

There were three elections in 2025, Cabinet and leadership shuffles and new MPs initiated.

But crises in health, housing and family budgets still dominate the debate in WA and should keep our political class up at night.

Santa won't deliver a lump of coal — that's being phased out — but the new year will deliver a dose of political reality.

Voters gave their verdict in March and handed Labor another four years in power.

An historic third term and a bigger than expected winning margin gives Roger Cook high marks but there are storms ahead.

Hospitals on life support and record rates of domestic violence must be reckoned with, putting new ministers firmly in the hot seat.

Here's my assessment of the past year in State politics.

Roger Cook — A

He won it fair and square and deserves credit for it — 2025 was Roger Cook's coming of age.

The Premier set the election pace and though the campaign wasn't without fault (the debate was hard to watch back), Mr Cook's political instincts proved true.

The public verdict is the one that matters. Voters gave him an A-plus. I've pegged it back to a solid A since polling day.

His "knob" remark about J.D. Vance wasn't rehearsed but finally showed some personality and the election result meant the once-loyal deputy was finally able to step out of his predecessor's shadow.

Mr Cook has used that to set his own agenda post-election, reshaping Cabinet and the State bureaucracy.

This year has been about laying the groundwork for what's ahead and putting out spot fires. But where there's smoke, there is still fire, and 2026 needs to be a year of delivery on health, housing and renewable energy.

Basil Zempilas — B

He came within a whisker of not getting elected at all but the media personality turned mayor turned wannabe premier has successfully dialled up the pressure on the Government.

Mr Zempilas was forced to tread a fine line pre-election, with his mere presence on the campaign trail undermining Libby Mettam's leadership.

Post-election he's proved he is a formidable sparring partner. He's making the Government work harder, scored points on Labor's health backflip and has entrenched a level of public disdain for the Burswood "racetrack" that will be hard to overcome.

But he's yet to prove the new-look Opposition has the policy substance to match its more combative style.

Libby Mettam — C+

Libby Mettam sacrificed herself for the team. Have any of them thanked her for it?

Her personal election campaign was better than many predicted, myself included. But

she was shackled by a few below-par candidates, a lack of policy detail and a dire shortage of political grunt.

She lost with dignity and has proved to be a team player, with the ability to hold Labor to account on health.

The health debate got personal and heated on the campaign trail, and in Parliament.

Labor has, at times, taken offence. It should.

After all, it's life and death.

Shane Love — B-

He had to hand main Opposition party status back to the Liberals but Shane Love deserves a lot of credit for increasing the Nationals WA numbers in the Legislative Assembly.

The Nats made the most of a ripple of discontent in much of regional WA. But at times it left the opposition parties fighting each other instead of the Government.

A coalition deal should be his legacy. Mr Love also galvanised

public anger over polling debates on election day and ensured some level of accountability for that chaos.

Rita Saffioti — B

Love her or loathe her, she gets things done.

The deputy was a constant presence during the election campaign, boosting the visibility of other Labor candidates.

Rita Saffioti is the Government's hardest worker and loudest talker. That straight shooting is her biggest strength and weakness.

She delivered Metronet, connecting the Labor brand to every suburb. Well, except the western suburbs.

The budget blowouts were forgiven by voters.

But there's a big catch. The priority granted to Metronet ahead of other pressing needs has frustrated frontbench colleagues and is coming home to roost in health and housing.

And as Treasurer, Ms Saffioti has become the punching bag blamed for every dollar that is spent (or not spent) on racetracks, rugby league teams and convention centre upgrades.

She rightly wanted her share of credit for the decisions, so she'll cop the blame for them too.

Amber-Jade Sanderson — B-

The leadership race has been called off for now. Health was the weak link of Labor's election campaign and Amber-Jade Sanderson couldn't bandaid over that.

Running away from questions on the campaign trail was a low point.

But the move out of Health has revived her and reminded everyone why she is a future leadership contender. She's a good negotiator, and on top of the policy detail. Not much is done yet though.

Tying the State's energy

transition to jobs and local manufacturing is smart politics that will put her front and centre of Roger Cook's plan for WA. But the public — and industry — needs to be convinced the pathway to renewables is both realistic and affordable.

Show us the plan in 2026. It's overdue.

John Carey — A-

Labor's attack dog. He says he doesn't like the art of politics but he's very good at it.

John Carey has just scraped ahead of the targets he set on social housing, while the Liberals didn't bother setting any.

WA is behind on national housing targets but trending better. Overall, on housing, it's a work in progress but there has been progress.

The Cabinet reshuffle that divided Health across multiple ministers has left Mr Carey with both the responsibility and the credit for new hospital promises.

MAKING THE GRADE

A Premier elected in his own right and a fresh Opposition Leader kicked the year off but a litany of other issues had State polities busy. Here's the definitive guide to how key figures performed and who'll need to lift for 2026

Premier
Roger Cook

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Illustrations: Don Lindsay

