrawal of Remark

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Hon PETER COLLIER: I ask the honourable member to withdraw that last comment that she made.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Why? It's true!

The PRESIDENT: Order! I could not distinguish any particular comment because there were so many interjections, so I cannot make a judgement on whether it was unparliamentary. However, the convention is that if a member requests something to be withdrawn, it is up to the member to decide whether they withdraw it.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I said it and I withdraw it.

Debate Resumed

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is very difficult when people have to get personal when we are dealing with an issue of fact.

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I did not say a word, Mr Travers.

Hon Sue Ellery: You did so.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I did not.

The PRESIDENT: Minister, sit down.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Sorry.

The PRESIDENT: When whoever is in the chair seeks to maintain order, the member on their feet should resume their seat. The next step, which I do not want to go to, is for me to stand. That is when I am really serious! I am just "serious" now, not "really serious". Let us continue the debate on the lines of an orderly debate.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I say to the Leader of the Opposition in response to her interjection, I did not utter a word when she spoke. Having said that, education is in a much better place now as a result of this government's initiatives. We have provided quality core services in a very, very key area of Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! One member is trying to make a speech and 14 others are trying to make some sort of contribution between themselves across the chamber. For a start, Hansard has no chance of recording all that, and nor should they, because they are unruly interjections. Let the member on their feet make the point. You know the rules in this debate; we will give every member and every group in Parliament an opportunity to put their point of view.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Thank you, Mr President. As I said, those two key areas, in terms of providing job, training and educational opportunities, are key core service areas of the state. This government has been very proactive and successful in those areas and has provided quality delivery for all Western Australians.

I would like to make a few comments about the Auditor General's report, particularly with regard to Housing. The issues of the early days of the head contractor maintenance model are history, and that has been identified. We acknowledge them. Thanks to the review by the Office of the Auditor General, we have now rectified the problems and moved on to better service delivery. The OAG assessed Housing's documentation and found that Housing had appropriately investigated and resolved the issues. The OAG did not find any evidence of fraud, and the Leader of the Opposition actually acknowledged that. The July 2012 housing maintenance control framework was fully operational and sufficient for issuing, monitoring, paying and quality-assuring job orders, with up to 20 000 per month. The department has reviewed its procedures, training and internal communication for field staff in relation to the head contractor maintenance model. Any changes are communicated to staff via weekly updates and published on the department's internal website. The OAG found that controls over payment of job orders were adequate and had been recently enhanced, and that head contractor quality assurance processes are sound. Housing will make greater use of its maintenance information to identify patterns of activity that may indicate risk of fraud. Housing has addressed instances of head contractor noncompliance by resolving issues or commencing the recouping of payments. Almost \$1 million has been recouped to date.

All maintenance jobs are assessed through the Housing Direct contractor centre, regardless of the category. Routine maintenance has a 14-day target and includes repairs to gutters, broken cupboard doors and cracked glass. Under this category, the health, safety and security of tenants is not compromised and the property is not at risk of any further damage. Priority maintenance has a 24-hour target and includes cases where there is impaired use of the property or where a delay could result in further damage and increased costs, such as broken windows, a leaking roof or hot-water system failure. Emergency maintenance requires a three-hour target when it is

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necessary to protect the health, safety or security of tenants or prevent further damage to a property, and includes electrical faults, gas leaks and burst water pipes.

In response to the points of concern highlighted in the review, the department will produce a program of works to encompass all outstanding items or areas where improvements are warranted. This program will be overseen at executive level and there is a commitment to report back to the OAG, initially after six months, to inform of progress. That is in direct response to the report itself.

Having said all that, and I will conclude now, I feel very comfortable being a member of this government. I feel that this government has been extremely proactive in providing an enormous amount of funds, particularly for those in our community who are disadvantaged or marginalised. The significant amount of money that has been given to non-profit organisations is second to none. In terms of providing opportunities for education and training for those who are marginalised, our efforts in this area are second to none. As a direct result of that, the notion that we have ignored core service industries is without foundation. As I said, we will continue to steam ahead in the years ahead to make sure that all members of the Western Australian community benefit from the attributes that this state provides.

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [10.53 am]: It might come as a shock to Hon Peter Collier, but the electorate is not particularly interested in what makes him feel comfortable; what the electorate is interested in is where their basic core services have gone after four years of the Barnett Liberal–National government. I am pleased to support this motion today condemning the Barnett government for failing to adequately provide core services in favour of big projects around the Perth CBD. I think Hon Sue Ellery was perhaps being a little charitable in her introductory remarks when she spoke about the Barnett government having lost sight of its key priorities. I am not sure that it ever had those key priorities. If ever there was a government elected to office with no platform and no policies, it was this one.

What we have seen over the last four years is the gradual unravelling of service delivery in both the Perth metropolitan area and the regions. Other members have spoken at length in this place about the Bigger Picture tactic that the government is trying to hide behind. It must distress the government's metropolitan members to have to be out there talking all the time about the Bigger Picture, because those metro members know that what the community is worried about is the fact that there are millions and millions of dollars going on big city projects when core services in the suburbs are falling apart. Indeed, billions of dollars are going on a football stadium, on flash high-rise developments around the metropolitan area and on the waterfront, and a further \$1.5 million is going on the advertising campaign that is spruiking those infrastructure projects. I do not think that the government's website is so flashy, actually; I think it is distinctly clunky and boring. The other remarkable thing about that website is that there is no information on how much any of this is costing and no information about how ordinary people who are going about their business in Perth are going to be impacted by the construction of these projects; there is just a series of slightly sinister-looking pictures of ghost buildings —

Hon Ken Travers: That won't be built for another 10 years.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: — that will not be built for another 10 years, as Hon Ken Travers said. Added to that, this week we saw the exposure of the Barnett government's spending of more than \$70 million on advertising of its own public authorities over the past four years. In the last financial year alone, up to May this year, it had spent \$22.6 million on advertising its own government departments. Tens of millions of dollars are being spent by the Liberal–National government, which is pushing its message on TV, the internet, in cinemas, in magazines, in newspapers and on radio, while ordinary Western Australians struggle to pay their bills. I think this Bigger Picture thing is a major embarrassment for Liberal Party members in the metropolitan area, but it is a disaster for country people. We heard in the interjections made by Hon Robyn McSweeney and Hon Simon O'Brien and in the speech made by Hon Peter Collier that in the regions, the government is hiding behind royalties for regions. The core principle of royalties for regions was that expenditure would not be on services over and above existing expenditure. Guess what that means? That is just fancy language for, "It will not be spent on core services". The government cannot hide behind that. I will come back to that in a minute.

The government's Bigger Picture is a fraud; it is a trick being played on the Western Australian community in both the metropolitan area and regional areas. Let us look at the real picture that neither Liberal Party members nor National Party members can see. I will just canvass a few things. I went back to only three or four days of media coverage of these stories. This is what I got in just three or four days. Hon Sue Ellery has already canvassed at some length the problem with the disastrous head contractor maintenance model. The Department of Housing identified at least \$3.4 million in overcharges and noncompliance. We have got 40 000 properties that have been managed under a system that reeks of incompetence. It may be true that the Auditor General has not found any corruption in that system, but, boy, did he find incompetence, absolutely in spades! The Auditor General's report into that failed system found significant overpayments to head contractors and that key

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performance targets were still not being met. Head contractors have been allowed to charge Western Australians \$3.4 million for work that was not completed or was not adequate, and we are going to get back only a fraction of that money. That is number one. I will go on to number two.

Members might ask why I am raising this under the heading of core services, but let me suggest that programs like the working with children screening unit are a core part of the glue that holds our community together. What did the independent review of that unit find? This system is about reducing the risk to children from having unsuitable adults supervise them. Part of the child protection laws require that people doing voluntary or paid work with children must go through that criminal check system. What did the independent review find? A caseload backlog, officers vulnerable to burnout, high staff turnover and sickness, considerable gaps in compliance responses and unsustainable workloads. This is from a government that spends \$1.5 million just spruiking its high-rise developments around the inner-city CBD and it cannot run its working with children check systems properly.

Let me turn to something in Peel. Again, I remind honourable members that I am only looking at issues that have been brought to the community's attention over the past three or four days. Meadow Springs Primary School is just around the corner from my office. It opened this year, with about 480 students. It now has an enrolment of just over 600 students. Next year, the projected enrolment is 712 students. Guess what this brand-new primary school now needs? Sixteen demountables. Those 16 demountables are needed to house the school population. This is the first new school north of Gordon Road. Those members who know the area will know that Meadow Springs and Lakelands —

Hon Kate Doust interjected.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The member is quite right—also Ellenbrook. The minister has no idea about this kind of stuff. I do not think any members opposite have any idea. They are quite happy to spruik on about inner-city CBD projects costing billions of dollars when we have a brand-new primary school in Peel, around the corner from my office, with 16 demountable buildings.

Compare that opening figure of 480 at Meadow Springs with two new primary schools that recently opened in Ellenbrook—one opened with 286 students and the other with 206. The total combined number for those two new schools was not as much as the enrolment at Meadow Springs Primary School. I cannot do better than quote my colleague the member for Mandurah who said the kindergarten at Meadow Springs will require about five new schools. We need a new school in Lakelands right now, to avoid the situation of our brand-new primary schools being absolutely cluttered with demountables in trying to accommodate the kids who need to go there.

I have a fourth issue. Last week we had considerable debate in this place on parking fee increases for nurses and hospital staff. The Barnett Liberal–National government refused to reverse its decision about this increase in parking fees to five times the amount they were when this government took office. What does this government do? It claims the increase is needed to fund infrastructure costs. I point out to honourable members that by that token, the Premier of this state should be paying a fortune for his parking because look at what he is spending on infrastructure, building his emperor's palace just up the road here!

I have another small thing, but it all adds up—it is all ungluing that community demand for basic core services; again I remind members that I am only looking at the last three or four days of media coverage of these issues—the Barnett government promised Basketball WA that if it moved from Perry Lakes to the new stadium it would suffer no financial penalty. Guess what? Basketball WA has to pay an extra \$100 000 a year for court hire, plus it has lost all the revenue streams it had at Perry Lakes, from catering, bar takings, function hire and the like. Guess what will happen? Those costs will be passed on to the kids in this state, the families who are trying to enable their young kids to play basketball. I have not even got to what is happening in regional WA; I will have to come back to that at a later stage.

HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (Agricultural) [11.03 am]: I start by thanking the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this very important issue of public sector performance to the attention of the house, and particularly her take on the “Second Public Sector Performance Report 2012”, report 11, which was delivered only yesterday. As members well know, the Auditor General's reports continue to provide the government and various public sector agencies with many informed recommendations and opportunities for greater accountability and improved performance. From what my learned colleagues have already said today, that is a given in this day and age. The successes of the Office of the Auditor General in recent years reflect very well on the focus and professionalism of this essential independent public sector watchdog. The outcomes of the various initiatives of the Office of the Auditor General certainly ensure that the performance of the public sector is maximised and that accountability is promoted by an independent report to Parliament.

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On that note, I want to make some comments and observations about what members have said thus far. I start with Hon Sue Ellery, whose basic contention is that the government has lost sight of its key and core priorities. The member's particular focus was on big projects in the Perth metropolitan area and CBD. Hon Sue Ellery suggested that the suburbs had been forgotten, and she is spot on. Let me assure the house, if the suburbs of Perth have been forgotten, I am sure that members of regional, rural and remote parts of Western Australia could tell a story or two about what is not happening in their patch. Many parts of the state have been let down by this government. The recent promises, for example, regarding future investments in public transport and infrastructure projects by the Minister for Transport and Treasurer are occurring whilst tier 3 railway lines, which transport significant quantities of the state's grain produce let alone the nation's, have no future. That is the sort of investment we are finding. That is the sort of commitment to transport infrastructure that this government seems to promote. The Leader of the Opposition is spot on when she says that all the money has been spent on big projects in Perth because the rest of the state is receiving next to nothing. I make the same point that Hon Sally Talbot did about the government hiding behind royalties for regions: without royalties for regions spending, absolutely nothing would be provided in the bush.

I have a few issues with the Minister for Education, particularly in relation to, again, what is not happening in the bush. I do not know how often the minister goes out into regional, rural and remote parts of Western Australia but one of the big issues in those parts of the state is the basic nonexistence of a school psychology service. What about issues associated with Aboriginal education and the demise of the Aboriginal Education Directorate?

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: They do not even go to school!

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: That is certainly another significant issue, honourable member. Truancy rates in the bush are of significant concern. They have not improved; if anything, in some areas they are worse.

In talking about this litany of promises and whether it is correct that money goes to the bush, Hon Col Holt stood early this morning to deliver a petition simply headed "Save the Denmark Music and Arts Program Community Petition". I will read some of that. I am sure Mr Deputy President (Hon Col Holt) is very familiar with this. The petition commences —

Current enrolled music and arts students at the Great Southern Institute of TAFE ... have received notice that the courses will no longer be publicly funded. There will be no more Cert II, III, IV and Diploma music and art courses run at any of the Great Southern Institutes Campuses as of January 2013, with the nearest campus over 450kms away.

This is core service provision in the bush. If members believe that, they will believe anything! It continues —

This will be a great loss to the health and wellbeing of our community and economically and professionally harmful to our region.

I will not read out the rest of that petition, because basically it is set out in those introductory remarks. The regional, rural and remote parts of Western Australia, an overwhelmingly productive and important part of this state, seem to be forgotten, as the Leader of the Opposition has indicated, with more and more money being spent on big projects in the CBD.

I have some other questions. Where is the Bunbury to Albany gas pipeline? That was the number one priority for the Minister for Energy when he became minister. We would not want to be holding our breath. What about Ellenbrook? I will say no more about rail infrastructure. Hon Ken Travers can tell us all about that issue.

Hon Ken Travers: Big broken promise.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: It was a massive broken promise. How many of these big projects in the CBD are going ahead? All of them. What is happening in the bush? What is happening in regional and rural parts of WA? I say to you, Mr Deputy President (Hon Col Holt), as you would understand, being a member for South West Region, that apart from some royalties for regions spending, which I am sure you are au fait with, very little is happening.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Nothing's getting built. No, nothing's getting built. We rebuilt the whole health system in the south west.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: The minister can have his say when he is ready. I have only a couple of minutes left. It is amazing how quickly time goes when we are talking about these very important issues that need to be articulated.

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 27 September 2012]

p6631b-6643a

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Simon O'Brien; Deputy President; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Ljiljana Ravlich; Hon Helen Morton

I am sure the minister would understand, being part of cabinet, that the government comes up with decisions to cut significant amounts of money. I refer to an article written by Gareth Parker and Daniel Mercer that appeared in *The West Australian* today. It states —

Treasurer Troy Buswell revealed \$330 million of cuts to the public sector yesterday through a hiring freeze on public servants, prohibiting the accrual of more leave entitlements and forcing agencies to slash spending on procurement, including consumables, stationery, communications, travel and consultants by 1.5 per cent.

Why is that happening? I will tell members why that is happening. We need only look at expenditure growth since the May estimate of 10.2 per cent. It was originally calculated at 8.2 per cent. When we consider the net debt and the gross debt that this government has managed to rack up, no wonder the Treasurer started to push the panic buttons. There is no money to put into the essential projects that people in the suburbs and people in regional, rural and remote parts of Western Australia are crying out for. Why do we have to go down this pathway of spending all this money? I suppose it is part of the big picture. If that is the big picture, heaven help us. The government is not going to fill 1 500 job vacancies and leave liabilities will be capped at 2012 levels, all to save money that this government is wasting in other areas that it may well call priorities.

There is little time for me to add anything further to what I have had to say, suffice to say that it seems that these big projects around the Perth CBD are all this government is concerned about.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Finance) [11.13 am]: The motion seeks to condemn the government for failing to provide core services, including those identified in an Auditor General's report, not that much of that is contained in the Auditor General's report, which I guess just goes to show that the mover of the motion ought to look at some of these documents before she gives notice of a motion to ensure that they support her argument. The opposition wanted to make a series of claims, many of them baseless, to develop some myths that somehow this government is cutting core services. The fact is that that is simply untrue. A dispassionate examination of the facts, such as might be done by the Office of the Auditor General, would expose the claims of the opposition for the hollow hyperbole that they are.

I was referring to this year's budget, for example, to look at what we have done as a government since 2008–09 to increase the benefits to families and communities the length and breadth of Western Australia since we came to office. The budget figures, as one indicator, are very impressive. The Child Protection budget has increased by over 52 per cent. That is about delivering large numbers of new staff and extra core services. We have sustained those levels; we have not cut them.

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Mr Deputy President, there is a caterwauling going on in the background. I am trying to tell the house through you about the facts around this government's commitment to core services. I mentioned the fact that Child Protection's budget has increased by 52 per cent during the period that we have been in government. That is an extraordinary level of commitment. The budget for Communities has increased by 51 per cent; Corrective Services, by 33.5 per cent; and Health, by 39.3 per cent. That is not including an increase of 226 per cent in the health capital works program as we have basically rebuilt most of the fabric of the health system in this state, including the inland health services throughout the south west, as well as hospitals in a number of those localities. I can give Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm some more information. I will wrap it all up in a road map for him so he can look at it. Then he can come back —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Col Holt): Order, members! I remember hearing Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm suggest that the Minister for Finance could make his contribution. He is making his contribution now. Members should allow him to continue.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I will give him his money's worth too.

Point of Order

Hon KATE DOUST: Mr Deputy President, all members are required to speak through the Chair, not directly to —

Hon Simon O'Brien: Don't be a twit.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! I was about to remind —

Withdrawal of Remark

Hon KATE DOUST: Mr Deputy President, I find the use of the word "twit" quite offensive. I ask the minister to withdraw that comment.

Extract from Hansard

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Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I withdraw, Mr Deputy President.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I was about to remind the minister to direct his remarks through me before the point of order was taken. Minister, please continue. I am happy to listen to your remarks.

Debate Resumed

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I know that my good friend and colleague Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm —

Hon Ken Travers: Now you're misleading the house.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: No, I am not. The member will not be offended if I remind him of the good things that we have done and that for the purpose of political rhetoric he conveniently wants to overlook in the context of this debate. It would not worry them because they are all big tough Labor people. They can probably take it. Let me remind him that I can give him the information on Health that I just referred to and he can go out and have a look and then come back and advise the house that he, like his leader, got it wrong in this debate.

One thing I am particularly proud of as a former Minister for Disability Services—I know Hon Helen Morton and others are delighted about this on this side of the house—is that over the same period this government has invested mightily in disability services. There was an increase of over 66 per cent in the budget. It is not only the quantum; it is the spirit with which it is being done. We have dedicated ourselves to boosting core services in that area. If people ask me what I am most proud of having achieved as a minister, they would be surprised to find that it is not about building things and roads —

Hon Ken Travers: Well, you didn't do any of that, that's why.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: We did plenty of that. Hon Ken Travers certainly never did and he never will.

It is not that; it is what we have done in disability services, particularly in the area of alternatives to employment. There has been an increase of 28.9 per cent in training, and 24.3 per cent in education.

Several members interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Boy, they really do not like to be reminded about that, do they, Minister Collier? Members opposite particularly do not like to be asked to contrast the minister's fine performance in both his portfolios with their failure. The centrepiece of our last year's budget was an unprecedented \$604 million for the not-for-profit sector. What for? To guarantee the continued provision of vital core services—not the sort of political advertising that the pots-calling-the-kettle-black opposite are accusing us of. This is not about giving away cash to Labor mates when they ask for it: "Could we have some cash from your taxpayers in Western Australia?" What did the former government say to that? "Sure, here you go". I will have a bit more to say about that on another occasion.

The opposition is just a hollow vessel when it starts to accuse us of neglecting core services in respect of the expenditure cuts reported in this morning's paper—whether it be the *Fremantle Herald* or the *Sunday Times*; we now find that members opposite also look at *The West Australian*—which reported the prudent and proper conduct of our Treasurer and this government in seeking to trim expenditure to fit the cloth so that we do not suffer from an excessive deficit this financial year, but doing so without cutting jobs or core services. If the opposition wants to criticise, that is fine, but it should not make unfounded, irresponsible and inaccurate accusations, because it will get found out every time. There are two capital offences in this game of politics, and in this motion the opposition is guilty of both of them.

The opposition did not refer to another aspect of the Auditor General's report, relating to port authorities. I will respond to that and note that the Auditor General made some comments about the status of four of the port authorities in establishing their business continuity management plans. The Auditor General noted that business continuity management plans cannot just be done once and left on the shelf; they have to be continually reviewed, developed and adapted as the circumstances of an organisation change. Each of our ports, including the four sampled, are going through extraordinary periods of growth and the Auditor General's report is a useful reminder of that; the points made are accepted. I note that there was endorsement for what the Fremantle and Geraldton Port Authorities had done. The Geraldton Port Authority is compliant with the mature BCM plan and Fremantle Ports, similarly, is at an advanced stage. Port Hedland Port Authority has a gap, which it recognises, and it is making progress on closing that gap. Similarly, Esperance Port Authority has been having some problems, but, again, it is going to go ahead and develop a strategy for reporting to the board about these matters by 12 November. The government is responsive and is, as ever, determined to preserve our core services.

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan) [11.24 am]: I rise to support this motion and I thank Hon Sue Ellery for bringing it to the house. There is no doubt that this government has lost its way; there is no doubt that this government no longer understands what is important to the people of Western Australia. The areas of

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health, education, law and order, the effective delivery of services and effective access to services are important and key considerations for the people of this state. Obviously, cost of living is another major issue that impacts on families and households across the state, and this government has a particularly poor record for dealing with the containment of the cost of living. As a result, we see many households struggling to make ends meet, and there is no doubt that many of the households that are now financially stressed were not financially stressed in 2008.

I have listened to a lot of speeches in this place over the time I have been here, and one of the worst speeches I have ever heard was the speech delivered by the Minister for Education. I have to say that his response was particularly —

Hon Simon O'Brien: What a silly and gratuitous remark! It was a measured response.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It was an absolutely appalling speech, particularly coming from Hon Peter Collier. This minister has had a shocking record in every portfolio he has held. In respect of education, one of the first things the government did was to make sure that students in district high schools across the state no longer had access to years 11 and 12 courses; it absolutely wiped them off. Where does that sit with equity and access, and making sure that fundamental, basic human services are delivered to rural and regional Western Australia? That is the first thing the government did.

We have also seen a drastic increase in school absenteeism across the state. The other day we had a debate in this place about mental health in Mowanjum. Aboriginal students simply do not go to school in Mowanjum; they just do not go, and there are plenty of other communities where kids simply do not go to school. If they are Aboriginal kids, this minister does not care; in fact, he does not care if they are non-Aboriginal kids, either. There is no strategy, no effort and no investment by the government or the minister to make sure that the law of this state and this land, which says that every student needs to attend school, is observed so that students are made to attend school. The minister sits on his hands and does absolutely nothing about it.

The minister goes on about his great achievements in training, but he always talks about inputs and never talks about outputs. We know that dropout rates for apprenticeships and traineeships have never been so high in the history of this state as they have under this minister. We know that completion rates for apprentices and trainees have never been so poor in the history of this state. The minister also went on about his contribution to Aboriginal people and training. We also know that this minister has absolutely destroyed the school-based apprenticeship program. He has absolutely destroyed it. There are virtually no Aboriginal students doing that program. It was set up by the previous government; it had all the hallmarks of success, but because, as the former Minister for Training, he had a dispute with the then Minister for Education and they could not bear the idea of working together in the education and training sphere, they disaggregated the agency of education and training. The casualties from that were the thousands of Aboriginal kids across the state who could not complete an Aboriginal school-based traineeship or apprenticeship. That was due to the hideous response by this minister when he was Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

I want to touch on this minister's performance in the area of energy. This is not my portfolio but in the preparation of a speech I made in this place not so long ago, I found that this minister alone should hang his head in shame. There was a \$600 million blow-out on the solar panel scheme, \$100 million blow-out —

Hon Peter Collier: No; *The West* got it wrong and they retracted.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: — over 10 years. That is what it will cost, and I will tell him who lost out. It was the WA taxpayer.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Col Holt): Members! Order!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: No; do not worry about me.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, please.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Sorry.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Thank you. We were going so well, were we not, until that last little blow-up. Please continue, but direct your remarks through the Chair, please.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Thank you, Mr Deputy President. The amount of \$600 million is only part of it because there is more. There was also a \$100 million blow-out on the billing system. Then another blow-out was the Pilbara underground —

Extract from Hansard

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Hon Ken Travers: This minister blows out everything he touches.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The cost of the Pilbara underground power project has also blown out. On top of that, the cost of some gas turbines in Kwinana has also blown out massively. This minister alone has cost blow-outs of about \$900 million. How did the Premier respond to the fact that \$900 million will have to be found by WA taxpayers because this minister is incompetent and useless and has sat on his hands? How was he dealt with by this Premier? He was promoted. This minister alone has caused an impost on WA taxpayers of \$900 million because of his incompetence. Do members know what? He was promoted. He was promoted because he had some numbers in his pocket.

Hon Ken Travers: How does he get the numbers? That is the question.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: How does he get those numbers?

Hon Helen Morton interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Why do we not ask Miss Lorraine Allchurch how he gets them?

Hon Peter Collier: What does this have to do with the topic?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The minister takes great offence every time the word “forger” is used in this place. Why does he take such great offence when the word “forger” is used in this place? I am telling him. He asked me to go and ask somebody. I tell you what, Miss Allchurch knew what was going on.

Hon Peter Collier: I did?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order members! Both sides of the chamber need to be cognisant that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich is on her feet and she should continue her speech without interruption. Off you go.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Thank you, Mr Deputy President. The minister has gone very quiet —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: That is because I asked him to.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: He is sitting there, but he should be hanging his head in shame because of the financial impost that he has singlehandedly put onto the people of this state. He should have been sacked; he should have been dealt with. Instead, he was promoted by the Premier because he had a pocketful of numbers. How he got those numbers is very questionable.

There is no doubt that this government has done an appalling job in the delivery of core services. People have been turned away from hospitals. People with mental health problems cannot get access to care, and when they do, they are turfed out of their beds before they are ready to be discharged. We have heard that some year 7s cannot get places in high schools due to boundary restrictions.

HON HELEN MORTON (East Metropolitan — Minister for Mental Health) [11.35 am]: I can understand this failed former minister’s frustration because she is faced with a competent minister who is doing amazing work in the education portfolio. Her attempt at that job was so dismal that her own team tipped her out.

Hon Ken Travers: This is you guys not getting personal! Fascinating!

Hon HELEN MORTON: This is a government that can make decisions.

Hon Kate Doust: No detail.

Hon HELEN MORTON: We can make the big decisions, the little decisions and the middle-sized decisions.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Order, members! Why did I get this shift?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Mr Deputy President, can you remember the reply when people were asked to name one thing that Alan Carpenter’s government had achieved? It was zero—nothing; his government could not make decisions. The big picture is here to stay and members opposite have to get used to it.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order!

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.