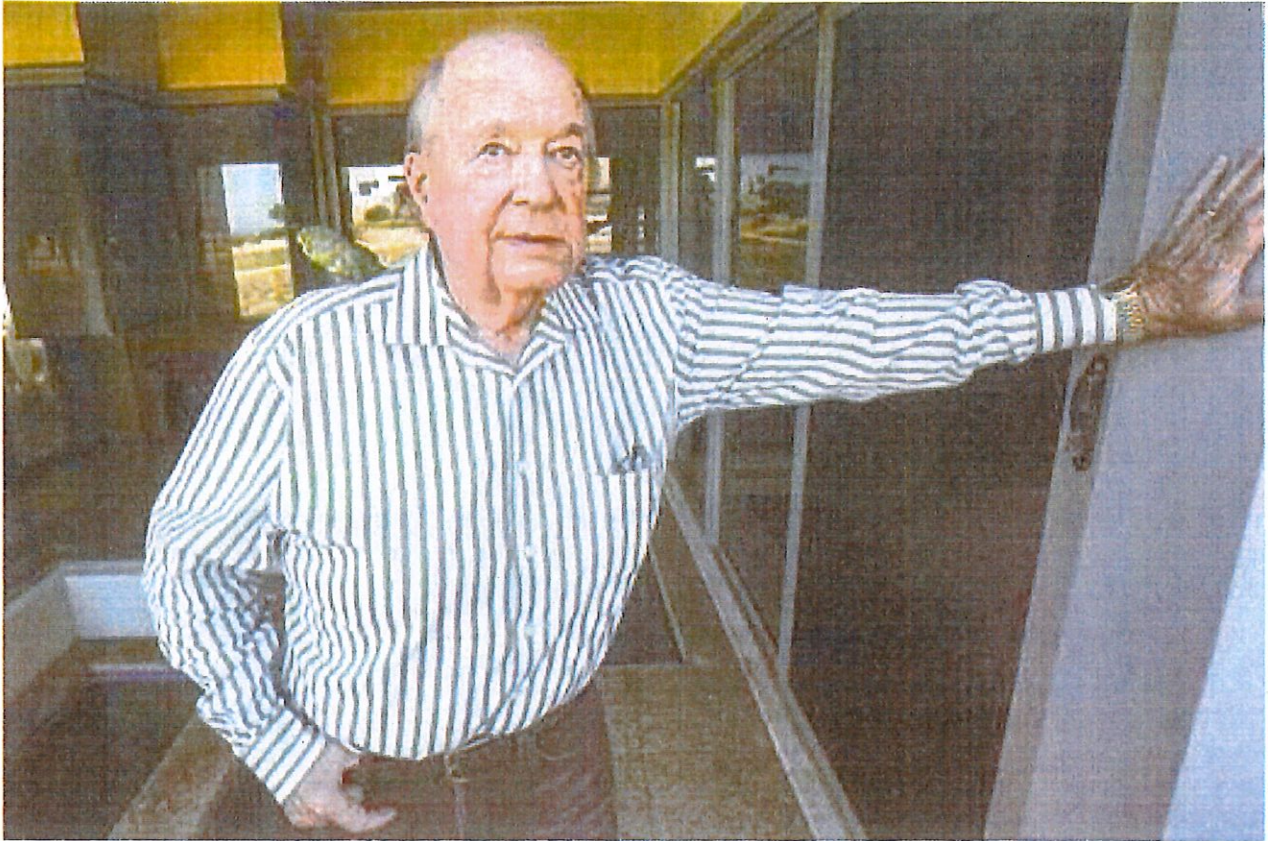


'WA Inc' Burke's donations tip for Premier



Former West Australian Labor premier Brian Burke with George the budgerigar at his Perth home

COLIN MURTY

EXCLUSIVE

PAUL GARVEY

Brian Burke — the once wildly popular West Australian premier who led the state through the heady 1980s, only to end up jailed in the fallout from the WA Inc era — has warned the McGowan government to take action over the perceived influence of property developers.

Premier Mark McGowan has overtaken Mr Burke to set a high-

water mark for electoral popularity, recording an approval rating of 94 per cent last year, and is on track to lead Labor to an unprecedented landslide at next month's state election.

But while there is no suggestion Mr McGowan has ever acted inappropriately like Mr Burke, the two have more in common than just their astounding levels of popularity. The McGowan government's links with parts of the business community and a string of deals that have benefited prominent business figures have

increasingly prompted comparisons to WA Inc.

Those comparisons — made most recently by embattled Liberal leader Zak Kirkup — were rubbished by Mr Burke, who said the current climate was different from the wild days of the 1980s.

"During the '80s, there was the complete deregulation of the financial system ... It was a time before prudential requirements and rules were put in place, it was a bit of a free-for-all. You haven't got anything like that right now," Mr Burke said.

The perceived influence of prominent Perth business figures on the WA government has emerged as a growing issue as Labor marches towards potential control of both houses of parliament.

The deals raised by critics of Mr McGowan — such as a lucrative gas-export exemption to a company part-owned by Kerry Stokes, a subsidised riverfront development awarded to Mr Stokes and fellow billionaire Andrew Forrest, and lucrative housing subsidies that have benefited property de-

velopers — are not of the same "tenor" as the deals for which Mr Burke's government was criticised.

But he says Mr McGowan should nevertheless take action to address the perceptions by introducing a ban on donations from property developers.

"It will always be an issue and I think the government would be wise to adopt the same prohibition that they have in NSW and Queensland," Mr Burke said.

Billionaire property developer
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