

GOVERNMENT — ANSWERS AND PERFORMANCE

Statement

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [5.22 pm]: That was very gracious of you, Hon Liz Behjat.

I want to make some comments about some of the answers to questions from and the performance of the government over the last couple of days. Starting with the correction that the Minister for Mental Health gave to the house about the Supply Bill, I was amazed, given what must have been some fairly fundamental issues about the bill and the purpose of the bill, that the minister clearly had not read the speech. I cannot believe that if she had read the speech before she gave it, she would not have picked up those errors in the speech. That says to me that there is a lack of attention to detail by members on the other side.

Hon Sue Ellery: Or by whoever gave her the speech and didn't check it.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The minister ultimately has the responsibility. She should have read it and would have picked that up as soon as she had read it.

The second point I want to make tonight in terms of attention to detail is the answer to a question I got today from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport. I am sure members who have been in this place long enough will recall numerous occasions when a member has stood in this place and said, "Look, I have an answer from the minister but I'm not satisfied with the answer; I'm going back to get a better answer and I'm not going to give the answer that I've been provided with because I'm not satisfied with it." Today I asked a question about question without notice 52 that I asked last Thursday, 16 May. The title given to it in *Hansard* is "Public Transport — Metro Area Express Light Rail". The question was around any complex engineering issue the minister had become aware of since the recent state election, and whether there was any other issue the minister had become aware of since the state election that he was not aware of before the state election that may impact on building the MAX light rail by 2018. The reason I asked the question just two months after the election is that the Premier said that things had changed and there were these new complex engineering issues that the government was aware of that it clearly was not aware of before it made its commitment during the election campaign. That was the question, but I got what I believe was a disrespectful answer in this house. I did not get an answer about whether the government had learnt of anything between the election and when I asked the question; I was told that the detailed planning and procurement options were still underway and would identify a range of issues as this progressed.

This goes to the heart of the integrity of the government and the integrity of people such as the Premier when they make public comments, which is what question time is supposed to be about. That is the point of this house. We have heard over the last couple of days new members opposite and the outgoing member Hon Norman Moore talk about the importance of this house as a house of review. If that means only one thing, it is that we should get proper answers to questions. I accept that under standing orders, we can ask questions and ministers can give whatever nonsensical answer they like. But let us remember that when they give nonsensical answers, it shows complete and utter disrespect for this house and the role that it plays. The answer I got that did not answer my question was bad enough, so today I noted the answer that I had been given and I asked why the minister did not answer my question and whether it was because the government was politically embarrassed that there had not been a change and it simply did not have a fully costed and funded plan at the time of the last election. I think that is the real problem. We understand why the government might want to try to run and hide from giving a proper answer, because it highlights the embarrassment of the government that it did not have a fully costed and funded plan, as it told the people at the last election. I asked why the minister did not answer the question and whether the minister could provide an answer to the original question that I asked about what had been identified since the recent state election.

This is where it gets even more intriguing. I think the parliamentary secretary clearly did not read the answer or look at question without notice 52 from last week. He just thought he would wander into this house and give whatever was put in front of him. If the parliamentary secretary does that, he will be constantly humiliated in this place. Those of us who have been parliamentary secretaries know that we have to keep a check on members in the other place. As I have said, many a parliamentary secretary or minister representing another minister has said in this place that they were not happy with an answer. So this is where the answer that I got today becomes quite farcical and almost comical. Did I get an answer about the MAX light rail? I will read what the parliamentary secretary said today in answer to my question about the Metro Area Express light rail. He said —

It is again acknowledged that, unlike the Labor Party, —

That statement almost borders on misleading the house —

this Liberal–National government is committed to the Perth–Darwin highway, ...

What was the parliamentary secretary thinking? A question was asked about the MAX light rail and he started giving misinformation about the Perth–Darwin highway. Did he not check what question 52 was about? There is stunned silence. I would sit in stunned silence too, because I would be humiliated and embarrassed by the answer that he gave today.

Hon Jim Chown: I can assure you that I would never be humiliated by any of your responses, honourable member.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: So how does the parliamentary secretary explain giving an answer about the Perth–Darwin highway to a question about MAX?

Point of Order

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Mr President, as you have mentioned on many occasions, the Chair should be addressed and there should not be debate across the chamber.

The PRESIDENT: Members are required to direct their comments through the Chair. In that respect, I think the minister has a point. On the rest of it, I am not quite so sure.

Statement Resumed

Hon Peter Collier interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It is fascinating, is it not? The Attorney General raises a point of order, and then the Leader of the House immediately tries to engage me across the chamber with an interjection. I accept that that is the free flow of this place, and that we do need to address our comments through the Chair. But it is fascinating that the government wants me not to engage with a member across the chamber, which is not unheard of in this place when the government is under a bit of pressure, but as soon as the pressure is off, the Leader of the House wants me to engage him across the chamber, rather than address you, Mr President! That is a quite extraordinary performance from the government.

So let us go back to where we were. The answer that I got today from the parliamentary secretary started by giving me a whole list of gibberish about the Perth–Darwin highway, when my question 52 was about MAX light rail. If the parliamentary secretary is not embarrassed by that, he has a very thick hide and clearly it will be impossible to embarrass him. The parliamentary secretary cannot comprehend how embarrassing it is to give an answer that talks about the Perth–Darwin highway to a question that is about MAX light rail! If the parliamentary secretary cannot see how humiliating that is, he will be humiliated on many occasions in this chamber. The parliamentary secretary goes on to say that it “will see heavy traffic removed from many local communities, particularly in the East Metropolitan Region.” What does that have to do with MAX light rail and question 52, parliamentary secretary? That is the sort of nonsense that we are now getting out of this government in terms of answers to this question.

It comes back to what the Leader of the House told us this week. This is a house of review. If we cannot get a straightforward answer to questions in this place, we have to start to wonder what is the point of having the Legislative Council. I say to the Leader of the House, through you, Mr President, that I hope he will go back to his cabinet colleagues and make the point at the next cabinet meeting that answers like this are simply unacceptable and are a disrespect to this house.

Can I also say, because I think this is the funniest bit about it all, that I was then referred back to question without notice 52. I assume that means that the parliamentary secretary is now referring me back to the nonsense that he gave me last week, which apparently was supposed to be about MAX. Clearly, the parliamentary secretary is completely and utterly confused in his new role about what is the difference between the Perth–Darwin highway and MAX light rail. If I remember correctly, this afternoon, during the speech of Hon Alyssa Hayden in the Address-in-reply debate, I think she also clearly understood that this parliamentary secretary has absolutely no idea about these two significant issues.

Can I finally, in conclusion, correct the record. It is completely wrong to say that the Labor Party is not committed to the Perth–Darwin highway. I challenge the parliamentary secretary to come into this place and show me a statement in which the Labor Party has ever said, “We do not support the construction of the Perth–Darwin highway.” In fact, what I would also say is that the federal Labor Party is actually incredibly committed, because it has put on the table half the cost of building that road. So, the parliamentary secretary cannot say that the Labor Party is not committed, when on the table at the moment there is more money from the Labor Party—admittedly the federal Labor Party—to build that road than there is from the state Liberal Party to build that road. So, at the moment, Labor is winning, with over \$400 million to build that road, and with under \$200 million from the Liberal Party to build that road.

What the Labor Party said during the election campaign is that we cannot give a promise to the people about the timing of when we will build that road until we know whether we can get federal government funding. That is

because the Labor Party is not prepared to make promises—unlike the Liberal Party, which lied to the people of Western Australia when it said it had fully funded, fully costed plans—about the timing of the building of that road without knowing whether we can deliver that. That is the key question. Do not say that we are not committed to it, when the fact is that we were not prepared to lie to the electorate—as the Liberal Party did—during the recent state election.

The PRESIDENT: Members, in relation to one aspect of the member's comments, in which he referred to part of an answer to a question that referred to a President's ruling, I will undertake to check that again to make sure that the answer complied with that ruling that I gave last week.

House adjourned at 5.34 pm
