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Two of State Parliament's biggest personalities went head-to-head this week and the debate got personal, but the Premier said it's fair game.

Budget Estimates meant Basil Zempilas had three hours to grill Rita Saffioti over the Burswood race track and Italian football.

"Parliament's a pretty robust forum, and so obviously you give a bit, you take a bit," Roger Cook said.

His own appearance at an Estimates hearing on Thursday was more cordial. He even laughed at the Opposition Leader's joke that artificial intelligence could replace politicians.

"People have different styles of politics. I've got mine," Mr Cook said.

He's already got the top job. Mr Zempilas wants it, and the Deputy Premier is a possible successor if Labor holds on to power.

Their rivalry was on full display, as the Treasurer confirmed the Burswood street circuit — that the Opposition has dubbed her "pet project" — won't be ready for the V8 Supercars opening round in 2027 which was the original aim.

But she insisted the delay was old news. And appeared offended by Mr Zempilas' line of questioning, accusing him of failing to listen.

"We said it'll be ready late 2027. ... we're targeting completion by late 2027," she said on Wednesday. "That's what I said on Friday as part of my press conference, which, again, you don't absorb numbers."

But the timeline did shift post-



Parliament battle spotlights the tension

BASIL V RITA, IT'S GETTING PERSONAL

election.

In January last year, Supercars Australia boss Shane Rogers — flanked by the Premier and Ms Saffioti — said: "We're confident that it can be delivered for 2027 and certainly will be our opening round."

On Facebook the same day, Ms Saffioti said Labor "hope to have it ready in time for the 2027 Supercars season".

By November, public statements listed the target comple-

tion date as "late" 2027 and the first race for 2028. The price-tag remains \$217.5 million.

Ms Saffioti angrily rejected the Opposition's claims that a new hospitality venue being counted on top of that means the budget has blown out.

"Was The Camfield part of the cost that you reported on (Optus Stadium)?" Ms Saffioti fired off at Mr Zempilas.

"Did (Barnett) include the Matagarup Bridge, did he

include the parklands, did he include the changes to the Graham Farmer Freeway, did you include the Stadium station?"

"You didn't. So don't come in here and lecture me about budgets because you have no idea about the history of this place."

The Liberal leader didn't let up, and Ms Saffioti's best defence was to attack.

She accused Liberal MPs with "dubious pasts" — a veiled reference to Anthony Spagnolo's role

at collapsed builder Niche Living — of teaming up with the Greens to oppose the Perth Park. She was ordered to withdraw that comment, but continued.

"I understand you have members in the Upper House, members of The Clan who have different views of things, which I don't agree with, aligning with the Greens," Ms Saffioti said.

"I understand you have an unhealthy obsession with (Perth Park). But good luck to you if this

between two high-profile polities



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Premier Roger Cook

is what you want to be focused on. If you want to hang your entire parliamentary career (on it). From a man who did nothing at the City of Perth but drive it into the ground."

The Opposition Leader, who was previously Perth lord mayor, kept going.

"Minister, what I've got an obsession with here is transparency and the facts," he returned serve.

Earlier, the Treasurer used

Parliament's rules to avoid questions about WA's failed bid to secure a Serie A Italian football match and the cost of her trip to Italy and Sweden.

"The FOI process is not subject to this current Estimates (hearing)," Ms Saffioti said.

Pressed on how much taxpayers' money was spent, she couldn't — or wouldn't — say.

"It's just part of the Tourism WA activity, they go for events, and sometimes I win them, some-

times I don't," she said. "I know you stand up in front of the Italian community and pretend to support them, but it's obvious you don't like the Italian community."

She pointed out that Mr Zempilas had travelled overseas, too, as a guest of Qantas in 2022.

"Remember when you were in Rome . . . you took a bunch of journalists to a film studio that you said was in the CBD, but it was actually 30 kilometres out-

side of the CBD," Ms Saffioti said.

Labor still has the weight of numbers, with 46 of the Legislative Assembly's 59 seats. But this back-and-forth felt personal.

"Social media has changed it, it's become more hostile across all politics," one Labor source said.

The Treasurer, Transport and Sport and Recreation Minister is in the thick of it more than most.

"She has copped more misogynistic bullshit than anyone else,"

they said. Elected in 2008, she was called Labor's attack dog long before Mr Zempilas became the main Opposition target. "She's formidable, she's their best performer," a Liberal source said.

Mr Zempilas has the task of rebuilding the Opposition, after five Liberal leaders in six years couldn't.

"I don't take the Treasurer's comments personally, but I do take exception to statements that I 'hate' a particular ethnic group, in this case, Italians. That is simply not true and the Treasurer knows it," Mr Zempilas said on Thursday.

"I'm focused on holding the Government to account on behalf of Western Australians."

Labor has vowed to hold him to account, too.

"He's made the entire (Liberal) party about him so of course he's got a target on his back," another party source said.

They want to make the first-term MP earn his stripes.

"Basil Zempilas didn't come into Estimates to ask about the Budget," Ms Saffioti said.

"He came in with a pre-prepared performance like it was some sort of guest television appearance."

"I'm focused on delivering projects and economic outcomes for the State. Basil can continue to throw negative commentary from the sidelines because he has never delivered anything."

But what is sure to be delivered, is a continuing debate between two of WA's fiercest politicians. And the Perth Park project will, no doubt, be the pair's main battleground until it opens . . . in late 2027.

