

<https://www.watoday.com.au/politics/western-australia/former-liberal-leader-mike-nahan-delivers-sober-warning-on-wa-labor-links-to-business-media-in-retirement-speech-20201117-p56fhg.html>

Former Liberal leader Mike Nahan delivers sober warning on WA Labor links to business, media in retirement speech

Former WA Liberal leader Mike Nahan has delivered a sober warning over media concentration in the state and the Labor government's close ties to business in his last speech in parliament before retiring at the next election.

Dr Nahan fired a broadside to parliament directed at Seven West Media, which controls the Seven Network as well as *The West Australian* and a range of other media interests, over its "near monopoly on newspapers combined with the dominant free-to-air TV" and links to a range of other commercial operations in the state.

Seven West Media has ownership links to WA companies including Westrac, Coates Hire and Beach Energy through its major shareholder Seven Group Holdings, which is controlled by WA billionaire Kerry Stokes.

Dr Nahan referred to WA Inc 'Mark I' throughout his speech to parliament, which was a series of scandals in the 1980s over financial links to then Labor government and high-profile WA entrepreneurs.

One of the contributing factors of WA Inc 'Mark I' was the take-over of media outlets – TV and newspaper – by commercial interests and then using these outlets to provide political leverage in pursuit of commercial gain," Dr Nahan told parliament.

The former opposition leader accused the McGowan government of being "far too close to select powerful commercial interests particularly in the media and the property sectors".

"To be effective, the media sector should be diverse, competitive and independent of commercial interests. These are not the characteristics of media in the state now," Dr Nahan told parliament.

"The traditional media is highly concentrated, with one outlet having near monopoly on newspapers combined with the dominant free-to-air TV. This is not healthy."

Dr Nahan said an important and healthy characteristic of the media was that newsrooms should be independent of commercial interests.

"In Western Australia, the dominant commercial media outlet has ownership links to a large range of commercial operations in this state and these operations have many dealings with state and federal governments," he told parliament.

"This is not surprising, threatening, indeed is appropriate. The concern lies with the potential use of media outlets to advance non-media commercial interests.

"The solution lies not in special regulation or prohibitions, but strict enforcements ... of transparency and tender guidelines.

"If we do not learn the lessons of the past we are bound to repeat them."

He said the ABC had become eastern states-centric and urged its management to spend more money in WA on news.

Dr Nahan also told parliament the McGowan government was too close to land developers and referred to other states, which have banned donations to political parties by developers.

He said planning safeguards had been eroded using the coronavirus pandemic as an excuse, which would result in poorer outcomes for the general public.

"Experience here and in other states has shown that without adequate safeguards, some politicians and developers succumb to the lure of largesse and do deals to their collective advantage but to the great disadvantage of the community," he said.

"In response to this experience of WA Inc, successive WA government – Labor and Coalition – have put in place processes which greatly reduce the discretion of ministers over planning, tending and land disposal decisions and increase the level of transparency of these decisions.

"These safeguards, particularly more recently under COVID-19, have been eroded. This is dangerous.

"I'm not advocating a ban on property developers but enforcement of transparency and tendering guidelines."

In 2018 Dr Nahan was engaged in a war of words with *The West Australian* after he told the state Liberal party conference that year that "mainstream media was not penetrating" anymore and voters were instead opting to get their news online on social media.

The then editor of the newspaper enacted a short-lived boycott of his press-conferences, before Dr Nahan resigned as opposition leader some weeks later.

Dr Nahan was a former Treasurer in the Barnett government and was first elected to the seat of Riverton at the 2008 election. He also held the ministries of energy, finance and multicultural interests.

Prominent Labor ministers Mick Murray and Fran Logan also delivered their valedictory speeches on Tuesday.

End.