

Mixed messages over pledges hurt record

■ Daniel Emerson
Comment



Only time will tell whether Colin Barnett's approach to promises will prove correct.

The Premier says there is an unrealistic expectation by media to stick to the letter of promises, which people do not pay much attention to, instead giving their vote to who they think is better at governing.

But if creating unrealistic expectations was something Mr Barnett wanted to avoid, it is difficult to understand why he went to the election claiming his entire platform was fully funded and fully costed when it was anything but.

Electorates are pragmatic enough to accept that delivery may need to be altered to suit changing economic circumstances, provided there is financial evidence to support it, but "fully funded, fully costed" left no wriggle room.

Particularly when it was known beforehand that GST receipts from Canberra would be low, mining royalties are a volatile revenue stream and big increases in debt would imperil the State's AAA credit rating.

Mr Barnett is right that good administration attracts votes.

So it is curious that his minority outfit, which had governed steadily — in contrast to the chaotic Parliament in Canberra — did not just run on its record of strong, stable administration instead of dangling unaffordable

baubles such as MAX light rail.

Overreach did not just occur with the big promises. Take the Ballajura police station.

The Liberals did well by pledging \$12.5 million for a new station, which it has since budgeted for but hired a flashing road sign

for, but hired a flashing road sign late in the campaign falsely claiming it would be open 24/7.

They have also had to abandon promises to start night courts and move Scitech to Burswood because they never asked beforehand whether the judiciary or Scitech wanted these things.

Mr Barnett is digging himself a hole by refusing to acknowledge that any of his promises have been broken. Better to just admit it and move on.

But Opposition Leader Mark McGowan also risks looking like the boy who called wolf by branding any delay a "broken promise", which will get repetitive and diminish the phrase's meaning.

West Australians deserve to be presented with credible, affordable blueprints for the future rather than an auction for their vote, paid for with their money.

West Australian
Monday 9/6/2014
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