

GOLD CORPORATION — AUSTRAC AUDIT

**558. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:**

I have a supplementary question. Will Western Australian taxpayers be left to pick up potential liability for this failure that could run into the hundreds of millions of dollars due to the failures on the minister's and the Premier's watch?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:**

I understand that these matters stretch back to 2014 when Hon Colin Barnett was the relevant minister. I will just make a point: if the member looks at the time of this government, it is a series of improvements in performance. The first improvement in performance came when the Premier was the minister because he got rid of the chair of the board, who was getting in the way of improving the standards of performance of the business. The next thing to happen was that we unfortunately had the COVID pandemic. It is understandable that the Premier was distracted with saving the lives of Western Australians. After the election, the Premier asked me to take on responsibility on the basis that we were worried about the information that was coming to government from Gold Corporation. That is what I did. I have worked with the new chair, Sam Walsh—an outstanding Western Australian; if the member makes any criticism of Sam Walsh, I look forward to hearing it. We have an official of the Department of Treasury on the board, and we have since hired an outstanding leader in Jason Waters. Just in the car park the other day I met the Auditor General, who told me what a refreshing change it was to have such an outstanding leader as Jason Waters running the business. As she put it, he is looking under every rock and finding every cockroach.

Yes, I agree that the business was left to us in a difficult state by the former government. It has taken us some time to get on top of all the issues. One of the reasons for that is that despite the fact that the Auditor General's report had not raised these issues with us until after we found out through other sources. Again, something I pointed out to the member in *Hansard* at the time, I asked my office to approach AUSTRAC about whether I could get a briefing from AUSTRAC on the work that it was doing. If I can find the letter, I am happy to table the correspondence from the AUSTRAC regulator—if I cannot find it right this second, I will table it at the end of question time—in which it said that they would not provide a briefing to me on its work.

The idea that somehow this is a failing of this government is simply wrong. The first time that these matters were properly dealt with is because of this government in the Premier's work of getting rid of the former chairman and in my work in taking his leadership and applying the blowtorch to the Gold Corporation. The fact is that we now know the problems. For example, its failure to register in the United States under the particular legislation it deals with there only came to light because of the Jason Waters' work. The idea that somehow we have lacked diligence is stupid; it is a ridiculous suggestion. I cannot believe that members opposite sat in government and did nothing about these things. I cannot believe that the only way these matters came to light is because of self-reporting by Gold Corp.

**The SPEAKER:** Members, that concludes question time.