

GOVERNMENT AGENCY EFFICIENCY CUTS

562. Mr M. McGOWAN to the Premier:

I refer to the Treasurer's comments on Channel Seven last night in which he said —

We are going to have to tighten our belts, and for some agencies that belt-tightening process will probably be a little more rigorous than for other agencies.

- (1) Will the Premier outline today in which agencies the belt tightening will be a little more rigorous; and, if not, why not?
- (2) Will the Premier exempt teaching, nursing, policing, child protection, dental therapy and planning positions from these measures?
- (3) Will the Department for Child Protection and the Disability Services Commission be excluded from the government's proposed cuts to staff and services?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)–(3) I make it very clear that there are no cuts, proposed or planned, for staffing within the public sector— none at all, and that was made very clear by the Treasurer —

Mr M. McGowan: Which vacancies won't be filled then?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: There are around 1 500 vacancies that have been vacant for a long time. We have simply said to the public sector, "You will not be filling those vacancies during a pretty tight financial year." No-one is going to be losing their job, no-one is going to be laid off, but there will be flexibility in it because there will be some initiatives that will require that.

Mr M. McGowan: So, which agencies?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, look, sorry; this government will govern as it sees fit.

Mr M. McGowan: That's accountability!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Treasurer announced around \$350 million worth of savings, and they are of a belt-tightening nature. They are simply saving expenditure within government. Why are we doing that? The reasons, I think, are pretty obvious. The iron ore price has fallen —

Mr M. McGowan: Yes. I'm asking you which ones.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Australian dollar is high and because of the Leader of the Opposition's friends in Canberra, the Labor Party, we get —

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Because of the Leader of the Opposition's Labor mates in Canberra —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: This is the big issue. In a resource state we expect and know that commodity prices will go up and down. We are also vulnerable to shifts in the exchange rate. The difference this time around is that the dollar has not followed commodity prices down because the Australian dollar is seen as a safe haven internationally, and that is understandable.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The difference is that, because of the cut in the GST share from 72c in the dollar for the financial year finished to 55c this year by the Labor Party in Canberra, we lose our resilience.

Mr M. McGowan: You'll make it up.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The opposition continues to support Julia Gillard —

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah, I formally call you to order for the first time today. Member for Armadale, I formally call you to order for the first time today. Member for Joondalup, I formally call you to order for the first time today.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Even if our GST share had stayed the same at an unfair 72c, it would have been easier for the state government to have ridden out this period. But, as the Treasurer made very clear yesterday, we are taking these actions now. They will not affect services to the public; they are internal to government. They will simply trim expenditure so that we do not have the situation that exists in Queensland and New South Wales, and probably exists in South Australia and Tasmania, where people in government employment are losing their jobs. That will not happen in Western Australia because we are taking the preventive measures now and doing it quickly. They are not harsh and they will not affect services to the public.