

STATE BUDGET — AAA CREDIT RATING BENCHMARKS

362. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Treasurer:

Will the Treasurer please outline which tough decisions the government will be making to deliver a budget that meets the credit rating agency's AAA benchmarks?

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

I thank the member for Scarborough for her question and her interest in the broader financial parameters that confront the government as it drafts the budget. I do not need to go into the detail around the AAA credit rating and the Standard and Poor's measures. The government has had to make a number of difficult decisions as it has shaped the budget. They are difficult decisions about positioning in relation to the net financial liabilities to revenue position and difficult decisions about ensuring that we invest to protect jobs and invest in infrastructure.

One of the things that interest me, as I look towards next week's budget—nine sleeps away—is what position the opposition will take next week.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I do not have to wait eight more sleeps, because every day when I get up in the morning there is a different position in the newspaper. Every day there is this emerging culture of uncertainty from the benches opposite. Let us consider the opposition's response to debt. The Liberal Party is on the record: it will be borrowing more money to support jobs. The Leader of the Opposition wants us to borrow more money to support jobs; the shadow Treasurer says that debt is nasty and that we should not borrow because someone else will have to pay it back.

Let us consider the opposition's position on recurrent spending. In this morning's paper the shadow Treasurer is reported as saying that it was very important that the government, through this budget, take rapid and immediate action on our recurrent spending so that the AAA credit rating is maintained.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Which paper is that?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: This piece of paper—right here in front of me! It is from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation!

Mr E.S. Ripper: The Buswell gazette!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: This is the shadow Treasurer's view. Has he discussed it with the shadow Minister for Health? He does not want to cut spending!

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Has he discussed it with the shadow Minister for Police?

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Warnbro to order.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: She does not want to cut spending. The opposition talks about it, but it cannot be done. I suspect that if we cut the stationery budget in Western Australia, the opposition would go off and find a pencil sharpener in the basement of some bureaucracy.

Point of Order

Mr B.S. WYATT: Will the Treasurer table the piece of paper to which he was referring?

The SPEAKER: Treasurer, if that is an official document, I ask for it to be tabled.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is not an official document; it is a transcript from the ABC on my piece of paper.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Getting back to the point, what is the opposition's position on reducing recurrent spending growth? There will come a time when the opposition will have to run its flag up the flagpole and let the people of Western Australia know where it stands on these crucial economic decisions. The problem the Leader of the Opposition has is that he does not know what flag it is. Members opposite are at the sewing machine trying to work out what the flag will look like. I suspect that if the shadow Treasurer is able to determine what the flag will look like, he will not have the courage to hold up the flagpole for everyone to see the flag, because it will get hot in the kitchen. You are all flag and no pole! That is your problem. The shadow Treasurer is all flag and no pole.

The opposition talks about rapid and immediate action. I will tell members opposite one thing that will be in the budget next week. Next week some remedial action will be reported in the budget to help us meet those financial constraints. That remedial action will see a reduction in capital and recurrent spending, and will include some other actions over the next four years with a total value of around \$7 billion. We are making immediate and hard decisions; \$7 billion of immediate, hard decisions have been made to help position the state to ride out this economic crisis. They are the sorts of decisions the former government could never make.

One area we will focus on is government advertising. In the budget last year, the former government spent \$150 000 on advertising placement alone. The amount it spent on production would probably be double that amount. We will not spend \$50 000 on advertising placement this year. Another thing members will see —

Opposition members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Wait for it! Another thing members opposite will see is this: we are cutting \$6 million a year out of the former government's advertising spend. I looked for an example of wasteful government advertising under the former regime. I thought that I might find a brochure or a small ad in a paper. Members will not believe it, but I tripped over this monument to the former government's disgraceful waste of taxpayers' money.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: Is that a doorstep?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: No, it is not a doorstep. It is a coffee table book called "48 Months, 48 Minutes: Building the Perth to Mandurah Railway". Now I know why the former Minister for Planning and Infrastructure delayed the project to 48 months; otherwise she would have mucked up the name of her book! I thought I would read it and see what the taxpayers got. Let me open it up. Who is on this page? It is the member for Armadale. It is a nice photo. Who is on this other page? It is the member for Armadale again! Listen to what is said about the member for Armadale —

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: Do you know who paid for that?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Yes; taxpayers paid for part of it.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: How much?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Taxpayers paid for part of it, and the member knows it. This is what is said about the member for Armadale —

... those close to the project are unanimous in their view that it was the power of the Minister's vision, passion and enthusiasm that —

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Hang on, I am not there yet! It continues —

single-handedly brought the Southern Suburbs Railway into being ...

The former minister planned it, funded it, dug the tunnel and laid the rails! I am surprised that she is not driving the train up and down the tracks! She is Superwoman! Before I sit down, I will do the member for Armadale a favour. I think we could probably find a couple of thousand of these books lying round. When she is out doorknocking in Canning, she can take them with her and distribute them to the residents of Canning.

We are making hard decisions. We will not waste taxpayers' money and we will look after jobs in Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I might just wait here for a while, members, until you decide whether you want to have the remainder of question time today. I presume that you do and that there are some questions members on both sides want to ask. Whether you get the answers you want is another question, I am sure. I have given the member for Cockburn the opportunity to ask the next question and I would appreciate it if members on both sides allowed him to ask the question.