

Costello faces fire from WA Liberals

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Treasurer Peter Costello flew into Western Australia on Tuesday to campaign in the most marginal Liberal seat in the state but came under unexpected fire from his own side of politics in the west.

While the attacks from Opposition education spokesman Stephen Smith and WA Premier Alan Carpenter would have been expected, a broadside from former state Liberal leader Colin Barnett must have come out of left field.

Mr Barnett on Tuesday accused the treasurer of torpedoing the coalition's failed 2005 election campaign by criticising key Liberal policies, including a proposal to supply water to Perth by building a canal from the far northern Kimberley region.

Mr Costello had also failed to recognise the potential of the state's economy, Mr Barnett said.

Mr Smith wasted no time in trying to further prise open any potential Liberal divide.

"Colin Barnett ... as a former Liberal leader himself, says Peter Costello is out of touch, that he doesn't understand Western Australia, he doesn't understand the Western Australian economy," Mr Smith said.

For good measure, Mr Smith added Mr Costello had only spent 20 days in WA since 1996.

But Mr Costello, whose first commitment was the launch of Stuart Henry's campaign to hold on to his 1.8 per cent margin in the Perth seat of Hasluck, wasn't going to bite.

He refused to comment on the Barnett barbs and batted off the claims he had neglected the west.

"I don't think they've (Labor) got much to do if they go through travel records. I would think they might be more usefully deployed doing things on behalf of constituents," the treasurer told reporters.

Mr Carpenter reiterated his well worn complaint that the federal government was failing to put in its share of investment for infrastructure projects in the resource-rich state.

Mr Carpenter also lauded federal Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd's promise to pump royalties from the Gorgon and Pluto natural gas projects back into WA.

"No such commitments have been forthcoming from the Howard government, which has given scant regard to infrastructure projects in WA," Mr Carpenter said.

"We deserve our fair share."

But Mr Costello said WA would receive \$1.7 billion under the federal government's Auslink road and rail program.

"This is the largest infrastructure spend that the Australian government, any Australian government, has ever engaged in."

He said Mr Rudd's plan on Gorgon was a "con" because royalty payments would not start flowing in until well after 2013.

Mr Costello faced the inevitable questions on the election date and defended the cost of potentially bringing MPs back to Canberra for the scheduled sitting of federal parliament on Monday.

"If you were worried about the air fares and the like for holding parliament you wouldn't have parliament in Canberra, but we do and it's one of the costs of democracy."

The treasurer was later due to launch the campaign of Steve Irons in the extremely marginal seat of Swan, held by labor's Kim Wilkie by 0.1 per cent.

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