

# Cook simply can't ignore our health

Just a few weeks ago Roger Cook put himself front and centre of this third-term Labor administration, declaring himself "the best person" to lead the party.

And during my interview with Cook, the Premier also made it crystal clear he wasn't going to hand over the leadership to any of his ministers any time soon.

He point-blank refused to anoint a successor.

"I'm running for election in 2029. So, what happens beyond 2029 is anyone's guess," Cook said.

So why wasn't the Premier at Thursday's press conference where the failings of past years were laid bare in terms of the nine-year Labor Government not properly addressing serious maintenance problems at Perth's public hospitals?

Instead, it was John Carey who was rolled out for just under an hour, with the director-general of WA Health, to face the music.

Yes, Carey is now the Mr Fix-It of WA politics — given the job of Health Infrastructure Minister in March's Cabinet reshuffle, in addition to his existing housing and planning portfolios (which in

JOE  
SPAGNOLO



itself is absolutely ludicrous, given the massive problems in housing).

But Cook should have been by Carey's side on Thursday.

"The buck stops with me. I'm the Minister for Health Infrastructure," Carey told the media as he released the findings of a health maintenance audit that confirmed works to rectify issues were taking way too long and, in some cases, never happened.

That's admirable of you, Mr Carey. But the truth of the matter is that the buck stops with the man who has declared himself No. 1, Roger Cook.

Questioned by the media on Friday as to why he wasn't at Thursday's press conference, Cook acknowledged "the buck ultimately stops with me".

But he still didn't say why he let Carey take the heat on a big, government stuff-up.

This week has once again put the spotlight on the fact that

Labor needs to get the basics of governance right before worrying too much about projects that won't be life-changing, including the \$100 million taxpayer-funded Perth Bears National Rugby League team.

Cook and Labor will argue they are doing just that — throwing billions at health and housing to address serious issues in both areas. But we are yet to see dramatic improvements.

This new report shines a light on the appalling state of our public hospitals, such as Sir Charles Gairdner, where basic maintenance wasn't done.

And again, keep in mind that Labor, since winning power in 2017, has enjoyed unprecedented wealth by way of royalties and GST monies that in this financial year alone will be \$17 billion.

This isn't all Roger Cook's fault, although he has been the State's health minister.

Mark McGowan escaped proper scrutiny over problems in health and housing because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the WA public won't blame him, or Colin Barnett before him, for problems we are facing in 2026.

Cook wants to remain Premier. He fought for it in 2023 and has made it abundantly clear he intends to hang on to it until the next poll in 2029, and possibly beyond.

He rightfully will receive accolades for all things good in WA. But he must also face the music when it's a bad news day.

Premiers don't like to publicly talk about legacies. But they think about it, privately.

McGowan's legacy was steering WA through the pandemic.

Colin Barnett's legacy was building Optus Stadium.

It is way too early to talk about Cook's legacy. He still has at least another three and a bit years in the job — probably more if he beats Basil Zempilas in 2029.

But Cook's legacy won't be a V8 Supercars race track, or a new NRL team, or more ferries on the Swan.

His legacy will be built around governance — whether this Government under his leadership got the basics right in housing, health, education and police.

Sure, hospital maintenance isn't sexy.

But getting this right is vital to Cook's legacy.