

Five things polties have to put right

Ah, the sweet sounds of political love. Roger Cook and Basil Zempilas head south to Collie and Bunbury respectively this week to hold “love-ins” for their respective parties.

Love-ins happen every year — think team strategising, pep talks and that rah rah, rah kind of thing.

Nothing too exciting happens at love-ins, except for the year when Liberal MPs John McGrath and Peter Collier had a slight disagreement at Rotto and McGrath floored his colleague.

The love-ins are scheduled to take place ahead of a new parliamentary year for WA polties, with the Legislative Assembly sitting on Tuesday, February 17.

In no particular order, I reckon these are five pressing issues for our political parties and leaders in 2026.

New tobacco legislation

For as long as I have covered State politics, which is now 21 years, Labor governments have always tended to react to bad news in the media by trying to blunt it with good news.

Over summer, there was strong media attention on the fact Labor was still piss-farting around with

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changes to its Tobacco Products Control Act.

Sure, a copper who looks like The Terminator has joined the Health Department's team of inspectors who keep an eye on the illegal tobacco trade, but the senior police superintendent still doesn't have powers to shut down illegal operations.

Cook can't walk into Parliament on February 17 without something significant to announce on new tobacco laws.

Cost of living

Rita Saffioti and Treasury would be beaver away to build the May State Budget.

This week's interest rate hike and the real threat of more to come because inflation is too high, means cost-of-living support will be high on the list of things to address as the Budget takes shape.

Both Saffioti and Cook appear to have thrown cold water on the prospect of power rebate sugar hits, but there are calls for some

decent reform on taxes, including stamp duty and payroll.

The median price of a home in Perth is about \$1 million. The fact the Government only offers a full exemption on stamp duty on homes up to \$500,000 is a joke.

Health and housing

I've grouped these two together because, guess what? One minister is responsible for both — John Carey.

Again, Cook and Labor came under intense fire over the summer for not properly addressing hospital maintenance and it's Carey's job to fix this, as well as oversee the building of the new maternity hospital at Murdoch, and new emergency departments at Sir Charles Gairdner, Royal Perth and Midland hospitals. Oh, and I almost forgot — building a new Peel Health Campus is also Carey's responsibility.

And then there's also a little problem with a social housing waitlist that has now exceeded 23,000. That's also Carey's problem to fix.

Cabinet

The fact Carey is charged with not just delivering new hospital

infrastructure, but fixing the old stuff — as well as building more houses — can only lead me to one conclusion. There is a serious lack of talent in Cook's Cabinet.

It is time for a complete renewal. Rita Saffioti, John Carey, Amber-Jade Sanderson, Tony Buti and Paul Papalia are probably the top five Labor ministers, with an honourable mention to Reece Whitby.

Cook reckons there will be no changes to his Cabinet this year, but for mine, Cabinet renewal no later than December is an absolute must.

PS: I keep hearing whispers that Paul Papalia is considering pulling the pin on his political career — perhaps this year.

Basil Zempilas

As I've said previously, Zempilas is yet to be seen by the public as an alternative premier.

He'll need to take a big vision for WA to the next election. Criticising the new racetrack at Burswood won't get him elected premier in 2029.

Good luck to our polties in 2026. In the meantime, I might play some Barry White. I can already hear the sounds of sweet love coming from the south.

