

STATE BUDGET — COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES

**224. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:**

I am not sitting down this time!

I refer to reports that demand for Foodbank services has more than doubled since 2020, with daily average customer numbers in Bunbury alone jumping from 20 to nearly 80, despite our state's financial position. How is it that in a state as wealthy as Western Australia, with an eye-watering budget surplus, we have so many families struggling to make ends meet in not only Perth city, but also our regions?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

That was a very broad question. Obviously, when you are in government, you do lots of things. We have taken the stance in our time in office that we had to concentrate on getting Western Australians back to work, and that is what we have done. We have created over 150 000 new jobs in Western Australia during our time in office, despite going through a global pandemic that floored economies all over the world. We have been the only mainland state that did not go into recession over the course of the pandemic. At the same time, because we managed to keep COVID out and because we put in place, admittedly, reforms that had been talked about forever and never been put in place, we managed to diversify the economy and ensure that far more Western Australians have an array of jobs and opportunities than they did before. We then put in place measures to ensure that more Western Australians could get trained more affordably than ever before. We reversed many of the massive cost increases for Western Australians to go and get trained that members opposite had put in place. The cost of some courses went down by 72 per cent over our time in office, which has meant that a surge of young Western Australians in particular, but also mature age students, took the opportunity to go and get trained over this period.

Then, as a consequence of our good financial management, we have invested in numerous things. The public housing package that we announced last year was the biggest investment in public housing ever seen in Western Australia. We put that in place last year. We put a package in place to ensure that private owners who wanted to go and own their own house could do so. We put that in place. We then ensured, over COVID in particular, that we put in place a whole range of measures to fund some of those not-for-profit organisations that help people in need. I even went and met with the Lotteries Commission and asked it to totally reorient its operations to support organisations like the one the member mentioned and to make sure they had enough resources to support people over this period.

We then come to the cost-of-living pressures. We put up fees and charges by less than half of what members opposite did in office over similar periods of time. As the Minister for Energy said a minute ago, in some years the previous government put up the price of electricity by 25 per cent for ordinary families. We put in place a \$600 credit on people's electricity bills and opposition members attacked it and said they did not support it. They then had the temerity and the hide to come in here and complain about it and say that they now support it. I am actually not sure whether members opposite support it or not. I do not think much of what they say makes sense. I do not know whether members opposite support it, but all those things we put in place over this period were to support Western Australians.

It is true that we have also focused on proper financial management, which the opposition did not do in office and it was unsustainable. The opposition had us heading to \$44 billion worth of debt off a \$5 billion base when it arrived in office, and somehow it thought that was a good thing—loading up the debt, losing the credit rating, increasing the interest payments.

What Western Australia needs and has is a government that not only focuses on keeping the state strong, but also has a strong stream of fairness running through it, which is exactly what we do. All those things I just mentioned are in a strong stream of fairness so that Western Australians can have opportunities they could not have before. That is what we will do and what we continue to do. As the Minister for Community Services will tell members, we have actually increased the base funding for many of the not-for-profit organisations out there that support people across the community to ensure that they have ongoing funding to provide all those services. Our time in office has been punctuated by good financial management, job creation and a whole range of social, health and other programs that have helped families, and, at the same time, we are keeping a real focus on cost-of-living pressures.