

## HANSARD

21 APRIL 2010

### PUBLIC LIBRARIES — FUNDING

*Motion*

**DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton)** [6.07 pm]: I would like to add a little to this debate. I guess the theme of the debate is funding cuts to libraries; but the real theme is: "What cuts?"

We have heard a succession of set speeches about the importance of libraries and most of them have been delivered with passion and in detail and, I might add, with a great deal of accuracy. Anybody who has raised children, has conducted research or is involved in the community will know the importance of libraries. When I say that libraries are important, something my daughter would say would be, "Dad, duh! Of course they are."

They are one of the core aspects of government. What are we debating? Why would anybody cut services at libraries? We have heard members of the Labor Party speak passionately and, I think, honestly in support of library services. However, passion and support does not mean much without the government providing financial support. That is what we are dealing with here.

When in government the Labor Party, despite having \$2 billion surpluses, was unable to adequately fund libraries on a long-term basis.

Some of the people opposite who spoke so passionately in favour of libraries were not in this house at the time, but their party was and it was in government. Look at their track record: what did they do? If we look at the library service overall, the government provides a number of things including the State Library, internet facilities and other services.

It also provides every year to local governments an agreed amount that is allocated and determined by the Western Australian Local Government Association, for the purchase of library books and other facilities. That baseload has been stuck at \$6.5 million for a number of years; it has not been increased regularly.

I am sure people opposite talked to librarians, who would passionately say they need predictability. Books are an asset and they become due; they wear out. In particular, children's books wear out very quickly—in about 18 months or so. Older reference books become dated and other older books have a life of about three to five years. Therefore, there is an issue of ongoing funding for books. As people opposite passionately said, these things go up in price. There is a variety of other services—big print, internet, and other things—that libraries have to provide; they always have to purchase them.

If members on the Labor side are so passionate about libraries, why did they not give them the money? Funding was stuck at \$6.5 million for three to four years. Right before the election, when this issue started coming up—remember the previous government had a \$2 billion surplus going into that election—admittedly, it did give local libraries a supplementary sum of \$4.4 million for the purchase of books, and the libraries were pleased with it.

It was nothing new; it was a pre-election amount. The libraries were pleased and they used it. Where did the previous government get the money from? It stole it from the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

Why would a government that is interested in arts, culture and libraries and which has a \$2 billion surplus take the money from a trust fund for the Symphony Orchestra? That money was set aside to purchase and build a practice facility for the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. What kind of brain-dead government was this? Again, this was not a cash-poor government; that government had a \$2 billion surplus.

Did the previous government tell the libraries that is where the money came from? No. When I did, the librarians were absolutely shocked because librarians like libraries and they also like other cultural facilities and they know that the symphony orchestra is as important as libraries.

Of course, we do not need as many of them, but symphony orchestras are as culturally and educationally important as libraries. The librarians were shocked. I went around my libraries and told the librarians to ask the Labor Party why it did not fund libraries.

Why did the previous government take the money from WASO? Why? When we look at the forward estimates we must remember to judge people by what they do, not what they say. Judge politicians in particular not by passion, caring and being able to read set scripts, but by what they did when they had the reins of government and the budget. What did they do? They stole money from WASO right before the election, and what did they put in the forward estimates?

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** It is all economic rationalists like you —

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** The Baldrick of the Labor Party over there comes up with another bright idea. We goofed up in government but Baldrick over there, the member for Mandurah, was in cabinet —

Several members interjected.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** What did the member for Mandurah say about —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I'll take that as a term of endearment! Thank you very much.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** Is that a good idea?

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I could give you a bit of history about what he does.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** What did the member for Mandurah say in cabinet when he failed to provide funding for libraries? What did he say? What did he say in cabinet when cabinet decided not to fund long-term libraries and to take the money from WASO?

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I'll tell you what we didn't do is hold a secret or an emergency cabinet meeting to reverse a decision!

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** What the previous government did was it took the money from WASO —

**Mr J.N. Hyde:** Did not!

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** You did!

**Mr J.N. Hyde:** No! Prove it! You can't! This is Liberal sludge!

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** You're up to your neck in it, member for Riverton!

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** No I am not! The member for Perth is up to his neck in it. He is the shadow minister. He swans around all the arts groups—"Look at me! I love you, I love you!" Delivery: nothing. When it counts the member does not deliver.

**Mr J.N. Hyde:** I look at \$4 million today that you cut!

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** What did we do? The main theme of this debate is funding cuts—what funding cuts?

Several members interjected.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** I went to my library today —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I bet it was the first time you've been there!

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** Pardon me? You must be joking!

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** No, I reckon it would be. They do not know who you are at your library.

**Mr J.H.D. Day:** They certainly did know who he was, I can assure you of that.

**Ms J.M. Freeman:** Obviously, it was a press conference then with him at his library—is that right? So you went with him, minister?

Several members interjected.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** My local libraries know me; I assure members opposite they know me better than their libraries know them, but that is to be judged by others. However, what is the issue here? Are there funding cuts? None —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** What about these librarians from the Riverton Library who said, "Don't cut my library. I vote for my library"? Now I know why there was a secret cabinet meeting this morning.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** There was not a secret cabinet —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Because they were fearful of the member for Riverton losing his seat over the libraries! The librarians in this photo I'm holding are the ones who deserve credit for bringing this back into the Parliament—Amy Ho, Elise Dowey, Annette Buchanan and Judi Wilmott. They are the champions! They are the people's poets! Congratulations to them.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson):** Member, if you want to encourage people —

**Dr M.D. Nahan:** I wasn't.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** He called me Baldrick!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Excuse me, I call you to order for the first time, member for Riverton. You do not ask the Speaker whether there is a Speaker in the house. I call you to order for the second time and if you disregard the Chair then I will throw you out.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** I asked the Speaker to give me some assistance so I can speak.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** You encouraged these people on the other side of the house; you cannot have it both ways. You challenged the member for Mandurah, you called him names, and I let it go. If you cannot take it, sit down.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** The librarians at Riverton Library were very concerned, as they would be. They were informed by a variety of people, including the Western Australian Local Government Association, that there were drastic cuts, and they were justifiably concerned about those cuts, as I was and as were all people around me. No-one cares more about the libraries than the Liberal Party.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** We will be judged by our actions rather than our words. Members opposite were hoping that we would cut them, they told people that we would cut them; they went around and got petitions going and told the librarians that there will be drastic cuts and said, "We're your heroes."

When the librarians found out that the previous government did not provide long-term funding for it, which they knew about, and that it did give them a pre-election sweetener by taking money from WASO, they knew what members opposite were on about. So what did we do?

What did the minister do? The minister went out and in the budget context and for the first time not only substantially increased the allocation for library services' purchase of books, but indexed it and put it into a long-term commitment. That is something the librarians had been arguing for years. Do members opposite know what? The librarians will be overwhelmingly pleased with the initiative. We will willingly rest on our record against that of the previous government.

The government has also decided to fix up another Labor mess and replace the \$4.4 million stolen by the previous cash-rich Labor government and put it into WASO.

It has actually found the money for not only the libraries, but also the West Australia Symphony Orchestra. The Labor government took money from WASO and put it into the libraries. This government has not made any cuts to funding, but in real terms it has not only increased the funding but also indexed it. We will go to the forward estimates, which is something Labor did not do. We also found the money for WASO to find a future home.

**Mr J.N. Hyde:** Where is the money being spent?

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** It is in a trust fund. Is that too complicated for the member for Perth?

What is the essence of the debate? Firstly, on funding cuts, there are none. Who supports libraries? Not those people who pontificate on the benefit of libraries. That is easy. What counts is the money that is put forward when it is needed and the Liberal Party has delivered to libraries and the libraries will be overwhelmingly appreciative.

My local library has a campaign to support libraries. I am very confident that the many people who attend the Riverton library would be told by the librarian that they have the

required funding. Those people will vote at the next election, and they will vote for us. I thank the opposition for its efforts.